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Continuity and Change in Screen Shakespeare(s)

Edited by Sylvaine Bataille and Victoria Bladen

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Victoria Bladen and Sylvaine Bataille

Introduction.
Continuity and Change.
A Screen Shakespeare(s) Snapshot[*]

This special issue arises from a seminar at the 2023 European Shakespeare Research Association (ESRA) conference in Budapest where participants explored elements of continuity and change in the field of Screen Shakespeares. We were pleased at the enthusiastic response to the seminar, and grateful for the generosity of Diana Henderson (MIT) in offering to be a respondent to the papers at the seminar; the insights and vital questions she gave to the group are reflected in her afterword here.

The phenomenon of Shakespeare on screen is now over a century old, with its origins in silent Shakespeare, most likely the 1899 *King John*.[1] From these ephemeral beginnings, Shakespeare's screen history developed to encompass a wide range of potential forms, from cinema adaptations (from mainstream to arthouse) and television series, such as the *BBC Television Shakespeare* series (1978-1985), *Slings & Arrows* (2003-2007) and *The Hollow Crown* tv series (2012-2016), to web films such as Netflix's *The King* (2019) and the range of new media and intermedia, including YouTube and Mobile Shakespeares.[2] Added to this are the intersections of the digital and theatre practices, and the phenomenon of the live broadcast/filmed stage performance.[3] From "box office poison", in the words of producer Louis B. Mayer, to "mass-market Shakespeare film", when the 1990s saw "Shakespeare's passage into the realm of mainstream film"[4] from "new wave Shakespeare"[5] to a "post-'Shakespearean-blockbuster' phase",[6] the history of Shakespeare on screen has been one of transformations and innovations as well as endurance and citation.

Culturally diverse, intermedial, interdisciplinary, global and local, Shakespeare is ever our contemporary, part of the fabric of modern popular culture, as Douglas Lanier's work has illuminated.[7] Conceptions from "Apocalyptic" Shakespeares to "lock-down Shakespeares" evidence the way Shakespeare continues to speak to our contemporary moments.[8]

[*] We would like to express our sincere thanks to Anna Maria Cimitile and the team at *Anglistica AION* for their support in bringing this publication together.

[1] On silent Shakespeare, see Judith Buchanan, *Shakespeare on Silent Film: An Excellent Dumb Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2011).

[2] Daniel Fischlin, *OuterSpeares: Shakespeare, Intermedia, and the Limits of Adaptation* (Toronto: U. of Toronto P., 2014); Douglas M. Lanier, ed., "Special Issue on Shakespeare and Intermediality", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 67.4 (2016), 401-514; Iris H. Tuan, *Beyond Shakespeare: Film Studies, Performance Studies, and Netflix* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023).

[3] Pascale Aebischer et al., *Shakespeare and the 'Live' Theatre Broadcast Experience*, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Bloomsbury, 2018). Erin Sullivan, *Shakespeare and Digital Performance in Practice* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

[4] Douglas M. Lanier, "Shakescorp *Noir*", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 53.2 (2002), 157-180, 163, 168, 165.

[5] Thomas Cartelli and Katherine Rowe, *New Wave Shakespeare on Screen* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007).

[6] Sarah Hatchuel and Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin, "Shakespeare, Memory, Film and Performance", in Andrew Hiscock and Lina Perkins Wilder, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Shakespeare and Memory* (Abingdon, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2017), 62-72, 68.

[7] Douglas Lanier, *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2002).

[8] Melissa Croteau and Carolyn Jess-Cooke, eds., *Apocalyptic Shakespeare: Essays on Visions of Chaos and Revelation in Recent Film Adaptations* (McFarland & Company Publishing, 2009). Gemma Kate Allred, Benjamin Broadribb and Erin Sullivan, eds., *Lockdown Shakespeare: New Evolutions in Performance and Adaptation*, The Arden Shakespeare (London:

There has also been immense variety in the type and style of engagement with the Shakespearean hypotext, ranging from sustained exploration to fleeting citations.[9] As adaptation theorists such as Linda Hutcheon and Julie Sanders have articulated, the process of adaptation and appropriation encompasses a wide spectrum.[10] Creators might situate their hypertext anywhere along that spectrum from announced adaptation or appropriation to invisible allusion, from close alignment with the text/s to "loosely based" adaptations.[11] Works that move further from the Shakespearean hypotext raise questions about the "Shakespeare/Not Shakespeare" distinction, while appropriating Shakespeare can also raise a range of ethical implications.[12] In engaging with Shakespeare, creators undertake a process of "Shake-shifting", to use Henderson's evocative term, and a process of "diachronic collaboration".[13]

A scholar negotiating the field of Shakespeare on screen studies now has to contend with a formidable reading list.[14] Readers in theory can choose from Lanier's influential "rhizomatics" conception, drawing from the work of Deleuze and Guattari,[15] Maurizio Calbi's approach to Shakespeare as spectral,[16] adaptation as a type of hacking, as Reto Winckler proposes,[17] or focus on Screen Shakespeares through a gender lens, as Magdalena Cieślak invites us to do.[18] In considering fidelity debates in our supposedly post-fidelity moment, a reader might also consider Lanier's rethinking of fidelity in relation to networked rhizomatic Shakespeare nodes, or James Newlin's idea of "uncanny fidelity".[19] Having obtained something of the breath of the field, and range of theoretical approaches, scholars might then turn to volumes focussing on specific plays or groups of plays, such as

Bloomsbury, 2022). Peter J. Smith, Janice Valls-Russell, Daniel Yabut, "Shakespeare Under Global Lockdown: Introduction", *Cahiers Élisabéthains*, 103.1 (2020), 101-111.

[9] See Alexa Alice Joubin and Victoria Bladen, eds., *Onscreen Allusions to Shakespeare: International Films, Television, and Theatre* (Springer International Publishing AG, 2022). This volume arose from the pioneering work on Shakespearean citations on screen of the late Mariangela Tempera (University of Ferrara). See also Sarah Hatchuel, *L'Écran shakespearien. Adaptation, citation, modèle* (Aix-en-Provence: Rouge Profond, 2023).

[10] See Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2013), and Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (London: Routledge, 2006).

[11] A recent example is *Anyone But You* (2023), directed by Will Gluck, in dialogue with *Much Ado About Nothing*.

[12] Christy Desmet, Natalie Loper, Jim Casey, eds., *Shakespeare/Not Shakespeare* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). Alexa Huang and Elizabeth Rivlin, eds., *Shakespeare and the Ethics of Appropriation* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

[13] Diana E. Henderson, "Shake-shifting: An Introduction" in Henderson, *Collaborations with the Past: Reshaping Shakespeare across Time and Media* (Ithaca: Cornell U.P., 2018).

[14] Valuable starting points might include the following: Russell Jackson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Screen* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2020); Samuel Crowl, *Shakespeare at the Cineplex: The Kenneth Branagh Era* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio U.P., 2003); Samuel Crowl, *Shakespeare and Film: A Norton Guide* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008); Sarah Hatchuel, *Shakespeare: From Stage to Screen* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2004); Mark Thornton Burnett, *Shakespeare and World Cinema* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2012); Courtney Lehmann, *Shakespeare Remains: Theater to Film, Early Modern to Postmodern* (Ithaca and London: Cornell U.P., 2018); Diana E. Henderson, *Collaborations with the Past: Reshaping Shakespeare across Time and Media* (Ithaca and London: Cornell U.P., 2018).

[15] Douglas Lanier, "Shakespearean Rhizomatics: Adaptation, Ethics, Value", in Huang and Rivlin, eds., *Shakespeare and the Ethics of Appropriation*, 21-40. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, [1987] 2013).

[16] Maurizio Calbi, *Spectral Shakespeares: Media Adaptations in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

[17] Reto Winckler, "Hacking Adaptation: Updating, Porting, and Forking the Shakespearean Source Code", *Adaptation: The Journal of Literature on Screen Studies*, 14.1 (2021), 1-22.

[18] Magdalena Cieślak, *Screening Gender in Shakespeare's Comedies: Film and Television Adaptations in the Twenty-First Century* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019).

[19] Douglas Lanier, "Shakespeare/Not Shakespeare: Afterword" in Christy Desmet et al., *Shakespeare/Not Shakespeare* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 293-306; James Newlin, *Uncanny Fidelity: Recognizing Shakespeare in Twenty-First-Century Film and Television* (Tuscaloosa: The U. of Alabama P., 2024).

the *Shakespeare on screen* series, published by Cambridge University Press and edited by Sarah Hatchuel and Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin.[20]

Given the daunting task of gaining even a broad overview of the field, it thus goes without saying that this special issue does not claim in any way to be exhaustive of contemporary Shakespeares on screen. Instead, what it offers is a snapshot from the current field, providing glimpses of the research of a cross-section of scholars, and the evocative questions these endeavours raise.

As theorists recognise, there are processes of continuity and change in the shifting sphere of Screen Shakespeares.[21] As Lanier expresses, negotiating Shakespeare in relation to the ever evolving field of adaptation theory remains "unfinished business".[22] Melissa Croteau, in her article in this issue, reminds us that in approaching Screen Shakespeares, in addition to the work of adaptation theorists, we can also gain insights from seminal filmmakers such as Russian filmmaker and theorist Sergei Eisenstein (1898-1948). Croteau argues that Eisenstein's influence and impact has extended to the present and that screen adaptations of Shakespeare's chronicle plays, such as *Henry V*, are often in dialogue with Eisenstein's work. She explores Eisenstein's theories that Shakespeare's plays, in their disjunctive narrative form, demand active reading/viewing from their audiences to fill in gaps, and thus mediate, literally and figuratively, the *Urphänomen*, the higher level experience, of cinema, thus rendering the director a type of co-author in dialogue with Shakespeare.

It has now been over 10 years since the *Shakespeare on Screen. "Macbeth"* volume was published,[23] and it is striking that, a decade on, *Macbeth* remains a dominant source for adaptation and appropriation, reflected in two of the articles here – Kinga Földváry's and Márta Hargitai's. Földváry aptly asks whether *Macbeth* is the play that speaks most directly to our violent, contemporary world and she considers the filmic strategies of three adaptations by Justin Kurzel (2015), Kit Monkman (2018) and Joel Coen (2021). She argues that each of these films experiment in various ways and reflect shifts in Shakespeare on screen, developments in cinematic production, and in terms of popular and critical reception.

Hargitai also explores a cross section of *Macbeth* adaptations – Rupert Goold's (2010), Kurzel's and Coen's – focussing on the Fleance narrative, and building further on the earlier work of William C. Carroll.[24] She considers the way that the playtext enigmatically leaves the future of Scotland open and, through an examination of key moments such as the show of kings and the endings, illuminates the ways that these adaptations suggest a linear or cyclical continuation of Fleance's story and Scottish history, while also emphasising the cycle of violence.

The current era of new, online and complex television brings new medial contexts for appropriating Shakespeare.[25] As Sarah Hatchuel has outlined, television series have affected the study of

[20] See the most recent volume in the series: Victoria Bladen, Sarah Hatchuel, and Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin, eds., *Shakespeare on Screen: Romeo and Juliet* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2023).
[21] Stephen O'Neill, *Broadcast Your Shakespeare: Continuity and Change across Media*, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).
[22] Lanier, "Shakespeare and Adaptation Theory: Unfinished Business" in Diana E. Henderson and Stephen O'Neill, eds., *The Arden Research Handbook of Shakespeare and Adaptation*, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), 38-55.
[23] Hatchuel, Vienne-Guerrin and Bladen, eds., *Shakespeare on Screen. "Macbeth"* (Mont-Saint-Aignan: Presses universitaires de Rouen et du Havre, 2013).
[24] William C. Carroll, *Adapting "Macbeth": A Cultural History*, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Bloomsbury, 2022); Carroll, "Fleance in the Final Scene of *Macbeth*: The Return of the Repressed", in Hatchuel, Vienne-Guerrin and Bladen, eds., *Shakespeare on Screen. "Macbeth"*, 261-278.
[25] Christina Wald, *Shakespeare's Serial Returns in Complex TV* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020). Martin Shuster, *New Television: The Aesthetics and Politics of a Genre* (Chicago: U. of Chicago P., 2017). Hatchuel and Vienne-Guerrin, eds., *Shakespeare on Screen. Television Shakespeare: Essays in Honour of Michèle Willems* (Mont-Saint-Aignan: Publications des Universités de Rouen et du Havre, 2008).

Shakespeare, and she illuminates the links between Shakespearean and serial production.[26] Pauline Durin's article in this volume considers *Bridgerton* season 2 (2022) and its dialogue with Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew.* Durin provides a thought-provoking analysis of how we can bring Shakespeare into a text that reimagines the appropriation of Jane Austen and her Regency world, while also engaging with Shakespeare's *Shrew*. Having recognised Shakespeare in the mix, what meanings emerge if we filter these intertextual dialogues through our contemporary feminist lens: is it a feminist adaptation, or is the answer more complex?

Shakespeare's cultural capital permeates our world, so it is unsurprising to find his work referenced in advertising. As Graham Holderness has observed, from the 1980s "the use of Shakespeare in advertising became something that could be taken seriously", reflected in the recent critical volume *Local/Global Shakespeare and Advertising*.[27] In her article for this special issue, Roberta Zanoni's analysis of the 2005 Levi's 501 jeans advertisement illustrates that citing multiple Shakespeare texts can create a complex palimpsest effect, even in a brief text such as an advertisement. Here *A Midsummer Night's Dream* intersects with *Romeo and Juliet*, mediated via the latter's afterlives, creating both incongruous and innovative effects. Zanoni's work reminds us of the instability of the intertextual process and that a viewer's reception of the advertisement will depend on what intertextual knowledge they bring of the various Shakespeares alluded to. In this montage effect, the weight of the Shakespeare intertexts is used to add perceived value to the jeans as a commodity.

Following the ethos of the *Shakespeare on Screen* series, this volume presents a balance of experienced and emerging scholars, and in doing so, we also bring together scholars coming from a range of cultural viewpoints and perspectives (Australia, France, Hungary, Italy, US). We are grateful to all our authors for contributing their work to this volume and for taking on board our editing and the valuable suggestions of the team of peer reviewers, to whom we are so grateful, many of them carving out time from their summer breaks to assist us with the peer review process.

In 2024, as we were preparing this special issue, the circle of Shakespeare on screen lost a pioneering scholar, a wonderful colleague and dear friend in Sam Crowl, author of, *inter alia*, *Screen Adaptations: Shakespeare's Hamlet* (2014), *Shakespeare at the Cineplex: The Kenneth Branagh Era* (2003), many chapters in the *Shakespeare on Screen* series volumes, and, finally, *Shakespeare and Baseball* (2024).[28] A stalwart of the Shakespeare on screen family, Sam's ethos of collegiality and generosity was as important as his erudite and insightful scholarship, and it was fitting that we dedicate this special issue to his memory. We also offer, on behalf of all of the Shakespeare on screen scholars, our thoughts and condolences to his wife Susan Crowl and the rest of Sam's family. Although we have lost his big-hearted presence, we can continue to be inspired by his work, and we like to think that he would have enjoyed reading this volume and would have had much to say about the issues it canvases. We hope that readers will find these articles, together with Diana's valuable reflections and insights, stimulating for their further explorations in the ever-evolving sphere of Screen Shakespeares.

For Sam.
Victoria Bladen and Sylvaine Bataille, 2024.

[26] Sarah Hatchuel, "Ce que les séries télévisées font aux études shakespeariennes", *TV Series (Le Havre)*, 22 (2023), http://journals.openedition.org/tvseries/7616.

[27] Graham Holderness, "'Beauty Too Rich for Use'? Shakespeare and Advertising", in Julie Maxwell and Kate Rumbold eds., *Shakespeare and Quotation* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2018) 260-274, 260; Marta Minier, Maria Elisa Montironi and Cristina Paravano, eds., *Local/Global Shakespeare and Advertising* (Routledge, 2024); and see Roberta Zanoni's chapter "The Italian Reception of Shakespeare in Advertising" in that volume.

[28] Samuel Crowl, *Screen Adaptations. Shakespeare's "Hamlet": The Relationship Between Text and Film*, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); Crowl, *Shakespeare at the Cineplex*; Crowl, *Shakespeare and Baseball* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio U.P., 2024).

Melissa Croteau

Sergei Eisenstein and William Shakespeare. A Dialectical Love Story[1]

Abstract: Traditional film theorists, from the 1910s through the 1950s, often focused on the "essential" differences between the arts of theater and film. Shakespeare was frequently a part of those specificity theory discussions, particularly as his work was so often adapted to silent film (generally in shreds and patches) and then in longer form for talkies in the first decade of sound. The cinematic and written work of prominent Russian filmmaker and theorist Sergei Eisenstein (1898-1948) engages dialogically with Shakespeare and/in film in significant ways that stretch far beyond the passing of this early giant of film theory. This article examines how Eisenstein's formalist and specificity-oriented theory features Shakespeare at its very core while his later films, *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) and *Ivan the Terrible* (*Part I*, 1944; *Part II*, 1958; *Part III*, 1946), were purposely structured in emulation of Shakespeare's contrapuntally designed history plays and the battle scenes in the major tragedies, particularly *Macbeth*. Conversely, the impact of Eisenstein's films and theoretical work can be seen clearly in the major film adaptations of *Henry V* (close or free, in part or whole), from Laurence Olivier's 1944 wartime adaptation, through Orson Welles's masterpiece *Chimes at Midnight* (1965), to Thea Sharrock's *Hollow Crown* adaptation (2013). Thus, as a filmmaker and theorist, Eisenstein finds profound inspiration in Shakespeare, and, in turn, several directors of Shakespeare films are in dialogue with Eisenstein's work regarding the ideological power and purpose of juxtapositionally structured "chronicle" films, which promulgate cogent ideological messages by demanding active spectatorship. In his later writing, Eisenstein declares that Shakespeare's plays figuratively and literally "mediate" the very *Urphänomen* of cinema, which stretches back into the prehistoric mists of mythological time and forward into theoretical futures.

Keywords: *film theory*, *montage*, *Caroline Spurgeon*, *history plays*, *formalism*, Henry V, *chronicles*

Traditional film theorists, from the 1910s through the 1950s, often focused on the "essential" differences between the arts of theater and film. Shakespeare was frequently a part of those specificity theory discussions, particularly as his work was so often adapted to silent film (generally in shreds and patches) and then in longer form for talkies in the first decade of sound. The cinematic and written work of prominent Russian filmmaker and theorist Sergei Eisenstein (1898-1948) engages dialogically with Shakespeare and/in film in significant ways that stretch far beyond the passing of this early giant of film theory. This article examines how Eisenstein's formalist and specificity-oriented theory features Shakespeare at its very core. Furthermore, Eisenstein's later films, *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) and *Ivan the Terrible* (*Part I*, 1944; *Part II*, 1958; *Part III* [short], 1946), were purposely structured in emulation of Shakespeare's contrapuntally designed history plays and the battle scenes in the major tragedies, particularly *Macbeth*. Conversely, the impact of Eisenstein's films and theoretical work can be seen clearly in the major film adaptations of *Henry V* (close or free, in part or whole), from Laurence Olivier's 1944 wartime adaptation, through Orson Welles's masterpiece *Chimes at Midnight* (1965), to Thea Sharrock's *Hollow Crown* adaptation (2013). Thus, as a filmmaker and theorist, Eisenstein finds profound inspiration in Shakespeare, and, in turn, several directors of Shakespeare films are in dialogue with Eisenstein's work regarding the ideological power and purpose of juxtapositionally structured "chronicle" films, which promulgate cogent ideological messages by demanding active spectatorship.

Strongly influenced by Hegel and Marx both ideologically and artistically, Sergei Eisenstein took a more radical approach to filmmaking than most of his peers: he aestheticized the dialectical movement

[1] This article is dedicated to the irrepressible Christian Smith, my favorite Marxist interlocutor, who left us too soon.

of history through the conflict and collision of contrasting film shots placed beside each other, which, he believed, would force the audience to feel strong emotions and then *think* about the theme or principle expressed by these disjunctions. Indeed, Eisenstein declared that "the basis of every art is conflict (an 'imagist' transformation of the dialectical principle)".[2] Most important of all to Eisenstein was this embodiment of the dialectical message, the film's theme or principle, within the dialectical film form: form expresses function (or "content").[3] In other words, the "pieces" both individually and collectively communicate ideology. Furthermore, Eisenstein did not think this could be accomplished without the *active mind* of the spectator filling in the gaps "between" images and co-creating meaning: the viewer must take on "the task of inner collaboration as co-author", which amounts to "unifying" the montage pieces assembled by the filmmaker.[4] What is often overlooked in the accounts of Eisenstein's montage theory is his extension of his principle of audio-visual counterpoint to conflict between *scenes*, thus emphasizing contrapuntal plot structure as a "wide-angle" macro-model of dynamic intra- and inter-shot juxtaposition. In the final decade of the theorist-filmmaker's too-short life, Eisenstein turns to Shakespeare as the apotheosis and progenitor of purposefully disjunctive narrative form. Eisenstein's public connection to the playwright began in his late teens, when he started to work in theatre arts during his military service. Between 1917 and the early 1920s, he created production designs for at least seven Shakespeare plays, though not all were staged.[5] Thus, the Soviet filmmaker's work in cinema and theory were steeped in his knowledge of and experience collaborating with Shakespeare.

By 1924, Eisenstein was consumed by the art of cinema, directing and co-writing *Strike* (1925) and the legendary *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) in his first year as a filmmaker. Nevertheless, Shakespeare continued to haunt and inspire him: there are mentions of and allusions to Shakespeare scattered throughout the director's writings, drawings, and films. True to his dialectical approach to art, Eisenstein engaged in more of a dialogue with Shakespeare's work rather than reverently citing him. To Eisenstein, Shakespeare was a fellow artist whose work revealed and modeled Marxist dialectical struggle in multivalent ways. While the most explicit references to the Bard are found in Eisenstein's writings of the late 1930s into the 1940s, in the *early* 1930s he composed numerous drawings referencing *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. In the summer of 1931, during rains in Mexico that interrupted the filming of *¡Que Viva México!* (1932), Eisenstein drew over 140 sketches "connected (at some remove)" with the Scottish play on the subject of "The Death of King Duncan".[6] These abstract line-drawings were done quickly and bear a sense of the iconic, primitive, and erotic, exploring the connections between violence, evil, and power. Furthermore, Duncan's "pierced", beheaded, and otherwise violated body in many of the drawings could be interpreted "as representing the idea that the origins of montage as a 'method of dismemberment and reunification' can be found in the reenactment of the dismemberment of the body of Dionysus".[7] In 1937, the filmmaker directly connected Shakespeare's art with the figure of Dionysus in writing that will be investigated shortly. Throughout the 1930s, Eisenstein was thinking in increasingly mythical and symbolic terms about the theory of disparate pieces "sewn" together to create a unified meaning; the apparent "realistic" body of the image needed to be "decomposed" so the spectator can

[2] Sergei Eisenstein, "The Cinematographic Principle and the Idiogram", in *Film Form*, ed. and trans. by Jay Leyda (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1949), 38. See also the chapter "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form", 45-63.
[3] See the long chapter "Form and Content: Practice", in Eisenstein, *Film Sense*, ed. and trans. by Jay Leyda (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1942), 157-216, wherein the director performs masterful close readings of his film *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) that include both image and sound.
[4] Cit. in N. M. Lary, "Eisenstein and Shakespeare", in Ian Christie and Richard Taylor, eds., *Eisenstein Rediscovered: Soviet Cinema of the '20s and '30s* (London: Routledge, 2015), 143-144.
[5] Jay Leyda and Zina Voynow, *Eisenstein at Work* (New York: Museum of Modern Art/Pantheon Books, 1982), 6-10.
[6] Lary, "Eisenstein", 142.
[7] Antonio Somaini, "Cinema as 'Dynamic Mummification,' History as Montage: Eisenstein's Media Archeology", in Naum Kleiman and Antonio Somaini, eds., *Sergei M. Eisenstein: Notes for a General History of Cinema* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam U.P., 2016), 95.

identify the "skeleton", the core structural principle (thematic message), which is the essential reality beneath any given story.[8] The filmmaker's obsession with the art and ritual surrounding Día de los Muertos clearly left a deep and permanent impression. In 1929, Eisenstein gave a speech to the Congress of Independent Filmmakers at La Sarraz in which he discusses his conception of "mimetic reality" and the key function of symbolic "objects", declaring, in Taylor's summation, that "when art imitated reality it had to imitate not the reality of surface appearance (photographic reality) but the reality of inner essence (the essential bone-structure)", and this vivid expression of "inner essence" is what makes a piece of art, filmic or otherwise, "effective in an artistic (and also a political) sense".[9] Art and politics were always inextricable in his stage and film work and in his theory. These overarching concepts regarding the definition and function of a "real" image would set him apart from the mimetic realism theories of the "essence" of film propounded by contemporaries Siegfried Kracauer and André Bazin.

Returning to the "Death of King Duncan" sketches, it appears that the filmmaker was processing his new sensory experiences through abstract thinking about a bloody murder scene that does *not* exist in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*; it is only described. Eisenstein chooses a play that plays with death, as it were, and he confabulates images to fill the gap created by Shakespeare's "jump cut" from before to after Duncan's slaying by Macbeth (between 2.1 and 2.2). This is precisely what the director demands from his *cinema* spectators. As Dudley Andrew poetically expounds, Eisenstein believed that a filmmaker must lead the spectator to the crux of a film's theme or ideological principle:

> with his eyes open, exposing the spectator to his means, his mechanism, not merely because this style is preferable to the illusionary realism which is the hallmark of Hollywood but because *the film derives its energy from the conscious mental leaps of the spectator*. The audience literally brings to life the dead stimuli, forcing lightning to leap from pole to pole until a whole story is aglow and until the theme is illuminated.[10] (my emphasis)

Dialectical montage requires spectators to collaborate actively in the production of meaning, and Eisenstein focuses on inspiring this process by evoking intense emotion. It insists on the "active spectator". Furthermore, Eisenstein clearly sees a similar dialecticism in Shakespeare. In sketching more than 140 "leaps" – his manifold visions of Duncan's murder – the director is co-authoring, dialoguing, with Shakespeare, actively investigating not just the meaning of this play but the significance of his own understandings of power structures and the consequences of political violence on and for the individual and society. It is, perhaps, not surprising that the Shakespearean filmmaker most compared to Eisenstein in regard to style and structure is Orson Welles, and it is he, another theater veteran and polymath, who was courageous enough to retain Shakespeare's repression of Duncan's bloody murder in his *Macbeth* (1948) on screen, inviting spectators cognitively to fill in the gaps, to join Macbeth and his wife in imagining the gruesome scene.[11]

As noted, it is in Eisenstein's later films – the historical epics *Alexander Nevsky* and *Ivan the Terrible* – and later writings – that one finds his most substantial dialogue with Shakespeare, particularly with the history plays and *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *King Lear*, all plays about kingship, politics, and abuses of power with roots in chronicles more or (much) less historically based. As a Marxist, Eisenstein was ever focused on the movement of social and political history. In his fine piece "Eisenstein and Shakespeare", N. M. Lary posits that Eisenstein believed "tragedy", especially "Greek and Elizabethan", embodies "the dialectical nature of the world": "In a world of change, the most powerful art dealt with the experience

[8] See Mikhail Yampolsky, "The Essential Bone Structure: Mimesis in Eisenstein", trans. by Richard Taylor, in Christie and Taylor, eds., *Eisenstein Rediscovered*, 171-82.
[9] Richard Taylor, "Introduction: Eisenstein at La Sarraz", in Christie and Taylor, eds., *Eisenstein Rediscovered*, 63-65, 64.
[10] J. Dudley Andrew, *The Major Film Theories: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1976), 63.
[11] Akira Kurosawa also resisted the temptation to stage the Duncan analog's murder in his peerless Japanese *Macbeth* adaptation, *Throne of Blood* (1957).

of change. The most 'pathetic' art was an expression of a world of dialectical transformation".[12] Furthermore, he "stressed that Shakespeare was living in an age of major political and social change", like himself.[13] Eisenstein saw tragedy as an art of suffering that evokes strong emotions and thereby cathartic relief. In Shakespeare's history plays, tragedy is always looming over individuals and society at large. Eisenstein mined these plays for plot pieces, imagery, and structure, particularly when developing his final masterpieces, *Alexander Nevsky* and *Ivan the Terrible*.

From early in his career, Eisenstein was interested in expressing abstract themes through graphic symbols and rituals (official and personal), a practice, he observed, that Shakespeare knew well and used frequently in the plays, especially in those dealing with politics and power struggles. This approach to imagery became increasingly distilled throughout his career; for instance, *Parts I* and *II* of *Ivan* open with a lingering close-up of the Tsar's crown, the ultimate symbol of power and of the unification of a nation, and the diadem functions as a redolent sign throughout. In his 1955 adaptation of *Richard III*, Laurence Olivier, its director and star, also opens with a close-up of the royal crown then depicts the coronation of Edward IV of the ill-fated house of York. It is possible that Olivier had seen *Part I* of Eisenstein's epic, but the imagery in Shakespeare's history plays is more likely to have been Olivier's guide, as it was Eisenstein's. In fact, in the 1930s, Eisenstein pored through Caroline Spurgeon's classic of Shakespeare criticism, *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us* (1923), "filling his copy with underlinings", as he was drawn to Spurgeon's treatment of "Shakespeare's total metaphoric vision".[14] Indeed, Spurgeon's ideas about the purpose of imagery in literature sounds a good deal like Eisenstein's regarding film. She describes an image as "a little word-picture" used by a writer "to illustrate, illuminate and embellish his *thought*. It is a description or an *idea*, which by comparison or analogy ... with something else, transmits to us through the *emotions* and *associations* it arouses, something of the 'wholeness', the depth and richness of the way the writer views, conceives or has felt what he is telling us" (my emphasis).[15] Imagery and its orchestration, as with Eisenstein's *montage*, are a means of *speaking*.[16]

Spurgeon, like the filmmaker, also rejects verisimilar realism, explaining that an "image … gives quality, creates atmosphere and conveys emotion in a way no precise description [i.e. realism], however clear and accurate, can possibly do" (9). Furthermore, Eisenstein's notion of a film's "essential bone-structure", the message behind the material, is often depicted with or through richly complex iconic imagery in his films. He believed and put into practice Spurgeon's declaration that "it is only by means of these hidden analogies that the greatest truths, otherwise inexpressible, can be given a form or shape capable of being grasped by the human mind" (7). Eisenstein himself cited Spurgeon's assertion that Shakespeare had "a peculiar habit of seeing emotional or mental situations throughout a play in repeatedly recurring physical pictures", connecting Shakespeare's artistic vision to his own and to what he believed to be the ideal creative process.[17]

In the volume *Towards a Theory of Montage* (hereafter *Montage*), comprised of essays written between 1937 and 1940, Eisenstein discusses Caroline Spurgeon's work in some detail in his lengthy, wide-ranging essay "Laocoön".[18] Most of these essays were published in English translation for the first

[12] Lary, "Eisenstein", 144.

[13] Lary, "Eisenstein", 146.

[14] Lary, "Eisenstein", 148.

[15] Caroline Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1923), 9.

[16] Eisenstein, "Dickens, Griffith and the Film Today", in *Film Form*, 245.

[17] See Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery*, 257, and Eisenstein, *Towards a Theory of Montage: Sergei Eisenstein Selected Works, Vol. 2* [1992], ed. by Michael Glenny and Richard Taylor, trans. by Michael Glenny (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 188.

[18] Eisenstein, "Laocoön", in *Montage*, 102-202; see esp. 187-193. In the title of this essay, Eisenstein refers directly to the influential 1766 treatise *Laocoön; or, on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, by German philosopher and dramatist Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, wherein Lessing develops a "specificity theory" that delineates the differences between the essence and functions of painting versus those of poetry. Film theorists of the first half of the twentieth century used this model to explore

time in 1992 by the British Film Institute as the second volume of their extensive four-volume series *S. M. Eisenstein: Selected Works*. In *Montage*, Eisenstein uses Spurgeon's ideas about Shakespeare's imagery, particularly that related to the human body, to argue that Shakespeare is "an absolute master" at both using juxtapositional montage in the imagery and formal structure of his plays and at "montage reworking", or "'re-montage'", incorporating materials from his primary sources, including from his own works, to create new art.[19] To Eisenstein, this was not a matter of what Frederic Jameson would later dismissively call postmodern pastiche, empty allusion or copying for the sole purpose of play(ing). Instead, this re-employment of (re)sources, such as Holinshed's *Chronicles* or Senecan revenge tragedy, was a redeployment of ideas and materials to address issues of the *present*: "Here it should be noted that 're-montage' is profoundly ideological, tendentious and meant to ensure that in its 're-scripted' and 're-montaged' form the material, which in itself had no connection with Shakespeare's ideals, would be made to serve [Shakespeare's] ideas".[20] In this passage, the Soviet director also is pulling heavily from the work of his contemporary and friend Ivan Aksenov (1884-1935), a Russian theater critic and historian specializing in Elizabethan drama who worked with the young Eisenstein in Vsevolod Meyerhold's theater company in the first half of the 1920s.[21] In the early 1930s, Eisenstein invited Aksenov to teach at the State University of Cinematography, so it is clear they not only were friends but shared an interest in theater, Shakespeare, and cinema. The director's lengthy quotations of and many references to Aksenov in *Montage*, published two years after Aksenov's death, prove that Eisenstein's thinking about Shakespeare was greatly impacted by Aksenov, who wrote about fifteen works on Shakespeare, most of which were written between 1930 and 1935 and published posthumously in 1937 in a book simply titled *Shakespeare*. Eisenstein was drawn to Aksenov's insistence on putting Shakespeare in historical context, which led the Elizabethan historian "to position Shakespeare in the context of class struggle and historical dialectics, in which the playwright emerged as the forefather of (socialist) realism".[22] Furthermore, Aksenov asserted, Shakespeare "challenged the obsolete feudal culture and revolutionized theatre by switching focus from the particular to the general, from the ossified misconceptions of the old epoch to the universal truths of human existence" (36). This pro-Soviet, socialist realist reading of Shakespeare was ingrained in Russia by the mid-1930s, and "[b]y 1939 mass Shakespearization was in full swing".[23] Eisenstein, the Formalist who defined "mimesis" as the representation of a generalized "principle" or theme rather than verisimilar imagery, did not embrace socialist realism, but rather redefined the "real", such that the "realism" he praises in Shakespeare is that of primordial truths or phenomena, the "skeleton" onto which he molds his dialectical characters, plot structures, and imagery.

Indeed, despite considering Shakespeare an artistic fellow traveler, a creative *colleague*, Eisenstein also clearly exalts the Bard as the apotheosis of "montage thinking". In *Montage*, he "crown[s]" his examples of montage principles with a study of Shakespeare, who provides "the most vivid and striking manifestation of our subject matter" in all of art history.[24] The director uses the work of Aksenov and Spurgeon to build his Shakespearean case, but the foundation of his argument lies in "the myth and mysteries of Dionysus ... being torn to pieces and the pieces being reconstituted in the transfigured

film's ontological, specific essence, alleging that various properties both aesthetic (form) and thematic (function) are innate to cinema.

[19] Eisenstein, *Montage*, 186.

[20] Eisenstein, *Montage*, 186.

[21] See Aleksei Semenenko, "Ivan Aksenov and Soviet Shakespeare", in Tom Bishop et al., eds., *Shakespeare International Yearbook 18: Special Section, Soviet Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 2020), 21-42. Aksenov was also Eisenstein's first biographer, writing *Sergei Eisenstein: The Portrait of the Artist*, which was not published until 1968.

[22] Semenenko, "Ivan Aksenov", 37.

[23] Arkady Ostrovsky, "Shakespeare as a Founding Father of Socialist Realism: The Soviet Affair with Shakespeare", in Irena R. Makaryk and Joseph G. Price, eds., *Shakespeare in the World of Communism and Socialism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 56-83, 58.

[24] Eisenstein, *Montage*, 186.

Dionysus".[25] This, he declares, is the prehistoric basis and referent of all art: "Here we are at the very threshold of the art of theatre which in time was to become the art of cinema, that threshold at which religious ritual gradually turned into art, at which the straightforward *cult act* gradually turned into *symbolic ritual*, then to metamorphose into an *artistic image*" (168). Forty-five years before cultural anthropologist Victor Turner published his important study *From Ritual to Theatre* (1982), Eisenstein builds his entire aesthetic theory on the relationship between religious ritual and the arts, predictably focusing on theater and film. He believes that the myths of Dionysus and Osiris provide a model for the form/structure *and* the core content of artistic works: art is always composed as a "reconstitution" of pieces from the past, and, ultimately, it always refers to the process of growth, decay, and death to which all bodies, human and otherwise, are subject. It is on these grounds that he turns to Spurgeon, whose work substantiates his argument vis-à-vis Shakespeare. Essentially, Eisenstein derives from Spurgeon the idea that "Shakespeare proves to be the first among his contemporaries not only in the quantity but also in the quality of those images of the human body and its parts with which his works are filled".[26] The filmmaker refers to several plays that prominently use body imagery but returns repeatedly to Shakespeare's mature tragedies, mainly *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* (including the 140 Duncan drawings), and *Coriolanus*. It is unsurprising that the socialist director was drawn to the allegorical treatment of bodies and the Body Politic in these plays, and he notes that *Coriolanus* also is an example of Shakespeare taking a piece of Plutarch's *Lives* and suturing it into a Jacobean tragedy; thus, it is an example of both montage and "montage thinking" (191).

Furthermore, Eisenstein insists that "in the composition of a whole major class of his plays – *the history plays* – we find ... 'the body in action', i.e. in plays whose composition consists in a *movement* through the biography [of their central characters], [but] this image of the '*body as process*' is just as frequent" (my emphasis).[27] Eisenstein declares Shakespeare a true *monteur* (editor) because of his "dialectical" orchestration of images:

> In [Shakespeare's] imagery there is a transition from *the assembly and disposition of random extremities* to a different model: the assembly and disposition of the same extremities but in conditions of *sequentially changing* positions in the context not of a body that is torn apart *in itself* but of a body that is breaking up the static configuration of its parts as it moves from phase to phase of a movement. The transfer of this to a sequence of visual images is not merely one of the methods of filmmaking: it is the fundamental phenomenon of cinema itself![28]

Shakespeare's work, therefore, has achieved the most sophisticated levels of montage, which finds its ultimate expression in film. Although it has become a bit of a canard to say that if Shakespeare were alive today, he would have been a filmmaker, it does seem that Eisenstein is claiming Shakespeare as his cinematic montage mentor. The filmmaker's words above support his contention that the "creative richness" in "Shakespeare's imagery goes even deeper than the 'Dionysian' model, deeper than that prototype of 'form as structure' ... Shakespeare actually merges with what was the prototype in nature of the Dionysus-figure", in other words, the movement and processes of "natural life as a whole".[29]

Eisenstein's final pronouncement on the Shakespearean subject in *Towards a Theory of Montage* sums up his audacious claim that the "Sweet Swan of Avon" is the artist nonpareil of the cinematic *Urphänomen*, Goethe's notion of the "original" or "primordial phenomenon" that synthesizes empirical

[25] Eisenstein, *Montage*, 168.
[26] Eisenstein, *Montage*, 188. See also Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery*, 50.
[27] Eisenstein, *Montage*, 188.
[28] Eisenstein, *Montage*, 189.
[29] Eisenstein, *Montage*, 190.

experience with theoretical idea or "mental construct".[30] Fundamentally, the filmmaker's idea of the *Urphänomen* points to his insistence on the form or structure of artistic imagery powerfully expressing its thematic "principle." Eisenstein declares that Shakespeare's plays figuratively and literally "mediate" the *Urphänomen* of cinema, which stretches back into the prehistoric mists of time and forward into the theoretical futures of increasingly multifarious artistic images, through cinema and beyond:

> Thus we have revealed in Shakespeare each and every variant of the 'montage approach' and 'montage thinking,' from the most atavistic examples (the 'Osiris principle' in his imagery) to the most sophisticated aspects of compositional montage, e.g. in the battle scenes in *Macbeth* and *Richard III*.
>
> It only remains to say one last thing: if Shakespeare has such mastery of all the forms that derive from the *Urphänomen* of cinema, i.e. of all those specific compositional devices ... then is he not equally inclined towards the very *Urphänomen* itself?
>
> What can that cinematic *Urphänomen* be ... outside of cinema? For an author who is not a film-maker, what can its attractions be when he is working within his own, non-cinematic art form?
>
> The main attraction will, of course, be the essential content of the phenomenon: *movement*. And more precisely ... the *image of movement* ... [W]e could say that perception of the phenomenon of any movement consists in the continual break-up of a certain static form and the *re-ordering* of the fragments of *that* static form into a *new* form.[31]

With his concept of the *Urphänomen*, then, Eisenstein uses Shakespeare's work as the ultimate exemplum of the dialectical law of "movement" that governs nature and history (and *should* govern the form and theme/principle of all art). Conversely, he exalts Shakespeare's art on the pedestal of the primordial *Urphänomen*, employing the theory to reify and validate the Bard's status as the premier master of "compositional" montage that communicates the foundational principles of life and history in both structure and meaning. As with Allardyce Nicoll and other early film theorists, it is *movement* that is the essential quality of film, but Eisenstein expands this idea immensely to encompass his entire dialectical philosophy, such that the world, through his lens, is most accurately and powerfully depicted on film. Furthermore, it is Shakespeare who teaches him the most sophisticated "forms" of essential dialectics.

In the consequential passage above, Eisenstein specifically mentions the montage structure in the battle scenes of *Macbeth* and *Richard III*, and, at this point, the filmmaker had already used these scenes as models for his own battle scenes in *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) and would shortly do so in *Ivan the Terrible, Part I* (1944). In war scenes in both films, the director cuts between extreme long shots featuring bold geometric patterns formed by lines of soldiers and armaments moving through the frame, often dominated by negative space; full and medium shots briefly focusing on interactions between the sovereign and individual officers, on heated clashes between opposing soldiers, or on the glory of the leader, which frequently are at waist height or from a low angle, putting viewers in the midst of the violence; and close-ups revealing the attitudes and emotions of soldiers from a variety of ranks. A virtuoso example of this contrapuntal orchestration is the epic "Battle on the Ice" scene in *Alexander Nevsky*, which stretches to nearly a half hour, depicting the unlikely victory of the outnumbered Russian troops in this historic medieval battle in 1242. There are a great many echoes of Shakespeare's second tetralogy of history plays in this film, including intense battle scenes punctuated by moments of humor, as in Shakespeare's depiction of the Battle of Shrewsbury at the end of *Henry IV, Part I*, and, as in *Henry V*, the king's pivotal interactions with his leaders and the rank and file the night before battle, which are juxtaposed with the haughtiness of the enemy, the Germans (or Teutonics) in this case rather than the French at the medieval Battle of Agincourt (1415).

[30] Sebastian Meixner, "Urphänomen (Original/Primordial Phenomenon)", *Goethe-Lexicon of Philosophical Concepts*, 3 (December 2022), https://doi.org/10.5195/glpc.2022.46.
[31] Eisenstein, *Montage*, 192.

Eisenstein's collage of diverse shots in these battle scenes is typical of the conflict-focused editing throughout his oeuvre, although the graphic geometric patterns become prevalent largely in these later works. In *Ivan, Part I*'s battle against the Mongols in Kazan – which, as with Henry V's war against France, the monarch uses to unify his fractious subjects – there are several steep, low-angle full shots of the Tsar, often standing on a hill looking regal with his throne beside him. These images are essentially positive emblems of power; however, there is inherent dissonance in these shots because viewers already know that Ivan is and will continue to be a brutal dictator, far from the anointed "ideal" king. Interspersed close-ups of his underlings show their awe at the majestic, inspirational sight, but the irony is not lost on the audience. The ambivalence in Eisenstein's depiction of a Machiavellian Ivan resonates with Shakespeare's equivocal portrayal of the charismatic Hal/Henry V and with the bloodthirsty Macbeth. This reflects the director's growing disillusionment with the Soviet government, resulting in a shift in his understanding of Ivan to "a more deeply tragic conception of the story – one that sees the limitations of the Marxist explanation of history (and of tragedy)".[32] Lary cites an unposted 1944 letter to writer Yury Tynyanov in which Eisenstein dolefully notes "the tragic inevitability of autocracy and aloneness" (144). As *Ivan the Terrible, Part I* culminates, the ruler of sixteenth-century Russia is faced with war on multiple fronts, and Eisenstein gives us a scene showing the tyrannical leader on his throne receiving messenger after messenger conveying bad news from the battlefields. The director's indebtedness to Shakespeare is evident, and this scene points to Ivan's bloody ruthlessness by alluding to the characters of Macbeth and Richard III. Furthermore, as in Act 5 of *Macbeth*, wherein a succession of messengers comes to deliver the king news of the strength and triumphs of his enemies' army, *Ivan the Terrible* is focused on the process of the dictator's emotional journey rather than the spectacle of the battlefield. As Eisenstein proclaims, Shakespeare excels at "not just the *depiction* of movement but also in the *image* of movement – above all of inner *psychological* movement in his plots and themes ... his command of the *image of movement* is ... indeed boundless".[33] In this late scene in *Ivan, Part I,* the movement is primarily happening within the protagonist, as messengers move into and out of the frame, reminding the viewer that the film is a *chronicle*, a biographical picture, of the evolution and devolution of one man, a ruler whose great power affects his whole realm: if the head is tempestuous, plagued by megalomania and vengeance, the members of the kingdom are also in chaos. In the midst of World War II and the Soviet Union's grueling fight against Fascistic Axis powers, it is not surprising that Eisenstein decided to make a film about the evils of autocracy; however, he is also pointing at a despot closer to home, Stalin, who would himself decipher this allusion only after screening *Part II*.

As with Shakespeare's battles, designed for the Globe's "little O," as *Henry V*'s Chorus declares (Prol., l. 14),[34] Eisenstein leaves much of the combat in his plots to the spectators' imaginations. Although the filmmaker could have chosen to show the final battles in *Ivan, Part I*, as he does in the earlier grand battle scene, Eisenstein chooses instead to require his viewers to fill in the gaps of the terrors of bloody warfare. This elision of gory and glorious violence at key moments is one of the Shakespearean montage techniques the filmmaker praises and appropriates in his films and his theory. This also brings us back to Eisenstein's insistence on the active spectator. Directly following the filmmaker's passage on Shakespeare's ineluctable connection to the cinematic *Urphänomen*, he returns to his theory of the purpose of montage, its evocation of critical ideological thinking: "Perception is intermittent, but here it is the role of the obturator or interrupter [i.e. the editor] to remove from our perception the *non-significant* elements of the progression of a movement from phase to phase ... The undefined imageless stages between two reasonable combinations are not 'read' and only exist ... in the mind of the perceiver!"[35] Clearly, it is not only film that contains this kind of "editing": Shakespeare's

[32] Lary, "Eisenstein", 144.
[33] Eisenstein, *Montage*, 193.
[34] All Shakespeare quotations taken from William Shakespeare, *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).
[35] Eisenstein, *Montage*, 192.

plays are always already employing montage via the parts of the narrative (*fabula*) they leave out of the performed plot (*syuzhet*), such as Duncan's murder or Ophelia's drowning, and in his elisions and alterations of his source materials, such as Macbeth's seventeen-year reign or Hotspur's age. Eisenstein is talking about cutting here: what the editor/author cuts out of the story in order to evoke emotion, imagination, and intellectual thought, arriving at the all-important "principle" under the "skin" of the artwork.

This lands us squarely in the aesthetic pronouncements of Shakespeare's Chorus in *Henry V*, the final history play of his second tetralogy of "chronicle plays", written shortly before *Hamlet* (circa 1599). In this play's prologue, the Chorus self-consciously mediates the history of the play and directly commands viewers to collaborate: "On your imaginary forces work. / ... / For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings" (*Henry V*, Prol. ll. 18, 28). Spurgeon's description of the imagery in the five Chorus prologues in *Henry V* reflects Eisenstein's notion that spectators must be co-creators: "the urgent appeal to the onlookers to use their imaginations and piece out with their thoughts the imperfections of actors and stage, is the main theme" of these prologues.[36] Eisenstein perceived depicting chronicles – narratives of historical movement – as the highest calling of cinema, and he considered Shakespeare's histories and tragedies to be the nonpareil of evocative contrapuntal structure that inspires spectators to contemplate the systems of power in which and by which they live. Throughout his career as a filmmaker and theorist, Eisenstein connected juxtapositional editing, based on the conflict between one shot and the next, to his overarching idea that the most powerful films, those that move people emotionally and ideologically, possess a unity or harmony between the messaging of the film and its visual and aural form, though the form itself should be disjunctive. Both the cinematic language in a film and the story it tells, therefore, should be structured dialectically in such a way that the viewer must actively participate in creating meaning by filling in the "gaps" between shots and between scenes, but also between images and ideas. Eisenstein's point is well taken: formalist techniques in film can challenge viewers to see or imagine their world differently. Eisenstein's obsession with the "chronicle film" and with Shakespeare's histories make film adaptations of these plays perfect specimens in which to examine the Soviet filmmaker's ideas at work (and in play). For instance, Laurence Olivier's wartime *Henry V* (1944) and Orson Welles's *Falstaff: Chimes at Midnight* (1965) – two earlier examples of Shakespeare's histories on screen being employed overtly as ideological messengers at key political moments – both display an oscillation between realism and formalism that is derived from Eisenstein's films and his theory embedded therein. It is undeniable that Shakespeare's work captivated Sergei Eisenstein and served as the preeminent model inspiring his theoretical concepts from the very beginning of his career to the end of his life, as his words in *Towards a Theory of Montage* attest. Furthermore, whereas the artist-theorist was disappointed with the outcome of Marxism in the form of oppressive Stalinism, Eisenstein never fell out of love with the dialectical Bard.

[36] Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery*, 243. There are many other compelling connections between Spurgeon's *Shakespeare's Imagery* and her Soviet filmmaker-admirer's theoretical perspectives on cinema, literature, and art more broadly, but this is beyond our scope. It also must be noted that Eisenstein was a devoted student of Fyodor Dostoevsky and Charles Dickens as well as Shakespeare, applying artistic insights he derived from their literary work to cinema, as can be seen in his now canonical essay (especially among adaptation theorists), "Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today", which appears in *Film Form* (195-255).

Kinga Földváry

The Shakespearean Tragedy of/for Our Times. *Macbeth*?

Abstract: The article compares the diverse strategies employed by the three most recent adaptations of *Macbeth*, a play that appears to be the Shakespearean drama of our age judging from the number of recent adaptations. I argue that Justin Kurzel's 2015 historical epic, Kit Monkman's 2018 experimental production, and Joel Coen's 2021 film entitled *The Tragedy of Macbeth* reflect the current shifts in the world of the cinema, as they exemplify a number of changes taking place in front of our eyes, both in terms of cinematic production and popular and critical reception. All three films use the early modern text in their dialogue, but rely on different visual and technological tools, showing how nostalgia and innovation, traditional and experimental approaches exist side by side in the contemporary mediascape.

Keywords: Macbeth, *contemporary cinema*, *location shooting*, *Chroma key*, *black-and-white cinematography*, *theatricality*

1. Introduction

Macbeth seems to have become the Shakespearean drama of our age, judging from the number of recent theatre productions[1] and film adaptations, and it is easy to see how a story of a tyrant's climb to power and the toxic atmosphere he creates in and around himself resonates with our age of populist politics and general sense of social crisis. As Susan Snyder claims, "The play is an open system, offering some fixed markers with which to take one's basic bearings but also, in closer scrutiny, offering provocative questions and moral ambiguities".[2] The play's universal appeal is testified by the fact that it has been adapted to the most diverse contexts and a variety of cinematic genres, particularly variations of the gangster-crime-thriller-*film noir* family, among them *Joe MacBeth* (1955, dir. Ken Hughes), and its later reworking *Men of Respect* (1990, dir. William Reilly), while other films added elements of horror to the conventions of the gangster genre, for instance Geoffrey Wright's *Macbeth* (2006). Pierre Kapitaniak lists twenty different versions made in the first decade of the twenty-first century, though some of these are lesser-known variants that may not be known beyond a niche audience.[3]

Nevertheless, the trend does not seem to be abating, quite the contrary: the second decade of the century saw not only plenty of theatrical *Macbeth*s, but even mainstream filmmakers keep trying their hands at adapting the Scottish play in big-budget productions. Some of the most recent variations, ranging from the South African Broadcasting Corporation's 2008 "two re-versionings of *Macbeth* … as a power struggle for control"[4] within the context of South African history and mythology, through *House*

[1] The Royal Shakespeare Company has had four different versions since the year 2000; in 2021, the Almeida Theatre staged the play with James McArdle and Saoirse Ronan, directed by Yaël Farber; the Globe Theatre had the last production in 2023; and the English Touring Theatre have been touring with *Macbeth* since 2023, to mention just a few of the most acclaimed recent productions.

[2] Susan Snyder, "A Modern Perspective: *Macbeth*", *The Folger Shakespeare*, *www.folger.edu/explore/.*

[3] Pierre Kapitaniak, "Witches and Ghosts in Modern Times Lost? How to Negotiate the Supernatural in Modern Adaptations of *Macbeth*?", in Sarah Hatchuel et al., eds., *Shakespeare on Screen: "Macbeth"* (Mont-Saint-Aignan: P.U. de Rouen et du Havre, 2014), 55-69, 55, fn. 2.

[4] Adele Seeff, *South Africa's Shakespeare and the Drama of Language and Identity* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 182.

of Cards[5] or even *Breaking Bad*,[6] to a "social-enterprise"[7] film project, directed by Daryl Chase, set in contemporary Northampton, provide ample proof for the adaptability of the play's themes and conflicts to our current reality. Possibly the most recent version to reach movie theatres in the Anglophone world in 2024 is Simon Godwin's filmed theatrical production, starring Ralph Fiennes and Indira Varma. As one review points it out, "It is not modernised as such, but the war-like cast of the design suits a contemporary mindset in which world leaders like Putin conduct themselves like Macbeth, but without the guilt".[8] In fact, the army fatigues and a contemporary battlefield as stage design have been common to quite a few recent adaptations of several Shakespearean plays, among them Rupert Goold's 2010 *Macbeth* film based on his 2007 Chichester Theatre Festival production (even though the setting is claimed to invoke the Stalin era of the 1950s, the atmosphere is easy to associate with our own world and its atrocities). The setting of Ralph Fiennes' 2011 *Coriolanus* was eerily reminiscent of the Balkan wars, and Iqbal Khan's RSC production of *Othello* included scenes of torturing prisoners that brought to mind Abu Ghraib, and the human consequences of warfare. It is in itself a reflection on the sorry state of our societies that the constant military conflicts endemic in the world make it easy to update Shakespearean settings as identifiably contemporary warzones. Yet war is not the only possible way to connect the narrative to our day and age, as even a 2012 video production of *Macbeth*, directed by Daniel Coll, testifies. Although the film received rather mixed reviews, its topicality was evident, with critics pointing out how it could be seen as a reflection on "today's fame-driven world" in which the Macbeths "are the celebrities of their age; filthy rich, famous and passionately in love … [but] they are seduced into believing that they deserve even more and they jump at the chance to take it. With no regard for the consequences, their reckless impatience leads them to a spiral of violence ending in madness and death, and a final self-realisation".[9]

In this paper, however, I do not wish to look at the diverse forms of topicality that the narrative or generic elements of various *Macbeth* offshoots may bring to the fore, but intend to examine some of the seemingly more conservative adaptations that the drama has inspired over the past decade. I use the word 'conservative' with caution, because while these films rely on the early modern dialogue and do not change the setting or the plot in any obvious ways, they nonetheless display the signs of our times, similarly to the above-mentioned looser appropriations. Most importantly, I do not intend to return to an earlier era of adaptation studies and its insistence on fidelity criticism which persists even in relatively recent investigations, and which often circles around the notion of change in theoretical and practical analyses alike, examining what has changed from the (supposed) original and what has remained unchanged. These are the questions at the heart of Julie Sanders's distinction between adaptation and appropriation,[10] but even Linda Hutcheon's definition of adaptation as "announced, extensive, specific transcoding"[11] is based on the idea that adaptations are always recognisable because they retain a considerable (extensive) proportion of the source work. In a more abstract sense, adaptation enquiries tend to return to the question of the changes in narrative, medium, genre, atmosphere or characterisation, asking where the limits of such changes are when one wishes to maintain a connection between source text and adapted product. It is true that an awareness of a literary source is generally unavoidable in

[5] See, *e.g.*, Katherine Rowe's discussion of the parallels between the tragedy and the series in an interview: "A Shakespeare Scholar Examines the Influence of Lady Macbeth in *House of Cards*", *The Week*, 4 April 2015, *theweek.com/audio.*

[6] Jeffrey Chisum, "The *Macbeth* of the American West: Tragedy, Genre and Landscape in *Breaking Bad*", *Critical Studies in Television: The International Journal of Television Studies*, 14.4 (2019), 415-428.

[7] Daryl Chase, "Northampton-based Social Enterprise *Macbeth* Feature Film Launches Campaign For Completion Funding", *Northampton Chronicle & Echo* (2023), *www.northamptonchron.co.uk.*

[8] Penelope Debelle, "Ralph Fiennes Gives Shakespeare's *Macbeth* a Contemporary Edge", *The New Daily*, 4 May 2024, *www.thenewdaily.com.au*.

[9] Independent Artists Releasing, "Press Kit: *The Tragedy of Macbeth*", *Yumpu.com* (2012), *www.yumpu.com*.

[10] Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

[11] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 16.

adaptation analysis, and the recent post-fidelity debate has addressed this issue in particular.[12] At the same time, Michael D. Friedman points out in his examination of reviews of Justin Kurzel's 2015 *Macbeth* that in spite of the changes within the field, "outside of academia, general audiences continue to believe that the spirit of a Shakespeare play resides in its language, and therefore any Shakespeare film will be judged, at least in part, on the extent to which it remains faithful to familiar verbal aspects of the dramatic work".[13]

While I do not claim that examining the textual strategy of any adaptation does not reveal important aspects of the work as a whole, and by implication, the state of contemporary adaptations, a predominant focus on the source text tends to make us lose sight of the fact that despite their ties to early modern English literature, Shakespeare film adaptations have been produced by twenty-first century cinema, and create their meaning in the complex interplay of these radically different sign systems. This is why my interest lies predominantly in the non-verbal elements of *Macbeth* films; therefore, in what follows, I look at three of the most recent cinematic adaptations: Justin Kurzel's 2015 historical epic, Kit Monkman's 2018 experimental production, and Joel Coen's 2021 black-and-white *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, with a view to examining primarily their visual aspects. Without dismissing the fact that the three films' scripts are not identical, as a result of different editing, dramaturgical and directorial decisions, each of them uses the Jacobean text as the basis of their dialogues, and therefore their distinct, unique identities need to be located elsewhere. For all their respectful attitude to the Shakespearean language, I argue, these films provide ample proof of their rootedness in contemporary visual culture. As I intend to show, it is in their cinematography, their diverse formal and technical strategies and tools, rather than their content or themes, that we find the most tangible evidence for their contemporaneity. Moreover, the three films together offer a better representation of the current trends in the world of the cinema than any one of them on its own, as they exemplify a number of changes taking place in front of our eyes, both in terms of cinematic production, and in popular and critical reception. Some of these trends are inspired by technological advances, others try to fulfil audiences' demand for greater authenticity in an era of fake, superficial and imitative contents. The industry is also forced to invent more sustainable means of production, which can be one of the most powerful drives behind green screen technology and other digital experiments. It is only natural that each and every era displays somewhat contradictory tendencies, with different forms of innovation and nostalgia manifested side by side. At the same time, this range of answers to contemporary challenges, and the way they appear in the films' cinematographic features, not only reflect on changes in viewing habits and patterns characterising the twenty-first century, but also on our changing interpretation of the role of Shakespeare in our times.

2. Justin Kurzel's Scottish *Macbeth*

The first, and seemingly the most traditional film out of the three contemporary *Macbeth*s, Justin Kurzel's 2015 historical epic focuses on the power of the Scottish landscape and uses the widescreen format to authenticate its visual narrative. Surprisingly, this in itself counts as an innovative solution, as Kurzel's adaptation appears to be one of the very few *Macbeth*s in cinema history shot on location in Scotland. Roman Polanski's 1971 *Macbeth*, although often mistakenly described as filmed in the

[12] On the interpretation and role of fidelity in contemporary adaptation studies, see Douglas M. Lanier, "Shakespeare / Not Shakespeare: Afterword", in Christy Desmet et al., eds., *Shakespeare / Not Shakespeare* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 293-306; and Douglas M. Lanier, "Text, Performance, Screen: Shakespeare and Critical Media Literacy", *Cahiers Élisabéthains*, 105.1 (2021), 117-127.

[13] Michael D. Friedman, "The Persistence of Fidelity in Reviews of Kurzel's *Macbeth*", *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 47.4 (2019), 3.

Highlands,[14] was in fact filmed in Wales and Northumbria.[15] Jeremy Freeston's 1997 television *Macbeth*, described by Alfredo Michel Modenessi as "a well-meaning low-budget effort"[16] was also shot in Scotland, but because of its limited accessibility, it never really gained public awareness. It comes as no surprise therefore that the Scottishness of Kurzel's film is presented as a key element in its marketing strategy and a key to its interpretation as well. However natural the Scottish setting may appear for what is commonly (and superstitiously) referred to as Shakespeare's Scottish play, and however much it feels like a long overdue coming home for the narrative,[17] in the drama's theatrical performance history, this localised interpretation has not always been an obvious or expected choice, but rather the result of a slow change with its origins in the long eighteenth century.

In the early modern era and during the Restoration period, traditional interpretations of the play tended to emphasise the moral element of the drama, viewing it as a universally applicable cautionary tale, and they focused less on the Scottishness of cast and conflict, or the local aspects of the setting. As a result, the type of authenticity demanded by audiences was also textual (using the Shakespearean language) and psychological (performing identifiable emotional and mental states), rather than historical or location-specific. As shown by Kristina Straub: "Macbeth embodied the changing image of military masculinity as he morphed, over the course of the century, from Restoration courtier, to British redcoat, and finally, to ancient Scot".[18] Even when the Scottish costume and scenic design became common on British stages, the Scottishness invoked in performance was more of an exotic and remote identity, and in this way "The raw violence of the character's action was comfortably removed from modern British military masculinity while retaining the aura of soldierly heroics".[19] Thus, until very recently, even the foregrounding of the Scottish element inherent in the play served the purpose of distancing the character from contemporary reality, rather than inviting an identification with them. In the twenty-first century, however, the representation of the traumatising impacts of the battlefield on the hero's psyche would not necessarily be off-putting for general audiences, and the psychological authenticity of such processes overrides concerns of identification with the troubled protagonist.

Yet what we can see in Kurzel's film, and what is a recognisable trend in contemporary cinema as well, is a constant striving for authenticity in representations of cultures that are seen as foreign or exotic,[20] either because of their geographical or temporal distance from the mainstream Anglo-American here and now. This is a very different use of identification from the above-described psychological relatability, and in this process even the more abstract elements of the film's visuality are employed to localise the conflict in the recognisable geographical setting of the Scottish landscape, and a medieval Scotland in particular. This Scotland is awe-inspiringly beautiful and brutally savage at once, a combination familiar to viewers of contemporary fantasy cinema and television series, especially HBO's *Game of Thrones* (2011–2019), which was at the height of its popularity at the time Kurzel's *Macbeth* was released. Based on popular and critical responses to the film, viewers were indeed quick to make the connection between Michael Fassbender's "handsome and rugged" Macbeth who "looks like he's

[14] Lars Kaaber, *Murdering Ministers: A Close Look at Shakespeare's "Macbeth" in Text, Context and Performance* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), xix.
[15] "Macbeth: Filming & Production: Filming Locations", *Internet Movie Database*, www.imdb.com.
[16] Alfredo Michel Modenessi, "'Stands Scotland Where it Did?': Re-locating and Dis-locating the Scottish Play on Scottish Film. *Anuario de Letras Modernas*, 14 (2009), 33-49, 35, doi.org/10.22201/ffyl.01860526p.2008.14.671.
[17] Anne-Lise Marin-Lamellet, "Bringing 'the Scottish Play' Back to Where It Belongs: Justin Kurzel's *Macbeth* (2015)", *Études écossaises*, 22 (2023), journals.openedition.org/etudesecossaises.
[18] Kristina Straub, "The Soldier in the Theater: Military Masculinity and the Emergence of a Scottish Macbeth", *The Eighteenth Century*, 58.4 (Winter 2017), 429-447, 430.
[19] Ibid., 433.
[20] See, *e.g.*, Vilsoni Hereniko, "Authenticity in Cinema: Notes from the Pacific Islands", *Journal de la Société des Océanistes*, 148 (2019), 65-72.

walked straight off a *Game of Thrones* episode",[21] or the setting as "Scotland with a pinch of Westeros".[22] Yet what Kurzel emphasises in interviews is always the "raw authenticity" of the location, the Scottish Highlands in winter, rather than a fictional or alternative universe.[23] The intended meaning of the location is precisely its reality, its lack of artifice, making the viewer feel that the film's "gimmick is there is no gimmick: according to historical record, the setting is the Scotland of 1057, a place of cruel violence, where crowns are made from bone and dogs lap at the blood of kings".[24] Whether the latter part of the statement is on historical record is hard to say, yet the intention is clear, which in itself may point to a common trend within the filmmaking industry of the twenty-first century: a striving for realism. This realism not only appears in film theory[25] or in documentary filmmaking, but it is equally noticeable in independent world cinema[26] and even in mainstream film. As Bruce Isaacs argues, "Contemporary film culture, particularly mainstream film culture, esteems an essentialist notion of realism in which cinema is a mimetic art, or a 'reality myth,' to paraphrase André Bazin. Cinema promises the possibility of the perfection of representative art: the revelation of truth and a profoundly humanist capacity for the illumination of Nature, self and culture".[27]

Considering that the play's earlier cinematic renditions tended to aspire to a universal and allegorical, rather than local interpretation (Orson Welles's expressionist 1948 film is an obvious example, but even Polanski's film makes the viewer contemplate the nature of politics and power in general, rather than as a reference to any specific society), the decision to authenticate the narrative through location shooting is itself indicative of an industrial change noticeable in recent years in global film production. As Camille Johnson-Yale points out, "Hollywood built its reputation on reproducing exotic and faraway landscapes on its back lots",[28] yet recently this practice of "runaway film production"[29] (that is, using "stand-in locations", or outsourcing film production, originally an economic necessity for the post-war American industry)[30] has come under scrutiny. Acknowledging that the choice of shooting location has far-reaching consequences appears to be a sign of our times, since real – rather than realistic – landscapes have an impact not only on the film and the tourist industry, but also inspire discussions on what Deborah Jones and Karen Smith describe as "the tensions between two sometimes divergent strands of authenticity: creative authenticity and national authenticity".[31] Research into the types of authenticity tourists are looking for has found that there are even more differences between the ways locations can appear authentic (or indeed, how they can fail to do so), and how they may inspire loyalty in former viewers who will in turn become tourists.[32] Therefore it is important to acknowledge the difference between the authenticity of cultural heritage sites and those locations that acquire celebrity status through

[21] Jennifer McShane, "Watch: Michael Fassbender's Epic Turn in *MacBeth*", *Image* (2015), www.image.ie/editorial/.
[22] Agnieszka Piskorska, "Scotland with a Pinch of Westeros? The Case of Justin Kurzel's *Macbeth*", *Anglica. An International Journal of English Studies*, 29.3 (2020), 135-143.
[23] Danny Leigh, "*Macbeth* Director Justin Kurzel: 'You're Getting Close to Evil'", *The Guardian*, 24 September 2015, theguardian.com.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Christine Reeh-Peters et al., eds., *The Real of Reality: The Realist Turn in Contemporary Film Theory* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2021).
[26] Fernando Canet, "The New Realistic Trend in Contemporary World Cinema: Ramin Bahrani's *Chop Shop* as a Case Study", *Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies*, 7 (2013), 153–167.
[27] Bruce Isaacs, "The Cinematic Real: Aesthetics and Spectacle", *Sydney Studies of English*, 33 (2007), 96-124.
[28] Camille Johnson-Yale, "West by Northwest: The Politics of Place in Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain*", *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 44.4 (2011), 890-891.
[29] Daniel Steinhart, *Runaway Hollywood: Internationalizing Postwar Production and Location Shooting* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2019).
[30] Paul Thomas, "Runaways", *Film Quarterly*, 63.2 (Winter 2009), 86-87, online.ucpress.edu/fq/.
[31] Deborah Jones and Karen Smith, "Middle-earth Meets New Zealand: Authenticity and Location in the Making of *The Lord of the Rings*", *Journal of Management Studies*, 42.5 (July 2005), 923.
[32] Minerva Aguilar-Rivero et al., "Authenticity and Motivations towards Film Destination", *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 28.5 (2023), www.tandfonline.com/.

the film industry, either as the 'original' or 'real' locations for historical narratives, or as the fictional locations created by the industry out of existing geographical spaces. The latter trend is evident in the increase of mass tourism to New Zealand following the success of Peter Jackson's cinematic renditions of J. R. R. Tolkien's works,[33] or *Game of Thrones* fans' flocking to Northern Ireland in search of the shooting locations of the series.[34]

Indeed, as in the case of the above films and series, Kurzel's *Macbeth* was promoted by VisitScotland[35] and the Scottish tourism industry, in the hopes that it would bring a much-needed boost to the country's economy. But what this move also signals is a recognition not only of a change in industrial patterns – the film industry catering to the tourist industry and the national economy, rather than the other way around – but also a change in viewing patterns, particularly in the sense of the type of authenticity viewers are looking for on the screen. As it becomes increasingly clear, the contemporary viewer is less concerned with the authenticity of language, or the originality of interpretation; what they demand is a visually immersive experience, often prompted by external factors, such as the landscape that can be further authenticated by the tourist gaze, in private visits inspired by fan-style engagement with visual culture. But this trend has also been fuelled by the desire to see "an antidote to the same vaguely anonymous, CGI-heavy blockbusters often demonized by analog purists, skeptical film theorists, and critics of Global Hollywood"[36] – an antidote Dudley Andrews finds in World Cinema, and its visual and cultural diversity.[37]

Beyond the attention to the Scottishness of the environment, Kurzel's *Macbeth* displays other creative decisions that are equally timely. The way the film places its protagonist within the environment shows a particular sensitivity to the cinematic medium and its evocative powers. In Edel Semple's discussion of Kurzel's *Macbeth*, it becomes evident that the film's "interest in the representation, construction, and destruction of masculine military identities"[38] can be observed in the film's visuality, and she points out how this impression is created already in the film's opening scene where Macbeth appears "pale, grimy, and bloodied. But the stripes of black war-paint on his face at once displays (*sic*) his military identity and suggests (*sic*) that his true self is masked, inaccessible to us and his opponents".[39] At the same time, this depiction also brings to mind the way the protagonist's body reflects the pale, grimy and bloody battlefield, and by association, the body of the kingdom, "marked signally by war"[40] and violent conflicts of all kinds. In Kurzel's film, this depiction of masculinity is thus tied in with a historically authentic visuality embedded in the "pale, grimy, and bloodied", but nonetheless awe-inspiring Scottish landscape.

As Peter Kirwan notes, the elaborate, not so much theatrical as painterly contrast between the realism of the backdrop and the artistic spectacle of the human body intends to offer a visual treat for the viewer. "The painterly composition of frames treats Fassbender's body – itself sometimes exposed – as still life framed within nature, the aura generated by the intersubjectivity of the two and subjected to the exposing

[33] ShiNa Li et al., "The Economic Impact of On-screen Tourism: The Case of *The Lord of the Rings* and the *Hobbit*", *Tourism Management*, 60 (2017), www.sciencedirect.com.
[34] Emily Mannheimer et al., "*Game of Thrones* Tourism and the (Re)imagination of the New Northern Ireland", *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 25.5 (2022), journals.sagepub.com.
[35] Ozgur Tore, "VisitScotland to Promote Country with the *Macbeth* Movie", FTNNews, 8 September 2015, ftnnews.com; "Tourism Industry Hails Macbeth", *The Highland Council* (2015), www.highland.gov.uk.
[36] David Richler, "Cinema, Realism, and the World According to Jia Zhangke", *Revue canadienne d'études cinématographiques / Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, 25.2 (Fall 2016), 6-7.
[37] Quoted in Richler, 6-7.
[38] Edel Semple, "'Make You a Sword of Me': Military Masculinity in *Coriolanus* (2011) and *Macbeth* (2015)", *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 46.2 (Spring 2018), 1.
[39] Ibid., 4.
[40] Ibid.

scrutiny of the camera".[41] Kurzel's film thus succeeds in creating an impression of a nostalgic film, which draws on its embeddedness in the past. This embeddedness is evident in its choice of the historical epic as a genre, and its reliance on the power of the still image as opposed to a hypermobile cinematography, and all of these technical features contribute to the taking of the narrative back to its roots, in pre-Shakespearean Scottish history. But this medieval landscape is filmed in a way that is a marked trend in twenty-first-century filmmaking: the use of subdued colour and lighting that can be used "to convey the nuanced emotional landscape of … characters",[42] and to emphasise a closed, oppressive, eerily haunting atmosphere – the orange mist transforming the landscape into an otherworldly, even hellish scene is one of the most obvious examples in Kurzel's *Macbeth*. In this way, the film provides ample evidence of its embeddedness in the time of its production: combining an evident desire to offer authenticity through its shooting locations and scenic design with the visual spectacle of its subdued colour palette and its painterly photography that draws attention to the (super)heroic male body of a star actor, it is indeed an epic work that is both historical and recognisably contemporary.

3. Kit Monkman's Chroma key *Macbeth*

While the proliferation of ultra-high-resolution screens places high demands on televisual and cinematic products alike, raising filmmakers' awareness to viewers' expectations of attention to detail and the authenticity of the visual spectacle even in historical narratives, this is not the only direction contemporary filmmaking is exploring. Kit Monkman's 2018 *Macbeth* chooses the opposite path to Kurzel's film, and turns the environment into the most artificial of spectacles: a spherical, floating world, "thus making a nod to Shakespeare's Globe, even as he marries aspects of theatricality with remarkable advances in cinema".[43] By shooting the film entirely on green screen (also known as bluescreen, or Chroma key technology),[44] in this *Macbeth* the human figure is placed in the centre of the fully digital globe, denying the viewer the visual authenticity of the setting that Kurzel's adaptation was evidently aiming for. While the limited popular or critical response to the film[45] may be seen as an implication of its failure to forge a viable path for itself, Tom Cartelli emphasises the potential that is never absent from the viewing experience, and that allows us to see the film "as an indicator of what digital filmmaking may do when it becomes more unmoored from the media – filmed theater, analog film – it is convergent with".[46] In fact, the film may be a perfect example of contemporary digital cinema's desire to emancipate Chroma key technology from its regular uses, either as special effects impossible to create otherwise, or an imitation of realistic images, where the use of live action or location shooting would be either more costly or less controllable. This in itself is a contemporary trend that is constantly gaining momentum: the drive for a more sustainable form of filmmaking, reducing the carbon footprint and the environmental impacts of the industry by substituting digital technology for human labour, eliminating the building of single-use sets, or the shipping of human and material resources all over the globe. Monkman's film, however, goes further than using digital technology for cost-effectiveness, and it flaunts its virtuality proudly: the result is a bold experiment in what the Chroma key technology is capable of. It is no wonder

[41] Peter Kirwan, "Consuming the Royal Body: Stillness, Scopophilia, and Aura in *Lear* and *Macbeth* on Screen", *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 39.1 (Spring 2021), 49.
[42] New York Film Academy, "The Best Cinematography Films: Exploring Contemporary Trends", *NYFA*, 1 January 2024, nyfa.edu.
[43] Tom Ue, "Review of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Motion Picture (Directed by Kit Monkman), Goldfinch Studios / Premiere Picture, 2018", *Shakespeare*, 15.1 (2019), 77.
[44] Giovanna Fossati, *From Grain to Pixel: The Archival Life of Film in Transition*, Third Revised Edition (Amsterdam: Amsterdam U.P., 2018), 380.
[45] After a single commercial theatrical screening, the film was made available for streaming on Amazon Video in Britain, and low viewing figures resulted in its inability to reach even the American Amazon site.
[46] Tom Cartelli, "Medium Specificity and/as Medium Convergence in Kit Monkman's Chromakey *Macbeth* (2018)", manuscript.

that both the trailer and the accompanying leaflet emphasise the film's technological achievements, and they quote Peter Holland's high praise, calling the film "the most innovative rethinking of what it means to put Shakespeare on film for decades"[47] – for all the shortcomings of the enterprise, the courage and the innovative vision of the filmmakers are undeniable.

When one allows the blatantly unrealistic backdrop to work its magic, it can foreground aspects of the drama that can hardly manifest in a naturalistic setting: particularly the creation of the environment that is just as much inside the mind of the protagonist as outside, closing in on him, and pulling him towards a virtual abyss. Alison Findlay and Ramona Wray describe the visual impact, emphasising its connections with contemporary popular culture's CGI-created visuality, but also the way this connects to the Shakespearean text/drama:

> [The camera] swings around a sumptuously designed set, a 'Scotland' visualized as a revolving 'other' world (a kind of Shakespearean 'Death Star' or globe-shaped castle/fort adrift in the void). This is very much not the 'Scotland' of the 'blasted heath' variety and inherited representations; instead, an audience is presented with a universe in which outside and inside are delightfully blurred (is the moon inside or outside Macbeth's room or both?) and in which 'nothing is but what is not'.[48]

Chroma key technology is of course not in itself a recent development in cinematography, as it has been characteristic of analogue television, and computer-generated imagery has been employed in mainstream feature films at least since the 1950s. What makes Monkman's film feel contemporary is, however, partly its exclusive reliance on the green screen for its set design, and perhaps, even more importantly, its unapologetic artificiality which does not even attempt to create an illusion of realism. The spectacle of the virtual globe invites the viewer to experience something akin to video-game-style visuality, and offers not only a contemporary, but almost a futuristic viewing experience in the way it experiments with the technology. As *The Guardian*'s reviewer summarises the effect, "the end result creates an edgy, visually innovative background which is lush to watch but constantly upstages the foreground action, especially since, to put it politely, not everyone in the cast has the chops to handle the material".[49] It is certainly true that we are never allowed to forget the artificiality of the fictional world wherein the action is set, particularly as the scenic design typically dissolves into architectural sketch-like lines, emphasising the createdness of the artifice, making the film as metacinematic as possible.

And yet, we are never quite allowed to enter into this otherworldly space, at least not in the sense that we would expect from a mobile camera and a fast-paced editing characteristic of contemporary cinema. As Neil Forsyth laments, "whereas most films, at least since the early days, have been spliced together from sequences and shots taken from multiple positions, in this case the viewer sees all the action from his one unchanging vantage point, as if he were stuck on his seat in the theatre".[50] The potential reasons for the film's commercial failure – though one with great educational potential – may be found precisely in the promise of this setting and what it fails to deliver in terms of a virtual spatial experience, opting for the invocation of a theatrical space instead. Since certain elements of the film remain not simply grounded in traditional cinematography, but feel even theatrical, what is more, they are theatrical in the sense that they feel out of place in the cinema – from the exaggerated enunciation of some characters to the stage-like design of some interior scenes, the freedom of the virtual space is contrasted by the unnaturally rigid movements of both actors and camera. While the meticulous planning and the two separate shoots, followed by painstaking labour by hand and software[51] resulted in a stunning

[47] "Macbeth Movie 2018 Official Trailer", *Daily Motion*, dailymotion.com.
[48] Alison Findlay and Ramona Wray, "A Review of *Macbeth* (dir. Kit Monkman, 2017)", *British Shakespeare Association* (2017), www.britishshakespeare.ws.
[49] Leslie Felperin, "*Macbeth* Review – Full of Sound and Fury", *The Guardian*, 8 March 2018, theguardian.com.
[50] Neil Forsyth, *Shakespeare the Illusionist. Magic, Dreams, and the Supernatural on Film* (Athens: Ohio U.P., 2019), 159.
[51] Ibid., 160.

and flawlessly composed visuality, and the acting is equally of very high, but very theatrical quality, the viewer still feels a discrepancy between the two, as they appear to come from (and remain in) two very different worlds. The film displays the creators' awareness of the role that digital technology can play in contemporary cinema, beyond its ability to add special effects, replicate real(istic) locations for easier access, or beyond a creation of an imaginary space for science fiction or fantasy narratives (films like James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009), Alfonso Cuarón's *Gravity* (2013), or even Baz Luhrmann's *The Great Gatsby* (2013) come to mind). In other words, the film's promise of a uniquely innovative visuality suggests that there is a demand for a more consistently experimental form of filmmaking, together with a conscious effort to make film production more sustainable, even if in this case it falls short of the fully immersive interactive storytelling that the design promises.

4. Joel Coen's Blending of the Theatrical and the Cinematic

While in terms of technology, Monkman's enterprise appears the polar opposite of Kurzel's, the two films' limited colour palette (Kurzel's alternating "between cold blue and grey and saturated red and orange",[52] as Agnieszka Rasmus points out, while Monkman's dominant black and red are placed against a greenish-brown background, also serving as an architect's drawing board)[53] emphasises the artifice of their spectacle. As already mentioned above, the use of subdued lighting and unsaturated colours or a limited colour palette, especially the extreme of black and white, is yet another feature of contemporary indie productions. In less than half a decade, cinemas have seen *Roma* (2018, dir. Alfonso Cuarón), *Cold War* (2018, dir. Paweł Pawlikowski), *The Lighthouse* (2019, dir. Robert Eggers), *Passing* (2021, dir. Rebecca Hall), *Belfast* (2021, dir. Kenneth Branagh), just to mention a few of the best-known award-winning black-and-white productions of the past few years. One of the effects of monochrome films is naturally the evocation of nostalgia, and an expression of the desire to recreate the cinema of the early twentieth century that is often a vital inspiration for the new auteur films. Looking at some of the most spectacular productions of the past decade, several Oscar winners and nominees among them, we can find that black-and-white filming is never a compromise but an artistic choice, "one loaded with meaning, sometimes artistic, sometimes technological, and sometimes purely emotional", showing that it is not an absence of colour, but "an art of light, shadow, lines, and shapes".[54]

This consciously artistic and abstract scenic design is especially characteristic of the most recent of the three *Macbeth*s, Joel Coen's *The Tragedy of Macbeth* (2021), which represents yet another path in its attempt to bring the four-hundred-year-old text to the contemporary viewer. In many ways Coen's film appears to seek a similar fusion of the theatrical with the cinematic that Monkman's project pursued, but in Coen's work the marriage of the sister arts has been clearly more successful. The film's understated visuality, shot in black-and-white, together with the use of the Academy aspect ratio (1.37:1) that in itself implies a return to a pre-blockbuster era of filmmaking, draws attention to itself through its sparsity. The first impression of this minimalist visuality is highly theatrical, rather than cinematic – Edward Gordon Craig's set designs for *Hamlet* are a direct parallel,[55] with their symbolic monoliths among which the human figure is haunted by shadows and pierced by beams of light. Production designer Stefan Dechant has also acknowledged Craig as one of the influences on the design, together

[52] Agnieszka Rasmus, "What Bloody Film Is This? *Macbeth* for Our Time", *Multicultural Shakespeare: Translation, Appropriation and Performance*, 18.33 (2018), 117.
[53] For a more detailed discussion of the different strategies used by the two films, see Kinga Földváry, "Going Digital vs Going Mainstream", in Magdalena Cieślak and Michał Lachman, eds., *Literature and Media: Productive Intersections* (Berlin, Bern, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford, Warszawa, Wien: Peter Lang, 2021).
[54] Luci Marzola, "The History of Black-and-White Cinematography: From its Death to Latest Oscar Trend", *IndieWire*, 18 January 2022, *Indiwire.com*.
[55] I am indebted to Veronika Schandl for drawing my attention to this parallel.

with German Expressionism, the work of "Carl Dreyer and F. W. Murnau, Hiroshi Sugimoto's photographs of architecture, and Casa Luis Barragán in Mexico".[56] Craig's description of the theatre of the future emphasised the power of the simplification of all visuals: stripping down the set design to the barest essentials would allow "a stronger and more immediate appeal to the imagination", and in its ideal theatrical form, where all the accidental elements would be eliminated, "movement and expressiveness would be limited to architectural shapes and the play of light".[57] These Craigian ideals are noticeably echoed in the way Coen's *Macbeth* plays with shadow and light, with the razor sharp edges of monolithic structures and fabric patterns alike,[58] each having its function in the creation of this nocturnal vision of a moral maze where man cannot but get lost.

Jean-Louis Coy refers to the film as an "aesthetic and faithful vision of tragedy",[59] and also argues that the sparse visuality underscores the film's theatricality, claiming that Coen's *Macbeth* "rather constitutes an aesthetic and faithful vision of tragedy, the technicality and filmic creativity put at the service of the theater in order to harmonize space and speech".[60] This effect is enhanced by the use of "theatre light, like you'd see at a Beyoncé concert, which has very, very hard shadows",[61] as cinematographer Bruno Delbonnel describes the way he achieved this spectacular combination of nostalgic contemporaneity and cinematic theatricality. At the same time, this theatrical space is employed in the service of a highly cinematic form of storytelling, where simplicity serves the purpose of abstraction, but never makes the viewer feel that they have left the cinema. Coy's analysis points out the ways the cinematography is embedded in a variety of visual traditions, from early cinema through theatrical modernism, showing how "The format … recalls that of the great 'mutes'; the geometric rigor of the shots, the discreet accessories, the austerity of the style, finally the magnificent black and white, allow the cinema to coexist with a refined theatricality".[62] At the same time, as cinematographer Bruno Delbonnel makes it clear, whatever theatrical or cinematic traditions were invoked, these were always in the service of a technologically highly advanced, consciously cinematic experience:

> But I didn't want to be 'nostalgic' about old black-and-white movies. Quite the opposite: I was looking for the intensity that a very sharp image gives to close-ups. We used large format because I wanted to get a very sharp 4K image. When you do a close-up in 1.37, you fill the screen. The set disappears, and you bring the face and the text to the forefront. Of course, close-ups don't exist in theater – they are pure cinema.[63]

While the film's cinematography deserves a more in-depth discussion than I have space for here,[64] it is useful to point out how Coen's film displays backward-looking features as well as highly advanced and thus very contemporary cinematographic precision as well. Acknowledging this complexity, Sarah Hatchuel analyses the film as a synthesis of all preceding versions.[65] As Chloé Giroud argues in her comparison of the *Macbeth*s of Orson Welles (1948) and Joel Coen, it is easy to find a similarity between the noiresque visuality of the two films, both of which feel like an internal exploration rather than a geographically rooted interpretation of the play (in contrast with Kurzel's Scottish *Macbeth*). As Giroud points out in her abstract, "In many a way, Coen and Welles move away – geographically – from

[56] Adam Woodward, "Joel Coen: How We Made *The Tragedy of Macbeth*", *Little White Lies* (2022), *lwlies.com/interviews*.
[57] Christopher Innes, *Edward Gordon Craig: A Vision of Theatre* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 179.
[58] Fosco Lucarelli, "To Transcend Reality and Function as Symbol: Stage Design of Edward Gordon Craig", *SOCKS*, 15 February 2014, *socks-studio.com*.
[59] Jean-Louis Coy, "*Macbeth* à l'écran: trois films", *Humanisme*, 335.2 (2022), 102 (my translation).
[60] Ibid.
[61] Kyle Buchanan, "This Movie Season, It's a Black-and-White Boom", *The New York Times*, 3 November 2021, *nytimes.com*.
[62] Coy, "*Macbeth* à l'Écran", 102 (my translation).
[63] Benjamin B, "*The Tragedy of Macbeth*: Palace Intrigue", *American Cinematographer*, 4 January 2022, *theasc.com*.
[64] For more details, see, *e.g.*, Dipankar Sarkar, "*The Tragedy of Macbeth* (2021) Cinematography", *Flickside*, 28 March 2022, *Flickside.com*.
[65] Sarah Hatchuel, *L'Écran shakespearien: Adaptation, citation, modèle* (Rouge Profond, 2023), esp. 290-295.

Scotland, but paradoxically seem to get closer to *Macbeth*. Both of them focus on the theatricality of the play…. And both of them place the story of *Macbeth* at the core of their adaptation, even if it means drifting away from historical realism, or even tending towards abstraction".[66] This abstraction is, however, different from Monkman's virtual Chroma key backdrop, although it displays a no less amazing sense of what contemporary digital cinematography is capable of. The blending of the virtual and the real, the theatrical and the cinematic, the simple and pared down monochrome world and the unimaginably expressive camerawork make this film a worthy representative of its age, particularly characteristic of films aspiring for a status of classics, with narratives and themes whose universal appeal fits the way the "stylization of black-and-white unmoors it from time and space".[67]

5. Conclusion

All in all, the three *Macbeth*s, released within less than a decade, can be seen as representatives of the parallel trends observable in contemporary filmmaking: Kurzel's authentication of the narrative through landscape, Monkman's interest in the fictionality of the virtual setting, and Coen's abstract combination of the theatrical and the digital are all significant approaches characteristic of twenty-first-century cinema. None of the films have been box office hits (which rarely happens to Shakespeare adaptations in any case),[68] but their existence in their diverse forms and appearance on various platforms (Kurzel's in traditional commercial theatres, Monkman's almost direct relegation to streaming, and Coen's parallel release in both theatres and on Apple TV+) all testify to Shakespeare's continued presence in the constantly changing mediascape. The future is always hard to predict, but the present of filmmaking – if these three contemporary productions are anything to go by – is full of experimentation with what technological advancements can offer to creative professionals, yet a respectful awareness of the earlier giants of cinema history is equally there, showing how innovation is never possible without nostalgia, how the cinema can keep learning from the theatre, and how the global is always rooted in the local in filmmaking. The three *Macbeth*s of the past decade thus serve as witnesses of past, present and future, and teach us how to appreciate our Shakespearean heritage while living in our own times.

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[66] Chloé Giroud, "*Macbeth* déracinée, ou comment transmettre l'Écosse sans l'Écosse, dans les adaptations d'Orson Welles (1948) et de Joel Coen (2021)", *Études écossaises*, 22 (2023), journals.openedition.org/etudesecossaises/.
[67] Marzola, "The History of Black-and-White Cinematography".
[68] Ronan Paterson, "Box Office Poison?", *Shakespeare in Southern Africa*, 25 (2013).

Márta Hargitai

Fleance and Obscured Scottish Futures in Screen Adaptations of Macbeth by Goold, Kurzel and Coen

Abstract: The play-text of *Macbeth* enigmatically leaves the future of Scotland open. The play ends with Malcolm hailed as the new king, but the rest of the weird sisters' predictions, namely that Banquo's issue will be kings, is left unanswered even though Shakespeare's main source, *Holinshed's Chronicles* (Volume V) (1577) contains a detailed (albeit completely fabricated) sequel as to the future of Fleance. The three *Macbeth* film adaptations examined here – Rupert Goold (2010), Justin Kurzel (2015) and Joel Coen (2021) – all address this loose end of the play-text, leaving clues for the viewer to predict what might happen after the action of the film is over. By opening a door to the future (often literally and visually, as in Goold and Kurzel), and showing Fleance on the move, they all suggest a linear or cyclical continuation of his story and Scottish history. This article considers key elements of the adaptations, focussing on the show of kings and the endings. I argue that the directorial choices of these films, instead of suppressing the line of Fleance, give voice and prominence to his alternative narrative, while also emphasising the cycle of violence that the play suggests.

Keywords: Macbeth, *film adaptations*, *Goold*, *Kurzel*, *Coen*, *Fleance*

The play-text of *Macbeth* enigmatically leaves the future of Scotland open. The play ends with Malcolm hailed as the new king, but the rest of the weird sisters' predictions, namely that Banquo's issue will be kings, is left unanswered even though Shakespeare's main source, *Holinshed's Chronicles* (Volume V) (1577)[1] contains a detailed (albeit completely fabricated) sequel as to the future of Fleance. Here, we read about his rescue by God and friends at court, his escape to Wales, and an extended description of his line of descent, the Stewards, leading up to the then present-day king, James VI, subsequently James I of England. William C. Carroll, in *Adapting "Macbeth": A Cultural History* (2022), traces the evolution of the Banquo narrative in detail.[2] He points out that "Banquo and Fleance were invented by the Scottish historian, Hector Boece in 1527 …; prior to his work, no such persons had ever appeared in chronicles, court records, or any other document",[3] and adds that "Boece's account was largely taken over by Raphael Holinshed".[4] Furthermore, as Carroll points out, "[I]n the chronicle narratives, Fleance was not only never king, he was himself murdered by the father of the Welsh princess. By the time of Malcolm's ascent, the Fleance of the chronicles was probably already a ghost himself (doubly so, since he never existed)".[5]

Even though Fleance's return has no textual or historical authority, filmmakers have consistently engaged with this narrative in various ways, as many critics have observed.[6] The three *Macbeth* film

[1] Raphael Holinshed, *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*, vol. V (London: Johnson, 1808), 271-272.
[2] William C. Carroll, *Adapting "Macbeth": A Cultural History*, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Bloomsbury, 2022). Also see his earlier chapter "Fleance in the Final Scene of *Macbeth*: The Return of the Repressed", in Sarah Hatchuel et al., eds., *Shakespeare on Screen: "Macbeth"* (Mont-Saint-Aignan: P.U. de Rouen et du Havre, 2013), 261-278, and "Politics, Adaptation, *Macbeth*" in Diana E. Henderson and Stephen O'Neill, eds., *The Arden Research Handbook of Shakespeare and Adaptation*, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), 81-99.
[3] Carroll, *Adapting "Macbeth"*, 84.
[4] Ibid., 14.
[5] Ibid., 90.
[6] See Victoria Bladen, writing that "There has been a common trend in film adaptations of *Macbeth* to introduce Fleance to the closing scenes, utilising the mythic founder of the Stuart family line to suggest that the cycle of

adaptations examined here – Rupert Goold's *Macbeth* (BBC/Illuminations, 2010), Justin Kurzel's *Macbeth* (See-Saw Films, 2015) and Joel Coen's *The Tragedy of Macbeth* (A24, Apple TV+, 2021) – all address this loose end of the play-text, leaving clues for the viewer to predict what might happen after the action of the film is over. By opening a door to the future (often literally and visually, as in Goold's and Kurzel's films), and showing Fleance on the move, they all suggest a linear or cyclical continuation of his story and his involvement in Scottish history. This article considers key elements of the adaptations, focussing on the show of kings and the endings. I argue that the directorial choices of these films, instead of suppressing the line of Fleance, give voice and prominence to his alternative narrative, while also emphasising the cycle of violence that the play suggests.

1. Fleance and Visual Ambiguities

1.1 *Goold*

All three filmmakers engage with a key image in the play-text, the show of kings in 4.1. Aiming at structural and visual unity, they establish visual echoes between the show of eight kings and the final scenes of the adaptation. In Goold's version, although Fleance (Bertie Gilbert) does not return at the end of the film, he is the figure appearing in all the images of the show of eight kings (1:41:52-1:44:11). At the beginning of the scene, we see a large door open and Fleance enters impersonating each of the future kings in Banquo's long line of heirs. This contrasts with Shakespeare's play, in which all eight figures look like Banquo. This directorial decision points to the overall importance of children in the film: their silence (Fleance) or innocent yet wise discourse (Young Macduff played by Hugo Docking) often reveal considerable insight and awareness, thus constituting a threat to the Macbeths and reminding them of their lost child.[7] As Víctor Huertas-Martín astutely observes, Lady Macbeth (Kate Fleetwood) keeps a little shoe in one of her drawers as "a *memento mori* of her dead child".[8]

The prophecies are delivered by the witches in the hospital ward with corpses in body-bags covered, uncovered, still and revived, in true horror film style.[9] Although in this adaptation there is no armed head, bloody child or child crowned, the repetition of Fleance's figure in the show of kings (1:42:50-1:44:24) is emphatic enough to the extent that it terrifies Macbeth, who is convinced that the new pages in the history of Scotland are to be written by Banquo's heirs. The strict rectangular frame of the ballroom is loosened up and opened by the doors repeatedly letting in Fleance, approximating the image of the room to an endless corridor, visually underlining the basic idea of the apparition: the succession of Banquo's issue. This linearity is a visual echo frequently recurring in the film, providing a frame and filmic structure. In the opening shot of the film we see a bleeding soldier wheeled along a corridor on a trolley, and in the closing sequence, the camera once more traverses various corridors and tunnels. As Goold states in the director's commentaries on the DVD, he did not tell the story of the eight kings in

violent ambition for the crown will continue". Bladen, "Performing the Child Motif in Kurzel's *Macbeth* (2015)", *Anglistik*, 28.2 (September 2017), 136). See also Carol Chillington Rutter, "Remind Me: How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?", *Shakespeare Survey*, 57 (2004), 52.

[7] Another layer of the child imagery in Goold's film, as Artur Skweres observes, is where the witches perform "a grotesque reversal of birth" when they rip a soldier's heart from his chest, "bringing to mind the unnatural delivery of Macduff" ("Upsetting the Body Politic(s): Witches as Enemy Agents in Rupert Goold's *Macbeth* (2010)", *RANAM: Recherches anglaises et nord-américaines*, 49 (2016), 173-188, 185, doi.org/10.3406/ranam.2016.1536).

[8] Víctor Huertas-Martín, "Rupert Goold's *Macbeth* (2010): Surveillance Society and Society of Control", *SEDERI: Yearbook of the Spanish and Portuguese Society for English Renaissance Studies*, 27 (2017), 81-103, 93n.

[9] Goold admits in the commentaries on the DVD that this scene was inspired by his favourite scary sequence in film history: the scene of "Sloth" springing to life in David Fincher's *Se7en* (New Line Cinema, 1995).

the earlier stage adaptation (2007),[10] where it was projected up as a film only.[11] In the film, the aim was to make Macbeth (Patrick Stewart) actually see the line of eight kings. The real triumph, however, as Goold adds, was Patrick Stewart's close-up showing his fracturing mind (1:43:49).

For the ending of Goold's adaptation, the camera revisits the main scenes of the film, first showing still images, then panning the eery tunnel, giving perspective to happenings both visually and temporally. We hear a noise, so we know there is something there, but we cannot see anything. The noise, however, is familiar, and, as the next frame confirms, it has been the door of the lift closing. Then we see the murderous couple holding hands taking a ride in the lift. Earlier, in the porter scene, a similar technique is used: we see the same tunnel, from the depth of which the drunken porter emerges, and we hear the porter's voice before we see anything. The same corridor's reappearance at the end of the film can be seen as a metaphor for the Macbeths' transgression[12] or as a visual echo of the dead end of their crime, with no heir to succeed them. The ambiguous corridor also recalls the long walk of kings impersonated by Fleance in the show of eight kings' scene, offering a way out into the light, i.e. the future. After the discovery of Duncan's murder, the lights at the end of the tunnels offer an escape for Malcolm and Donaldbain (0:57:57-0:58:05). When, as a farewell to the Macbeth universe, in the final sequence, the camera revisists the well-known locations of the film, three different corridors are shown, stressing the importance of linearity in this adaptation, making it almost the focal point of the film. First, we see Macduff carrying Macbeth's head along a corridor, then the view of the corridor of the hospital ward where we formerly saw Lady Macbeth's dead body on a trolley. Next, the camera completes its visual journey by reverting to the tunnel of the Porter scene. In the last frame, the camera observes the murderous couple confined behind the bars of the lift.

The comparison of the two perspectives, the closing door of the lift and the tunnel (suggesting the end of the Macbeths) vs the line of eight kings entering the open door and coming towards the camera (suggesting the continuation of Banquo's line), shows a sharp yet subtle contrast, visually connecting the two scenes and thereby reinforcing Fleance's otherwise muted narrative. As Víctor Huertas-Martín observes, Goold "explicitly states that he does not want to conclude the film leaving the impression that a second Macbeth will come to take over Malcom's kingdom",[13] by whom the director probably means Fleance turning tyrant at some point later in his life. Goold wanted to end his film, as he expresses it on the DVD, with a tragic catharsis where the death of Macbeth leaves everyone brutalised and desolate, creating a definite finality to it. As Huertas-Martín discerns, "whether or not Malcom's reign will indeed mean that a different, more transparent, regime will start, the dynamics of the last scenes suggests a video game atmosphere offering alternative interpretations"; and he notes that the final montage revisits the locations once more, as first-generation video-games would do once they were concluded, thus giving viewers "the feeling that the play itself could be a re-enacted ghost-story".[14]

[10] On the stage performance history of Goold's adaptation see Susan L. Fischer, "*Macbeth* Apropos to Rupert Goold's and Gregory Doran's Stagecraft: Equivocation, Violence, and Vulnerability", *Cahiers Élisabéthains: A Journal of English Renaissance Studies*, 107.1 (2022), 39-62, 40, doi.org/10.1177/01847678211062926.
[11] On the techniques used on stage see ibid., 43, 53.
[12] For further details on horizontal imagery of transgression in Goold (and Welles 1948) see Márta Hargitai, "Chronotopes of Hell in Two Film Adaptations of *Macbeth*", *The AnaChronisT*, *The Reel Eye*, 21.1 (2023), 19-33, doi.org/10.53720/PTMK2462. On katabatic chronotopes in Goold's film, see Víctor Huertas-Martín, "Katabasis in Rupert Goold's *Macbeth* (BBC, 2010): Threshold-Crossing, Education, Shipwreck, Visionary, and Trial Katabatic Experiences", *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 46.3 (2018).
[13] Víctor Huertas-Martín, "Off-Modern Hybridity in TV Theatre: Theatrical, Cinematic and Media Temporalities in Rupert Goold's *Macbeth* (BBC-Illuminations Media, 2010)", *International Journal of Transmedia Literacy (IJTL)*, 5 (2019), 81-101, 97.
[14] Ibid., 98.

1.2 *Kurzel*

In Kurzel's adaptation, the Fleance narrative is woven into the main plot to the extent of making it almost a coming-of-age story. Earlier in the film, Fleance (Lochlann Harris) seems to be weak and soft, hardly able to lift his father's sword. The script continues with a scene that was not ultimately included in the film: although Fleance tries hard, "even absent-mindedly Macbeth is too quick for him".[15] A moment later, "seizing the opportunity, Fleance lunges forward in frustration and JABS MACBETH IN THE GUT with his father's sword".[16] In any event, what we do see on screen by the end of the film is that Fleance is strong enough to run fast holding Macbeth's sword in his hand.[17] Kurzel presents a narrative of Fleance running parallel with Macbeth's storyline linking the two together in various scenes.

What does Fleance represent for Macbeth in Kurzel's adaptation? In the scene set on the beach (0:56:00-0:57:31), there is an exchange of glances between Macbeth (Michael Fassbender) and Banquo (Paddy Considine), with Macbeth's menacing gaze repeatedly fixed on Fleance, the shot-counter shot frame embracing the ominous question, "Goes Fleance with you?" The query here, as elsewhere in the film, is whether Macbeth sees his own (unborn/dead/imagined/hoped for) son in Fleance.[18] The answer as to what Fleance might mean for Macbeth could be given in Lacanian terms. Fleance can be seen as the *objet petit a*, or object-cause of desire. As Lacan's translator, Alan Sheridan, observes, "The 'petit a' (small 'a') differentiates the object from (while relating it to) the 'Autre' or 'grand Autre' (the capitalized 'Other')…. Lacan insists that 'objet petit a' should remain untranslated, thus acquiring, as it were, the status of an algebraic sign".[19] When asked about the relation between the real and the drive, and the differences between the object of the drive, that of phantasy and that of desire, Lacan explained that the subject is a lacunary apparatus, and "it is in the lacuna that the subject establishes the function of a certain object, *qua* lost object. It is the status of the *objet a* in so far as it is present in the drive".[20] He continues that "[I]n the phantasy, the subject is frequently unperceived, but he is always there, whether in the dream or in any of the more or less developed forms of day-dreaming. The subject situates himself as determined by the phantasy",[21] which is suggested in this adaptation, given the many visions Macbeth experiences.

In Todd McGowan's Lacanian reading, "this special term *objet petit a* indicates that this object is not a positive entity but a lacuna in the visual field".[22] He points out that our visual field is distorted by our desire, and "this distortion makes itself felt through the gaze as object…. The gaze is the *objet petit a* of the scopic drive",[23] which is also called "pleasure of seeing" by Lacan, translating Freud's term *Schaulust*.[24] The *objet petit a* is always a lost object, inaugurating the process of desiring. Macbeth is incomplete or lacking because he does not have this object, a son, so whenever he sees the sons of others,

[15] Jacob Koskoff et al., *Macbeth: Best Adapted Screenplay*, 29, www.dailyscript.com (undated draft).
[16] Ibid.
[17] By comparison, we see Malcolm (Jack Reynor) slowly unsheathing "the sword from its scabbard" and "his arm begins to tremble. Whether from the weight of the ceremonial blade or the realisation of his new responsibility, we do not know" (ibid., 86).
[18] On the relevance of the figure of the child in *Macbeth* on stage and in film adaptations see: Chillington Rutter, "How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?"; Carroll, *Adapting "Macbeth"*; Bladen, "Performing the Child Motif"; Gemma Miller, "'He has no children': Changing Representations of the Child in Stage and Film Productions of *Macbeth* from Polanski to Kurzel", *Shakespeare*, 13.1 (2017), 52-66, doi.org/10.1080/17450918.2016.1174728; Agnieszka Rasmus, "What Bloody Film Is This? Macbeth for Our Time", *Multicultural Shakespeare: Translation, Appropriation and Performance*, 18.33 (2018), 115-128; Edel Semple, "'Seeds of Time': Women, Children, and the Nation in Kurzel's *Macbeth* (2015)", *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 38.4 (2020), 615-633; and Hanh Bui, "Effigies of Childhood in Kurzel's *Macbeth*", *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 48.1 (2020), lfq.salisbury.edu.
[19] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1998), 281.
[20] Lacan, *Seminar XI*, 185.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Todd McGowan, *The Real Gaze: Film Theory after Lacan* (Albany: State U. of New York P., 2007), 6.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Lacan, *Seminar XI*, 178.

it triggers his desire for one. In Kurzel's adaptation, the camera frequently shares Macbeth's point of view, and his gaze, repetitively resting on Fleance, betrays what he lacks. Although Macbeth in Kurzel's film may find – for instance, in the young boy soldier – an object of desire temporarily satisfying his lack, the *objet petit a*, lacking any material status, will always remain unattainable. Fleance as the *objet petit a* of Macbeth's gaze reveals the vulnerability of Macbeth's character, the void or hollow that can never be filled and, by implication, this might also indicate the hollowness of the crown itself.[25] For Michael Fassbender's Macbeth, Fleance functions as the point around which Macbeth's visual field organizes itself. As McGowan outlines in relation to the concept of the *object petit a*: "The only satisfaction available to the subject consists in following the path (which psychoanalysis calls the drive) through which it encircles this privileged object", which can be repeatedly seen in Kurzel's movie.[26] Not only is the gaze of Macbeth oriented at Fleance persistently, but the camera also encircles this privileged object recursively, so the spectator needs to acknowledge and recurrently contemplate the significance of the character of Fleance and the gravity of his narrative in the film.[27] Out of the many child characters of the film, it is Fleance who stands out as he is repeatedly shown by the camera, creating a sub-narrative for him within the larger context of the film-text.[28]

In Kurzel's adaptation, Macbeth in his night gown visits the weird sisters, but there is no show of eight kings (1:08:35-1:11:22). Just before this, we see, as the screenplay describes, "ominously, a thick wall of MIST … blocking the plain"; Macbeth calls out to the mist, but "There is no response".[29] Desperate to make contact, he starts running, until he is out of breath. But the mist is still silent: "Fathomless. He is alone. Then, from nearby, the faint peal of bells begins to chime in the mist. He turns, the sound drawing him on towards it".[30] So, first it is the sound that indicates that there is something there, not yet visible. Then, against expectations, the three apparitions do not emerge; instead, their words are reassigned to the witches and the ghost soldiers. Most intriguing among the ghost soldiers is the figure of the young boy soldier (Scot Greenan): the same character that presents Macbeth with the dagger, and whom Macbeth coaches when preparing for battle at the beginning of the film. Significantly, he is the one who is reassigned the lines of the second apparition, the bloody child, "Be bloody, bold, and resolute: laugh to scorn / The power of man, for none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth".[31] As the screenplay describes it, "Macbeth reaches out to embrace the Young Boy Soldier, relieved. The Boy accepts his hold without emotion.[32] Then breaks away and marches on. Macbeth's mind whirring".[33]

The young boy soldier here (1:10:25), similarly to the second apparition in the play-text, can stand for or prefigure many things.[34] Agnieszka Rasmus states that at the beginning of the film, "Macbeth coaches a boy soldier who in the film represents his son's alter-ego".[35] In my view, he rather functions as a younger

[25] See Richard II's speech in *Richard II*, 3.2.155-170. William Shakespeare, *Richard II*, ed. by Anthony B. Dawson and Paul Yachnin (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2011).
[26] McGowan, *The Real Gaze*, 6.
[27] Also see Bladen, "Performing the Child Motif", 134, 137.
[28] To a lesser extent, the young boy soldier is also given an embedded story: from his being groomed by Macbeth to fight in the battle early on in the film, through his death, to his 'resurrection' presenting the dagger and the prophecy delivered in the show of 'kings' scene.
[29] Koskoff et al., *Macbeth*, 63.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Koskoff et al., *Macbeth*, 64.
[32] This emotionlessness is symptomatic of PTSD, a key-factor in affecting Macbeth's own unhinged behaviour, as actor Michael Fassbender related in 2015, recalling a conversation with Kurzel. See Henry Barnes, "Michael Fassbender: 'Macbeth suffered from PTSD'", *The Guardian*, 23 May 2015, www.theguardian.com.
[33] Koskoff et al., *Macbeth*, 64.
[34] Albert R. Braunmuller suggests that the bloody child may represent baby Macduff, Fleance, the phantasmagoric children of Banquo, or any children threatened by Macbeth. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. by Albert R. Braunmuller (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1997), 194.
[35] Rasmus, "*Macbeth* for Our Time", 124.

version of Macbeth, or as a son and Macbeth's younger self together.[36] Like the young soldier, Macbeth probably also had to learn to cope with war and he might have been similarly prepared by his father; as the script describes: "Macbeth's army checks and re-checks their weapons, the older men doing it for the young boys, like fathers taking their sons through a rite of passage".[37] According to the screenplay, before the fatal battle, this young boy soldier "swallows down panic desperately. More than the others he looks out of place in this battle, unproven. His hands are shaking too hard to grip his own sword and he drops it again and again, hopeless, as thick tears stream down his face".[38] With his hands too shaky and weak to hold the heavy sword, the young boy is at the same time a contrast and a parallel to Fleance.

In Kurzel's adaptation, the mist visually signifies the unknowable and the timeless, as the script spells out in the scene of the show of eight kings: "Macbeth wanders alone in the mist; as though in a dream. As *though out of time* itself.… An army lost to the ages" (emphasis mine).[39] These visual references to being lost and out of time and space with blurred vision and limited visibility might bring to mind the concept of the "stain" in film theory. At the end of Kurzel's film, we see the church-door open and Malcolm, carrying his father's sword, leaves and heads towards an "impenetrable shaft of light", as the screenplay describes.[40] At the same time, in another location, Fleance is shown running with Macbeth's sword towards some mysterious foggy space, underlining the parallel between the past and future of these two characters. The image here is horizontally linear: both Malcolm and Fleance are heading towards some unspecified misty place, which could, for both of them, mean the unknown, i.e., their future.

Lacan's concept of the gaze is a useful lens through which to interpret and demystify this image. In Lacan's words:

> There is no need for us to refer to some supposition of the existence of a universal seer. If the function of the stain is recognized in its autonomy and identified with that of the gaze, we can seek its track, its thread, its trace, at every stage of the constitution of the world, in the scopic field. We will then realize that the function of the stain and of the gaze is both that which governs the gaze most secretly and that which always escapes from the grasp of that form of vision that is satisfied with itself in imagining itself as consciousness.[41]

Henry Krips might help us decipher Lacan's statement that the gaze is "governed" by "the function of the stain". A stain blocks vision, Henry Krips explains, therefore, it is a disruption, "a point of indeterminacy in the visual field",[42] lacking a precise identity. The stain's power to evoke interpretation arises from its indeterminacy, "which precipitates viewers into a struggle to read something where, other than an allusion to/illusion of meaning, there is nothing to be read".[43] This also aligns with the end of Kurzel's film.

The filmscript is curiously enigmatic regarding the mist towards which Fleance is running, as if the director and the scriptwriters themselves did not have a clear idea about its nature and origin, which is not necessarily a deficiency, yet significant in its indeterminacy. In a similar fashion, neither the script

[36] Semple suggests he can be both, writing that "[F]or Macbeth, the death of the Boy Soldier is a heavy blow from which he never recovers. Lady Macbeth is haunted by the death of her son … but Macbeth seems more struck by the loss of the Boy Soldier, a pseudo-son and teenage copy of himself" ("'Seeds of Time'", 619).
[37] Koskoff et al., *Macbeth*, 3.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid., 64.
[40] Ibid., 87.
[41] Lacan, *Seminar XI*, 74.
[42] Henry Krips, "The Politics of the Gaze: Foucault, Lacan and Žižek", *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research*, 2.1 (2010), 91-102, 94, *cultureunbound.ep.liu.se* (*doi.org/10.3384/cu.2000.1525.102691*).
[43] Ibid., 97.

nor the film clarifies the source and meaning of the sharp light that Malcolm is hurrying towards. This accords with the general theme of ambiguity throughout their *Macbeth*. Krips might be helpful here again. He cites the well-known autobiographical story of Lacan about his youthful encounter with a Breton fisherman, "Petit-Jean … pointed out to me something floating on the surface of the waves. It was a small can, a sardine can.… It glittered in the sun. And Petit-Jean said to me – You see that can? Do you see it? Well it doesn't see you",[44] and interprets this phenomenon through Freud, concluding that the scrutiny turns around, i.e., "it switches from active to passive voice – from 'I look' to 'I am looked at'".[45] In other words, a conscious outward look transforms into a self-conscious anxiety regarding the scrutiny of an "externalized anonymous Other".[46]

Malcolm cannot see the source of the light, and because of the light, he cannot see who might be watching him. At the same time, in counter shot, the camera shows Fleance taking a similar linear motion away from the camera. So, Malcolm's externalized anonymous Other can be found in Fleance, the one who endangers his reign and the future of his dynasty.[47] Fleance's escape towards the murmuring mist is illuminated by Krips' second example. At the end of the film, the script describes "A THICK WALL OF MIST"; "Its depths seem hungry, impenetrable. A RUMBLE starts to build from deep within it".[48] Krips comments on Lacan's second idea that sometimes it is an aural rather than a visual object that stimulates the effect of the gaze.[49] We recognize that there is something present although there is nothing to be seen.

In Kurzel's adaptation, the two succession stories, Duncan's and Banquo's, are linked through the juxtaposition of the two sons taking the sword, suggesting a "chain of transmission",[50] from a deceased father and the murderer of the father respectively,[51] and their motion towards something they do not fully know. Nothing is solved with this closure: it maintains and amplifies the original Shakespearean ambiguity, its open-endedness, and the duality of the succession narratives. The mist at the end and the strange rumbling coming from its midst recall the realm of the weird sisters that has always seemed to draw Fleance, rescued by the child witch (Amber Rissmann), and both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth (Marion Cotillard) inexorably, giving weight to the weird sisters' predictions, yet maintaining its vagueness, rendering it a matter of interpretation.

Logically, and according to the script, the mist at the end of Kurzel's film should be white. However, the filmmakers opted for a more dramatic image of saturated orange-red at the end in post-production. The script reads:

> Fleance looks round to the woods from which he came. As if he is able to see something in them that we can't. And there, we see that A THICK WALL OF MIST has formed, just like in the opening battle. Its depths seem hungry, impenetrable. A RUMBLE starts to build from deep within it. Fleance squares himself up, breath trembling. He begins to walk towards the mist, the sword's tip trailing in the ash behind him. We track with him as he raises the weapon, heavy in his hand, and breaks to a RUN -- a sprint, wild, panting desperately -- when finally we PLUNGE WITH HIM INTO THE WHITENESS and... SNAP TO BLACK.[52]

[44] Ibid., 92, originally recounted by Lacan in *Seminar XI*, 95.
[45] Koskoff et al., *Macbeth*, 93.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Carroll notes the apocalyptic nature of the last scene: "The implication is that he must take care of Fleance, who has fallen back into the catastrophic natural world, and that this end-of-world setting will be replayed" (Carroll, *Adapting "Macbeth"*, 94).
[48] Koskoff et al., *Macbeth*, 87.
[49] Krips, "The Politics of the Gaze", 94.
[50] Carroll, *Adapting "Macbeth"*, 93.
[51] Bui, "Effigies of Childhood", n.p.
[52] Koskoff et al., *Macbeth*, 87.

Agnieszka Rasmus, writing about the colour-scheme of the film, reflects on the wide shot at the beginning (0:03:08) where, for a brief moment, we see a solitary figure, probably Macbeth, "set against a desert-like scarlet landscape"[53] with fog rising from the ground. Rasmus argues that this functions as a framing device that anticipates Macbeth's bloody end, and she identifies a number of film classics where a similar colour scheme can be recognised, suggesting this shot in Kurzel can be seen as a visual tribute to "Polanski's pre-credit sequence" in his *Tragedy of Macbeth* (1971), or *Laurence of Arabia* (1962, dir. Lean), or *Apocalypse Now* (1979, dir. Francis Ford Coppola), or *The Exorcist* (1973, dir. William Friedkin).[54]

At the end of the film, when we see Fleance running towards the orange fog (1:45:52-1:46:12), recalling this image of the isolated silhouette at the beginning, in retrospect we can also realize that a connection is established between Macbeth and Fleance by the framing of the story, indicating perhaps that Fleance will have to fight his way to reach the crown similarly to Macbeth, a link further underlined by the same colour: saturated orange. As the script testifies, this idea must have come as an afterthought, in post-production, to provide a frame for the story with yet another visual echo: a solitary soldier figure in an orange-reddish mist in the beginning, unconnected, belonging nowhere, yet linked to another one, a younger version of the first, facing smoke of a similar colour. By the end of the film, however, we can identify where the orange fumes come from as the prediction has come true with a slight change: Birnam forest, burning, comes to Dunsinane. Fleance heading towards the burning forest defies logic: why does he not go back to the woods he came from, taking shelter with the weird sisters as the script suggests? Yet the film creates a more picturesque visual representation through this decision. Furthermore, the orange mist establishes a link not only between Malcolm and Fleance, whose motions in the end are crosscut, but also between Macbeth and Fleance, sharing not only a past but implicitly a similar future.

The whiteness of the mist, in contrast, would have implied that Fleance was seeking the protection of the weird sisters as they are the ones he can trust, as he learnt in the hard way when he was running for his life after his father was brutally murdered, and he was saved by a teenage witch miraculously emerging in the forest. With their earlier help he managed to survive, and now, at the end of the film, when in the script he is running towards the white mist, the hint is that he is probably going to be helped by the sisters again, this time to succeed to the throne. The milky whiteness of the mist into which he plunges in the script is evocative of the maternal protection of the sisters, something that he was missing and seeking all along. With the colour switching to orange on screen, in contrast, the maturation of Fleance is shown to be complete: he no longer needs the protection of the sisters; he is able to carry Macbeth's sword and is not afraid to take the road less trodden.

1.3 *Coen*

In Coen's adaptation, Fleance (Lucas Barker) is found and perhaps kidnapped by Ross (Alex Hassel) (1:00:21) and then put temporarily in the custody of the sinister Old Man (Kathryn Hunter, also playing the weird sister/s) – probably in the hope that one day he will be king, and one easy to manipulate. In the last but one frame we once again see Fleance in the saddle with Ross riding towards the camera along a meandering road, suggesting perhaps that Fleance's future is not going to be without hiccups (1:41:23).

In Coen's version of 'the show of kings'[55] (1:08:56-1:1:20), the three apparitions are represented by three children's faces submerged in water, but they are so generic, blurred, and anamorphic that we can

[53] Rasmus, "*Macbeth* for Our Time", 118.
[54] Ibid., 119-120.
[55] We do not see the line of kings in this adaptation, only the three children's faces.

only know from the script that they belong to three different children.[56] It is the third image that is especially rich in connotations, as the script explicates, "The third child's face breeches the black water which leaves blood dripping from his face",[57] although the blood is not discernible in the film. On screen, there is no tree shown in the frame of the third child, so this rendering differs from the stage direction in the Folio, "THIRD APPARITION, a Child crowned, with a tree in his hand".[58] The lack of a branch in the child's hand in the film renders the identification of the third child with Malcolm slightly ambiguous. Yet, the third child is wearing a crown when saying, "Macbeth shall never vanquished be until / Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill / Shall come against him",[59] so his figure could refer to either Malcolm or Fleance. Or, by extension, it could also stand for any of Banquo's imagined children, and, as the script perhaps suggests, also for Macbeth, assuring himself that he will never be vanquished.

After the third apparition disappears, and before both the water and Macbeth's mind clear up (1:11:14), according to the screenplay, "[A]s Macbeth leans over to watch it the reflection of his face covers the child's".[60] In the film, one by one, each child's face rises in the water where Macbeth's reflection should appear (but does not), before the image of his own face – he is himself wearing his crown –, almost imperceptibly, or perhaps illusorily, overlays that of the third child, creating a repeated pattern suggestive of an otherworldly experience.[61] One might discover here a subtle homage to Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet* where, in the graveyard scene, there is the famous shot of the shadow of Hamlet's head superimposed onto Yorick's skull lying on the ground (1:56:31).[62] Such superimposition in Olivier underscores the close connection between the two characters, as well as the proximity of life and death, and the comic and the tragic,[63] whereas in Coen's *Macbeth*, the significance of children and the concept of children as knowers, as well as the very problem of knowledge, are highlighted by the editing technique. There is no specific show of eight kings in this version to suggest that succession is to be granted to Banquo's issues yet the ambiguity over especially the last apparition is fruitful enough to be taken as a hint at Banquo's succession.

At the end of Coen's adaptation, Ross and Fleance riding a horse disturb a flock of crows that take off and cover the sky with their sinister figures, recalling perhaps the weird sister(s)'s crow-like appearance. What used to be the source of information about the future now becomes a stain, blocking vision at the end of the film, leaving the option open for both Duncan's and Banquo's succession narrative. The lens of the camera is obscured by the dark birds, perhaps suggestive of a gloomy future ahead of Fleance (and/or Ross), once more referencing the Lacanian concept of the stain that obscures the gaze.

Conspicuously, Malcolm (Harry Melling) is not given any more screentime after his coronation, so it is Fleance's image and narrative that the spectators will take away. Yet, Fleance is not an independent agent, so when at the very end of the film, he does reappear, we see him as a completely passive young boy who does not seem to understand what is going on around him. It is his 'guardian', Ross, who is perhaps more likely to capture the imagination of the audience, as he is another enigma, just like the third murderer in the play-text. In Coen's film, this mystery is solved similarly to Roman Polanski's

[56] "The face has fallen back into the depths to be replaced by another that rises to just below the surface", "This child too sinks back down", "A third child is rising, this one wearing a crown...", Joel Coen, *Macbeth: Screenplay* (2020), 65-66, deadline.com.
[57] Ibid., 66.
[58] Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Braunmuller, 195.
[59] Coen, *Macbeth*, 66.
[60] Ibid.
[61] See superimposition explained in Kyle DeGuzman, "What is Superimposition in Film — Definition and Examples", *Studiobinder Blog* (2024), www.studiobinder.com/blog
[62] Laurence Olivier, *Hamlet* (Two Cities Films, 1948).
[63] See Sarah Hatchuel's observation in "*Hamlet*: To Be or Not to Be an Action Film" in Victoria Bladen and Yan Brailowsky, eds., *Hamlet in the Twenty-first Century* (Paris: Belin (CNED), 2022), 245-262, 248-249.

merging the two characters into one.[64] Polanski has Ross (John Stride) act as the third murderer, spying upon the first two.[65] In Coen's film, Ross is more like a go-between for Macbeth, first bringing the two murderers to the castle,[66] then joining them at the sinister place around the crossroads and the hut, not only checking whether they perform the deed, but also taking it a step further by seeking out Fleance.

Thus, in Coen's version, one might find a thought-provoking sub-plot woven into the plot: the embedded story of Ross. Ross's point of view is shared by the viewer at certain key moments, e.g., overhearing Malcolm and Donaldbain planning their escape, waiting at the crossroads, finding Fleance, not warning Lady Macduff of the imminent attack, although he knows that the murderers have arrived because he observes them from the window, then catching the crown, and hailing Malcolm as the new king of Scotland. All along, he seems to have a plan, and throughout the film he strikes the spectator as a scheming, Machiavellian character, who carefully chooses who to support and when to do so. In his project for the future, it is not only the crown that is an object in a chain of transmission but the figure of Fleance too.

2. Cycles of Violence

When most modern adaptations present Fleance as returning, there are political implications. It undermines, as Carroll outlines, "the legitimacy of Malcolm's coronation, even as it obscures or reverses the play's succession politics"; he argues that:

> Bringing Fleance back at the end of adaptations produces a 'closed frame' that suits certain aesthetic assumptions and theories, from the neo-classical demands of the seventeenth century to contemporary expectations of coherence, whereas there are other examples, in Shakespeare, of the 'open frame' ending, such as *Hamlet* (the Ghost does not reappear at the end, as he does in *The Spanish Tragedy*), or *Love's Labour's Lost*, with its deferred marriages.[67]

Does bringing Fleance back in many film adaptations impose a closed frame upon an open-ended structure? I argue that these endings do not close the frame but rather suggest further possibilities and uncertainties consistent with the ambiguity of the weird sisters' prophecies. By bringing Fleance back in these three adaptations, Goold, Kurzel and Coen foreground the idea of the continuation of the cycles of violence. As Carroll observes, "[E]ven those adaptations that do not bring Fleance back at the end frequently represent some circularity, the end reflecting the beginning, as the cycle of violence seems to start again, as seen in the more radical interpretations of Kott, Ionesco, and Müller".[68] The idea of cycles of violence as an underlying pattern of human nature is also emphasised by Stephen Prince in analysing Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (Toho Co., Ltd, 1957).[69]

Although it has become a modern topos to make Fleance return at the end of *Macbeth* film adaptations, this ending is not inconsistent with the play-text: references to Banquo's seed and doubts about Malcolm[70] are both inherent in the Shakespearean play-text. While Malcolm's succession in Shakespeare's play can indeed be read as an open frame structure as Carroll argues, it could also be

[64] Roman Polanski, *Macbeth* (Playboy Productions, Inc., Caliban Films, Ltd., 1971).
[65] See Braunmuller on Polanski's innovations: Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Braunmuller, 87.
[66] In the play-text, it is an unnamed servant who is sent for to call the murderers: see Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Braunmuller, 3.1.47-48.
[67] Carroll, *Adapting "Macbeth"*, 86.
[68] Carroll, *Adapting "Macbeth"*, 94.
[69] Stephen Prince, "*Throne of Blood:* Shakespeare Transposed", *The Criterion Collection: Film Guides* (2014), www.criterion.com.
[70] See Braunmuller's list of many equivocative lines of Malcolm, including the 'testing' scene in 4.3 (Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Braunmuller, 89-93).

viewed as a closed one: Duncan names him his heir in the beginning, and then in the end, his projected coronation can be seen as a return to the beginning and thus the repetition of the same cycle.

The return of Fleance, on the other hand, might open up the perspective, showing a creative "line of flight" as suggested by rhizomatics theory; Deleuze and Guattari write that "according to" the line of flight, rhizomes or multiplicities "change in nature and connect with other multiplicities".[71] As Lanier explains:

> rhizomatic analysis seeks out which relations, of the multiplicity of relations a work partakes, are particularly creative. Of special value are those relations which effect a conceptual transformation in the larger aggregate and initiate what DG [Deleuze and Guattari] call a 'line of flight', that is, a novel mode of becoming or way of thinking created by a new form of connection, heretofore only immanent or virtual, between two entities.[72]

Lanier's "Shakespearean Rhizomatics" conceives of Shakespeare in an expanded way, one that "includes Shakespeare the text but is in no way reducible to it", so much so that by 'Shakespeare' we should mean a network of adaptations.[73] In accordance with Lanier's theoretical framework of the rhizomatic structure of adaptation, drawing from the work of Deleuze and Guattari, we can view these different adaptations of *Macbeth* in terms of a network where each adaptation is in dialogue with the others. As Deleuze and Guattari stress, Lanier writes, "that potentiality and virtuality, what a thing might become through the inexorability of difference and desire, is in fact its reality, rather than the identity that thing might momentarily seem to take at a moment in time".[74]

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, what do these three screen adaptations bring to their dialogue with Shakespeare's play-text? This examination has illuminated the way that the various structures of the films engage with its open-endedness. In Goold's film, the last image is that of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth behind the bars of the large industrial lift, so their story is implicitly over, and thus seemingly, this version is arguably the closest to Shakespeare's shape of tragedy: a parabola of the hero's rise and fall, permeating an aura of finality. Yet, there is a haunting similarity to first-generation video-games with new levels of action always able to retry with new and different outcomes, as Huertas-Martín points out.[75] Kurzel also maintains the ambiguity, but the final images of the camera are fixed on Fleance. In Coen's adaptation, the most important addition in my view is the character and behaviour of Ross, and how he is shown to have the rein in hand over the destiny of Fleance.

Closely related to the problem of open vs closed-endedness is the representation of Malcolm at the end of the adaptations. What is conspicuous is that two of the three films do not 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. In Kurzel's final crosscut sequence, alternatingly showing Fleance and Malcolm, Fleance is given three times as much screentime as his rival, Malcolm; moreover, Banquo's son is the last figure the camera shows. In Coen, Malcolm does not have a chance to deliver his victory speech, and what the camera shows in the end is Fleance taken away by Ross on horseback, engraving this last ever darkening image in the spectators' minds. In Goold, however, Malcolm is given almost two full minutes during which he captures Macbeth's severed head and holds it, fighting nausea

[71] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* [1980], trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, 11th print 2005), 9.
[72] Douglas Lanier, "Shakespearean Rhizomatics: Adaptation, Ethics, Value", in Alexa Huang and Elizabeth Rivlin, eds., *Shakespeare and the Ethics of Appropriation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 21-40, 35.
[73] Ibid., 30, 39.
[74] Ibid., 27.
[75] Huertas-Martín, "Off-Modern Hybridity in TV Theatre", 98.

as he delivers his speech of victory.[76] So, while Goold manages to avoid what Fischer calls the "eternal return syndrome at the end with Donalbain"[77] and, we might add, with Fleance, his adaptation also complicates the victor-vanquished as well as the hero-traitor dichotomy, as it is likely to arouse sympathy for the defeated and doubts about the victorious party.

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".[78] By visually opening a door to the future or by showing Fleance on the move, all three adaptations present a linear if not exactly straight line of the continuity of his narrative, bringing the film's plot closer to the Kottian endless staircase image of chronicle plays,[79] thereby relativizing the otherwise unique achievement of not only the (villain-)hero's parabola-shaped rise and fall but the moral superiority of the victorious party as well. Even the film adaptation that seems to be the most final, Goold's, contains the seeds of circularity and cyclicity.

Analogous to the open-endedness of the Shakesperean play-text, all three film adaptations contain or imply contingencies regarding the Fleance narrative. In visual terms, it is the final focus on tunnels and corridors in Goold's film that supports the possible continuity of the story. In Coen's adaptation it is the meandering road along which Ross is taking Fleance with him that serves as a visual reminder of the continuity of Fleance's narrative. In Kurzel's adaptation it is the mist that is especially fruitful as a symbol, serving as a multi-layered entity, open to interpretation. The mist, the unknown and the timeless are not evil, neither do they determine the fate of human agents; they only offer possibilities; in themselves they are indeterminacies. Likewise, the endings of the film adaptations are determined only to the extent they have been shot, cut, and edited, but the viewers' readings of the films are open-ended, giving way to speculation, spectator engagement and creativity.

[76] See Fischer on the theatrical version: Fischer, "*Macbeth* Apropos to Goold's and Doran's Stagecraft", 57.
[77] Ibid., 57.
[78] Rasmus, "*Macbeth* for Our Time", 117.
[79] Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* [1961], trans. by Boreslaw Taborski (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1966), 10.

Pauline Durin

Is *Bridgerton* Season 2 a Feminist Adaptation of the Shakespearean Character of the Shrew?

Abstract: William Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* (c. 1590-1591), categorized as a comedy, foregrounds the place of women in an utterly patriarchal society by depicting the character of Kate, labelled as a shrew, as starved and deprived of sleep by her new husband Petruccio. The play generally proves discomforting to a contemporary audience. Yet, *Bridgerton*, season 2 (2022), broadcast on Netflix, borrows from Shakespeare's comedy and revives its shrew. Originally adapted from a series of books by Julia Quinn, the series shows Kate (Simone Ashley) come to London to have her younger sister Edwina (Charithra Chandran) married. The series shares several features with the original playtext of *The Taming of the Shrew*: a dichotomy between two opposite sisters, an enemy-to-lover trope, and a form of final redemption. This article explores whether Netflix's Kate may be considered as a feminist version of Shakespeare's shrew by examining the discrepancy between seemingly feminist strategies and what can be identified as feminist-baiting elements.

Keywords: *Shakespeare*, The Taming of the Shrew, *adaptation*, Bridgerton, *feminism*, *Netflix*, *series*

1. Introduction

In 2017, Heather Mitchell adapted the novel *Still Star-Crossed* by Melinda Taub into a TV series aired on ABC. The plot is a sequel to William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and focuses on the characters of Rosaline and Benvolio. Although ABC quickly cancelled the show, it was produced by Shonda Rhimes, revealing the producer's taste for period series and Shakespearean adaptations. Indeed, she is also one of the main executive producers of the Netflix series *Bridgerton* (2022), which appears to borrow from Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. *Bridgerton* is adapted from a series of books written between 2008 and 2016 by Julia Quinn. Set in a fantasized Regency era, the series focuses on the Bridgerton family, and each season revolves around one of its children's love stories.

In season 2,[1] Viscount Anthony (Jonathan Bailey), the eldest son, under pressure from his mother to wed, wishes to marry the epitome of perfection, the lady named diamond of the social season by the Queen. The latter chooses Edwina Sharma (Charithra Chandran), a young girl just arrived in London from India with her mother Mary (Shelley Conn) and her elder sister Kate (Simone Ashley). Anthony repeatedly clashes with Kate, who confronts him for voicing misogynist comments. Yet, the more the viscount courts the youngest sister, the more he falls in love with the eldest, who is renowned for her quick temper. Meanwhile, Lady Whistledown, a merciless columnist whose identity remains unknown to the other characters, comments upon social events. The writer actually is Penelope Featherington (Nicola Coughlan), a discreet girl who is the confident of Eloise Bridgerton (Claudia Jessie).

Despite the suppression of the subplots – such as the induction with Christopher Sly or Tranio's courting of Bianca – numerous parallels may be drawn between Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Bridgerton*. Shakespeare's play focuses on Kate whom no one wishes to marry because of her scolding tongue while every man in Padua wishes to seduce her little sister Bianca. Their father Baptista therefore decides not to let Bianca get engaged before her sister Kate is married. Bianca's suitors find a

[1] *Bridgerton* Season 2, created by Chris Van Dusen (Shondaland, 2022).

solution in Petruccio, who decides to marry Kate for her money, and then undertakes to tame her. He prevents her from eating and sleeping until she finally abides by every single thing he says and demands. We may ponder over the fact that *The Taming of the Shrew* is often adapted in romantic comedies,[2] despite its original plot revolving around the violence a husband imposes towards his wife. Yet, Julia Quinn herself claims to be feminist[3] and commentators in the popular media often celebrate the feminist stance of the series.[4] Through a comparison between *Bridgerton* season 2 and *The Taming of the Shrew*, I offer further reflections on this reinvention of the Shakespearean shrew. I consider whether Kate's representation may be viewed as a feminist adaptation of this typical character or be perceived as feminist baiting. In order to better understand and analyse the evolution of the figure of the shrew from Shakespeare to Netflix, I shall first focus on the elements that the series borrows from Shakespeare before turning my attention to the feminist rewriting of the play. I shall finally delve into the notion of feminist baiting and the underlying violence behind a seemingly feminist plot.

2. Borrowing from Shakespeare's Play

Various writers in the popular media have underlined similarities between *Bridgerton* and literary works like Jane Austen's novels and Shakespeare's plays, more particularly *The Taming of the Shrew*.[5] Most only quote Lady Whistledown's criticism of Kate in episode 2: "any suitor wishing to gain an audience with Miss Edwina Sharma must first tame the rather prickly spinster of a beast otherwise known as her sister" (S02, E02, 0:43). This represents a drastic change compared to Julia Quinn's book, in which Kate is described as "well liked",[6] and likens Netflix's Kate to Shakespeare's. The figure of the shrew is central to the plot of the romantic comedy in this series, presenting two opposed sisters, one being rather unruly and short-tempered while the other is submissive and delicate, just as Baptista's daughters are. Similarly to her Shakespearean counterpart who systematically questions orders ("What, shall I be appointed hours, as though, belike, / I knew not what to take and what to leave? Ha!" [1.1.103-104]),[7] *Bridgerton*'s Kate often rejects commands: "I require no instruction" (S02, E04, 20:03). Resuscitating Shakespeare's character, who refuses to be instructed to learn music in Act 2 Scene 1, Kate Sharma insolently insists that Lady Danbury should not hire any instructor for her sister and her (S02, E01, 20:00). At Lady Danbury's mansion, two men compare the two sisters and complain about the unruly character of the eldest ("The younger one would do, if the eldest just got out of the way", says one; "The sister is dreadful", rejoins the other [S02, E01, 43:53]) just as Tranio and Lucentio do in Shakespeare's play:

[2] See Monty Banks, *You Made Me Love You* (1933), Paul Bogart, *Kiss Me Kate* (1968), P. Madhavan, *Pattikada Pattanama* (1972), M.S. Rajashekar, *Nanjundi Kalyana* (1989), Gil Junger, *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999), Dennus Carvalho and Walter Avancini, *O Cravo e a Rosa* (2000-2001), Gary Hardwick, *Deliver Us from Eva* (2003), David Richards, *ShakespeaRe-Told*: *The Taming of the Shrew,* (2005), Lim-Won-kook, *Frivolous Wife*, 2008, Vidhi Kasliwal, *Isi Life Mein…!* (2010).

[3] Julia Quinn (@juliaquinnauthor), "Historical romance author. Science geek. Feminist. Author of the Bridgerton series—Streaming now on Netflix!", *Instagram* (11 April 2023), www.instagram.com.

[4] Maria Fontoura, "'Bridgerton': What If Shondaland, but Balls and Corsets", *RollingStone*, 24 December 2020, www.rollingstone.com; Anna Merlo, "How 'Bridgerton' Season 2 Caters To The Female Gaze", *Study Breaks*, 4 May 2022, studybreaks.com; Debiparna Chakraborty, "Bridgerton Season 2: How the Women Reclaim Agency in a Patriarchal World", *MovieWeb*, 5 April 2022, movieweb.com.

[5] Safia Khanam, "Does Bridgerton Season 2 Have a Shakespearean Connection? Find Out", *Netflix Junkie*, 12 March 2022, www.netflixjunkie.com; Victoria Edel, "'Bridgerton' Season 2 References Jane Austen and Shakespeare in Creative Ways", *Pop Sugar*, 25 March 2022, www.popsugar.co.uk; Thomas Bacon, "Bridgerton Season 2 Easter Eggs & Jane Austen References Explained", *Screen Rant*, 29 March 2022, screenrant.com; Madeleine Brand, "'Bridgerton' Season 2 Borrows from 'Taming of the Shrew'", *KCRW*, 29 March 2022, www.kcrw.com.

[6] Julia Quinn, *The Viscount Who Loved Me* (London: Piatkus, 2006), 36.

[7] William Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, The Arden Shakespeare, ed. by Barbara Hodgdon (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

TRANIO
That wench is stark mad or wonderful froward.
LUCENTIO
But in the other's silence do I see
Maids' mild behaviour and sobriety. (1.1.69-71)

In the very first episode of the season, Kate joins her stepmother, her sister and Lady Danbury in the latter's sitting room. While the place is entirely decorated in pink, and the three other characters all wear pink dresses, Kate stands out wearing turquoise. This contrast immediately signals her non-conformity to gender stereotypes.

More importantly, the animosity between Kate and Anthony can be compared to Petruccio and Kate's verbal jousting. In *Bridgerton*, the first time Kate hears him speak, Anthony lists all the qualities he wants in a wife among his friends and depreciates women while presenting himself as a heartbreaker. Kate overhears him and then confronts him:

KATE
Are the ladies of London so easily won by a pleasing smile and absolutely nothing more?
ANTHONY
So you find my smile pleasing.
KATE
I find your opinion of yourself entirely too high. Your character is as deficient as your horsemanship. I shall bid you goodnight. (S02, E01, 38:05)

Parallels between answers, repetitions, a masculine flirtatious tone and a feminine final farewell recall Act 2, Scene 1 of *The Taming of the Shrew*:

KATHERINA
If I be waspish, best beware my sting.
PETRUCCIO
My remedy is then to pluck it out.
KATHERINA
Ay, if the fool could find it where it lies.
PETRUCCIO
Who knows not where a wasp does wear his sting?
In his tail.
KATHERINA
In his tongue.
PETRUCCIO
Whose tongue?
KATHERINA
Yours, if you talk of tails, and so farewell. (2.1.210-218)

In both occurrences of verbal jousting, Kate illustrates what Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin designates as "verbal cannibalism": "Verbal cannibalism is typical of men and women of wit who use the speech of the other as a support for their own insulting remarks. Insulters imitate and transform at leisure the words of the others".[8] Through this process, both *Bridgerton*'s and Shakespeare's Kates oppose and question a male character's authority while displaying their rhetorical skills and wit. The masculine characters play on such responses to create sexual tension, therefore transforming confrontation into a seduction

[8] Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin, *The Anatomy of Insults in Shakespeare's World*, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), 54.

scheme. Such strategy waters down unruly women's rebellion and might possibly deter women from answering men. It tends to present an enemies-to-lovers trope that directly borrows from Shakespeare's plays. *Much Ado about Nothing* might be the most obvious example to illustrate such a scheme, as Benedick and Beatrice are constantly quarrelling in the first scenes. Beatrice's uncle, Leonato, indicates: "You must not, sir, mistake my niece; there is a kind of merry war betwixt Signor Benedick and her. They never meet but there's a skirmish of wit between them" (1.1.57-60).[9] They finally fall in love with each other after several scenes of verbal jousting between them. *Bridgerton* therefore imitates Shakespeare to build its romance, the shrew being particularly adequate for this genre, as underlined by Neal Wyatt et al.: "Female protagonists are apt to be somewhat rebellious, whether by nature or forced by circumstances – this is how authors enable them to behave in a manner somewhat more comfortable to today's reader".[10] The Shakespearean shrew is rebellious indeed and prone to refuse any form of command. In Act 2, scene 1, as Petruccio tries to seduce Kate, he asks her to walk in front of him: "O, let me see thee walk. Thou dost not halt" (2.1.258). Kate answers: "Go, fool, and whom thou keep'st command" (2.1.259). She systematically offers a dissenting answer. The rebellious shrew appeals to and is more appropriate to our modern tastes, in contrast to being mocked, as she commonly was in early modern England. Yet, do these numerous parallels between Shakespeare's shrew and the Netflix series enable us to see *Bridgerton* as "a more feminist version of the same"?[11] Major differences between the play and the series do bring more feminist features to the adaptation, leading us to think that the figure of the shrew is now used to voice feminist comments and to question patriarchal views.

3. A feminist Regency Shrew

1960s feminists saw Shakespeare's Kate as one of them,[12] establishing a parallel between the early modern typical character and modern-day feminism. *Bridgerton* seems to adapt the character accordingly. First of all, the series stages outspoken female characters,[13] while Shakespeare's Kate is rather silent, despite her fearful reputation, as several critics have noticed.[14] Anna Kamaralli underlines that Kate seldom speaks spontaneously but rather strikes back when male characters criticize her.[15] Kate Sharma could therefore rather be compared to Beatrice in *Much Ado about Nothing*, about whom Benedick declares: "She speaks poniards, and every word stabs" (2.1.226-227). However, when Kate Sharma voices women's protestation against misogynists, her words strangely echo Shakespeare's play, as if she were answering Petruccio more than Anthony. As she hears the latter listing the qualities he requires in his future wife, she confronts him: "I take issues with any man who views women merely as chattels and breeding stock" (S02, E01, 38:05). Such words bring Petruccio's tirade to mind:

> I will be the master of what is my own.
> She is my goods, my chattels; she is my house,
> My household-stuff, my field, my barn,

[9] William Shakespeare, *Much Ado about Nothing*, ed. by Claire McEachern (London: The Arden Shakespeare, Bloomsbury, 2016).
[10] Neal Wyatt et al., "Core Collections in Genre Studies: Romance Fiction 101", *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, 47.2 (2007), 120-126, 122.
[11] Khanam, "Does Bridgerton Season 2 Have a Shakespearean Connection?"
[12] Leah S. Marcus, "The Shrew as Editor/Editing *Shrews*", in Graham Holderness and David Wootton, eds., *Gender and Power in Shrew-Taming Narratives, 1500-1700* (Houndmills, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 86.
[13] ANU, "Does *Bridgerton* Fall Flat as a Feminist Hit?", *Australian National University* (2022), www.anu.edu.au.
[14] Anna Kamaralli, *Shakespeare and the Shrew: Performing the Defiant Female Voice* (Houndmills, Basingstoke and New York: Macmillan, 2012), 79; Larisa Kocic-Zámbó, "*The Taming of the Shrew*, from Inversion to Subversion" (conference paper, ESRA, "'Then fate o'erruled': Change in Shakespeare", Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Budapest, 7 July 2023).
[15] Kamaralli, *Shakespeare and the Shrew*, 90.

> My horse, my ox, my ass, my anything,
> And here she stands. (*The Taming of the Shrew*, 3.2.230-234)

If the main characteristic of the shrew is her voice and willingness to confront men, we may say that *Bridgerton*'s creator, Chris Van Dusen, depicts a female character that is more vehement than Shakespeare's.

Unlike *The Taming of the Shrew*, in which part of Petruccio's strategy to domesticate Kate is to isolate her, the series also presents solidarity between women and more specifically between sisters. Both Kates exert some supervision over their little sisters' love affairs, but they do so for different reasons. While Netflix's Kate selects Edwina's suitors because she wants her to be happy, Shakespeare's Kate demands to know what man Bianca favours: "Of all thy suitors here I charge thee tell / Whom thou lov'st best. See thou dissemble not" (2.1.8-9). However, we may compare the first two scenes in which the sisters are represented on their own. Contrary to Baptista's daughters, who quarrel rather violently in Act 2, Scene 1, the Sharma sisters are represented as loving, supporting and taking care of each other (S02, E01, 25:00-27:19). Netflix's Kate is willing to give up her own happiness in order to protect her sister, while Shakespeare's Kate appears quite jealous of Bianca's opportunity, as she tells her father:

> She must have a husband,
> I must dance barefoot on her wedding day
> And, for your love to her, lead apes in hell.
> Talk not to me, I will go sit and weep
> Till I can find occasion for revenge. (*Taming*, 2.1.32-36)

The authority the Kates have over their younger siblings is thus used in drastically different ways. As a consequence, Shakespeare's Kate appears as quite obnoxious and hateful to the spectators, while Kate Sharma is protective and therefore more relatable. It turns her into an endearing character whose happiness we hope for. Her brashness is not interpreted as a form of selfishness but as a way of protecting a sister she loves. This creates proximity and attachment between the shrew character and the spectator.

Kate is also joined in her rebellion against social norms by characters like Eloise Bridgerton. Contrarian and reckless, Eloise reads pamphlets defending women, names Mary Wollstonecraft as a model figure and goes to debates about women's rights in Bloomsbury. As she does not know her best friend Penelope to be Lady Whistledown, she accidentally prompts her to express more feminist views in her column:

> Is the entire practice of naming a diamond not well, rather ridiculous? Should a woman not be valued for so much more than her dancing skills or her comportment? Should we not value a woman instead for her candor, her character, her true accomplishments? Perhaps if the queen abandoned this absurdity that is the diamond, we would all see that a woman can be so much more. (S02, E01, 1:05:43)

As Eloise dances with Lord Morrison, who compliments her for having read Locke but criticizes other girls for being unable to "even articulate a thought", she puts an end to their exchange and leaves him with a biting comment: "Next time you compliment a woman, at least try not to insult her entire sex in the process" (S02, E04, 33:39). Her permanent questions about women's positions also lead her to ask Kate about society's harsh judgement on single women:

> ELOISE
> Was it your choice you never married? … Everyone tells me it is fate worse than death to end up a spinster. But you seem perfectly content with your situation.

KATE
You must know it is hardly ideal. The world is not exactly welcoming to an unmarried woman. There seems to be no place in society for us, except at the edge of things.
ELOISE
That rather seems to be society's flaw, not a woman's.
KATE [*smiling*]
Indeed it does. (S02, E03, 44:46)

Such conversation underlines that the series passes the Bechdel-Wallace test as women talk together about another matter than a man,[16] which enables the spectators to hear about feminine experiences. The series thus introduces sorority while denouncing the harsh treatment single women receive. In *Bridgerton*, charismatic, united characters that do not qualify their judgement by the end of the season embody rebellion, while Shakespeare's shrew rather embodies division, teaching her sister and a widow the obedience a woman owes her husband in the final scene of the play. Contrary to her, Kate Sharma is a catalytic force that creates feminine solidarity, as she deeply cares about other women's well-being.

Furthermore, the series presents Anthony as being tamed rather than Kate. The viscount first voices clear misogynist comments, raging against Kate:

ANTHONY
I shall certainly not let some sister … keep me from getting what it is I want.
BENEDICT
Whom you want, you mean? (S02, E02, 27:41)

In *The Taming of the Shrew*, given his rather tempestuous temper, other characters within the play suggest that Petruccio might also be a shrew: "By this reck'ning, he is more shrew than she" (4.1.76). Such parallels exist in *Bridgerton* as well:

ANTHONY
She is pompous and arrogant and quite sure she knows best in every situation.
COLIN
She sounds like a terrible nuisance.
BENEDICT
Especially since *you* are the one who knows best in every situation. (S02, E02, 26:20)

Yet, Anthony changes his opinion, as he expresses when asking Kate to marry him in the last episode:

ANTHONY
I know that I am imperfect, but I will humble myself before you because I cannot imagine my life without you, and that is why I wish to marry you.
KATE
You do know there will never be a day when you do not vex me.
ANTHONY
Is that a promise, Kathani Sharma? (S02, E08, 1:01:54)

Bridgerton may thus be interpreted as a reversed plot of *The Taming of the Shrew*, in which the tamer is finally tamed[17] and apologizes for his redeemed past. While Shakespeare's Kate offers her hand to put under Petruccio's foot ("And place your hands below your husband's foot: / In token of which duty, if he please, / My hand is ready, may it do him ease" [5.2.183-185]), Anthony offers to "humble [himself]",

[16] Alison Bechdel, *The Essential Dykes to Watch Out for* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008).
[17] This is how Chakraborty interprets the plot in "Bridgerton Season 2: How the Women Reclaim Agency".

adapting the plot for a post-#metoo audience that would most certainly be shocked by the violence Petruccio exerts on Kate. Moreover, Anthony voicing her full name enables us to discover that her nickname is a short for Kathani and not for Katherina, therefore adapting Shakespeare's character for multi-cultural Britain. Her name appears to pay homage to the vocality of unruly women as it means "words, utterance".[18] The series may thus be seen as a post-structuralist adaptation, borrowing from *The Taming of the Shrew* while re-writing its structure and its conclusion in order to make place both for cultural diversity and feminist thoughts. It therefore seems to adapt the character of the shrew, turning it from a despicable lady to an admirable character. Nonetheless, despite being inclusive, the feminism it displays appears to be a simplification of both past and present strands of feminism and of the struggles they support.

4. Sugar-coated Feminism

Bridgerton aims at intersectional feminism as, contrary to most historical romances, the cast is not exclusively white. The Sharma sisters both refer several times to their childhood in India, escape marginalisation or stereotypes, and numerous elements of Indian culture and traditions are represented: the Sharma sisters use Indian languages (Bangla and Hindi), Edwina enjoys the Haldi ceremony before her wedding, details of their jewels and clothes imitate Indian jewellery and saris. Payton Creamer yet draws attention to the series' incompleteness as race is "left as a confusing subplot",[19] especially in season 1. Indeed, the series shies away from questions of discrimination. Furthermore, although the Sharma sisters' social and financial status is quite precarious – hence the importance of marrying Edwina to a wealthy man – they still are part of an aristocratic world. *Bridgerton* only focuses on "the ton", neglecting people with a lower social status. Although Eloise quickly fancies a printer named Theo, she is finally compelled to forsake him and, should the series faithfully adapt Julia Quinn's book, she shall marry an aristocratic man, Sir Philip Crane. Just as the racial and the social questions are quite overlooked, *Bridgerton* also displays sugar-coated feminism. Men such as Anthony utter misogynist stances and are confronted by outspoken girls willing to defend their rights as when Kate confronts Anthony because she wants to go hunting with the men. Edwina tells Anthony that Kate is an excellent shooter, and when he responds that Kate would have trouble managing, Kate replies sharply:

> KATE
> Why would you assume I had any trouble managing at all, my lord?
> ANTHONY
> I only mean to say –
> KATE
> Because I am a woman?
> ANTHONY
> No – No. I did not say that.
> KATE
> But you thought it.
> ANTHONY
> Ladies do not hunt.
> KATE
> Do not or are not allowed to? (S02, E04, 8:40)

[18] Shabdkosh, "कथन (kathana) - Meaning in English", *Shabdkosh: English Hindi Dictionary*, www.shabdkosh.com.

[19] Payton Creamer, "An Intersectional Feminist Look at Bridgerton", *Student Research Submissions-University of Mary Washington*, 478 (2022), 9, scholar.umw.edu.

The series thus tackles issues prone to reach a consensus and yet shies away from burning issues such as consent,[20] gender identity or the right of a woman over her own body. Besides, though main female characters bond and unite, secondary characters, like Cressida Cowper and Prudence Featherington, re-enact the *topos* of competition between girls for men and are depicted as vain and half-brained. Feminine solidarity may also be questioned since Kate falls in love with her sister's suitor and thereby becomes a hidden rival of her. This love triangle does not exist in Julia Quinn's novel, and though Kate first resists her feelings in order to protect her sister, heterosexual love finally creates tension and conflicts between Kate and Edwina.

Although Anthony first woos Edwina, a strong similarity between the series and Shakespeare's play lies in his perceiving Kate as a challenge to overcome. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Petruccio boasts: "For I am rough and woo not like a babe" (2.1.136). As other male characters express their fear of Kate, he exclaims: "O, you are novices!" (2.1.315). Petruccio thus perceives Kate as an opportunity to prove his manhood and to display his power. While Anthony is rather moderate compared to Shakespeare's Petruccio, he is perceived as a strong-headed and stubborn man needing defiance from his partner:

> DAPHNE
> It is just that I've always imagined Anthony to be with someone more like him.
> VIOLET
> Sharp, quick, a little too exacting? …
> DAPHNE
> Anthony is a Bridgerton, isn't there something in all of us that requires a challenge? (S02, E04, 29:08)

The character of the shrew is therefore still perceived as a challenge just as she was in Shakespeare's play, therefore suggesting that unruly women might soften once they meet a man to match them.

Most singularly, despite an offer of more inclusive content, Payton Creamer notes as well the heavy "heteronormative lens where queer people are close to nonexistent and outcasted".[21] This might now be qualified, as the spin-off series on Queen Charlotte[22] displays Brimsley and Reynolds as a gay couple, and as Season 3 clearly presents Benedict and Francesca Bridgerton as queer characters, which was not the case in Julia Quinn's novels. We might, however, ponder the fact that the character of the shrew is part of a heterosexual love story. Just as in *The Taming of the Shrew*, romantic life is presented in the Netflix series as the only fulfilment and acceptable ending. Heterosexuality is rather encouraged and, more importantly, presented as the only desirable issue for Kate. This is to be expected in a romantic comedy, particularly one that evokes Regency England, but secondary characters might have offered counterpoints, yet they do not. Eloise falls in love with Theo, which is not the case in Julia Quinn's *The Viscount Who Loved Me*, and Penelope is deeply in love with Colin Bridgerton, so that there is no female character within Season 2 without a male love interest. Anthony and Kate are presented as doomed to woe should they not find love. Although Anthony is finally softer by the end of the series, he is first presented as a misogynist, and yet remains an important love-interest that every woman desires while Kate's shrewishness frightens men away, illustrating a double standard that is never questioned. In episode 2, Lady Danbury criticizes Kate's choice to remain single:

> LADY DANBURY
> You may not yet know, and that is all well and good. But I, for one, find it not only terribly disheartening but also an offense against truth to hear you say you wish to be alone at a mere six and twenty?
> KATE
> Perhaps you should not. I will be a governess. I will be content knowing my sister is taken care of.

[20] In season 1, episode 6, Daphne sexually assaults her husband.
[21] Creamer, "An Intersectional Feminist Look", 9.
[22] *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story*, created by Shonda Rhimes, Netflix, 2023.

LADY DANBURY
Content?
KATE
Are you so miserable, my lady?
LADY DANBURY
I beg your pardon?
KATE
Are you not alone yourself? I watch you. I see you. You are more than content.
LADY DANBURY
Because I have lived a life. I am a widow. I have loved. I have lost. I have earned the right to do whatever I please, whenever I please, and however I please to do it. Child, you are not me. And if you continue down this road, you most certainly never will be. (S02, E02, 46:05)

Just as in Shakespeare's play, Kate cannot find contentment if she does not find love. Kate is presented as a delusional character for voicing her will to remain single ("an offense against truth to hear you say you wish to be alone at a mere six and twenty"). Having known love is equated with having "lived a life", implying that life without a man would have no value. The verb "to earn" induces an underlying duty behind any form of relationship. From music to clothes, the series neglects historical accuracy to please a contemporary audience. Feminist reflections certainly aimed at modernisation too, yet the show fails to tackle contemporary issues and to question stereotyped narratives. Kate, as a character, only briefly questions social injunctions and becomes more and more gentle as she falls in love with Anthony. Although she first planned to go back to India, expressing her unease in England, she finally stays in order to marry Anthony. At the end of the last episode, while having sex, the couple jokes about Kate being a dutiful viscountess. The very structure of romance is therefore not challenged but rather reinforced as Kate unwillingly betrays her sister, and only finds happiness and contentment through her marriage, maintaining a structuralist and traditionalist vision of the genre,[23] even though Kate remains quite headstrong. This is reminiscent of Shakespearean comedies, ending with united couples and softened shrews. In *Much Ado about Nothing*, as soon as she falls in love with Benedick, Beatrice declares:

What fire is in mine ears? Can this be true?
Stand I condemned for pride and scorn so much?
Contempt, farewell; and maiden pride, adieu;
No glory lives behind the back of such.
And Benedick, love on, I will requite thee,
Taming my wild heart to thy loving hand.
If thou dost love, my kindness shall incite thee
To bind our loves up in a holy band.
For others say thou dost deserve, and I
Believe it better than reportingly. (3.2.107-116)

She expresses guilt for her defiant behaviour and offers not to be tamed, but rather to tame herself. She opposes "wild heart" and "loving hand", suggesting thereby that love brought her to be more docile. Love therefore appears as a transforming power that softens shrews and brings them to abide by conventions. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Kate never voices feelings for Petruccio, but she vows to obey

[23] *Bridgerton* also borrows from Jane Austen's novels, often perceived as "embodying feminist principles" and yet displaying women with reduced opportunities, "[having] to stay home and wait for an eligible bachelor to appear". See Sue Parrill, *Jane Austen on Film and Television: A Critical Study of the Adaptations* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2002), 7.

him: several critics say that she is in love with Petruccio[24] and that it brought her to qualify and to re-evaluate her contrarian attitudes.

However, in *Bridgerton* just as in Shakespeare's play, another character embodies the shrew when the initial one finally qualifies her judgement. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, although Kate finally delivers a monologue in which she professes her duty to her husband, her little sister Bianca proves quite disobedient despite first being presented as the ideal woman (5.2). Similarly, although *Bridgerton* Season 2 stresses the necessity for Edwina to get married, she is still single by the end of the season. In the final ball scene, instead of dancing with a man, she dances with her sister, thereby underlining the love she bears to her and the independence she has acquired as she claims not to care about anyone's opinion (S02, E08, 42:19). Edwina finally falls in love in Season 3, the season that displays Penelope and Colin's love story. Being Lady Whistledown, Penelope is also a social shrew and as she is often described as unattractive, she is quite marginalised. Yet, by the end of Season 3, she is both engaged to the man she loves and does not renounce her writing activities to please Colin.

To a certain extent, the series reproduces the same pattern as *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999). This movie adapts *The Taming of the Shrew* for an adolescent audience by setting the action in a high school while teenagers embody Shakespeare's characters. Both Gil Junger's movie and Chris Van Dusen's series adapt one of Shakespeare's most controversial plays to modern tastes. The movie and then the series may appeal to contemporary audiences more than the theatre does nowadays. By injecting Shakespeare in a Netflix series, spectators discover themes and characters the author used and have access to them on a familiar platform, illustrating the importance of transmedia storytelling in our daily lives.[25] However, despite this modernisation of his play, both the series and the movie fail at any reconfiguration of gender roles.[26] Of course, the plot is far less violent, as neither Patrick in *10 Things I Hate About You* nor Anthony in *Bridgerton* lock Kate away, starve her and keep her awake until she finally surrenders the way Petruccio does in Shakespeare's play. This does not mean the plot is emptied out of its brutality. *Bridgerton* Season 3 presents a sequestrated woman as Cressida's father locks her up. She is then sent away to live with a gloomy aunt as a punishment for boldly claiming that she's Lady Whistledown in order to try and escape an unwanted union with an old man. This is quite reminiscent of Kate being raptured after her wedding and brought to Petruccio's isolated house. In addition, the spin-off series on Queen Charlotte displays numerous scenes in which Lady Danbury is raped by her repulsive husband and the recurrence of these scenes leads the spectator to adopt a voyeuristic gaze just as Shakespeare's play does when Kate is reduced to begging food from her domestic Grumio who mocks her (4.3). Both occurrences are quite grotesque and are meant to arouse laughter more than pity despite displaying a suffering and humiliated woman.

Bridgerton is also set in the Regency era, that is to say a moment of heightened attention to social conventions and reputation. Neal Wyatt et al. describe any romance set within this period as: "Graced with sparkling dialogue; intelligent, well-turned phrases; a glittering, though highly restrictive, social backdrop; and a preoccupation with the importance of social consequence and behaviour".[27] Adapting Shakespeare to the Regency era therefore seems quite adequate as the social pressure enhances the concept of self-fashioning that Stephen Greenblatt defined as such:

[24] Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998), chapter 2.
[25] Henry Jenkins, "Transmedia Storytelling", *MIT Technology Review*, 15 January 2003, www.technologyreview.com; Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York U.P., 2006).
[26] Monique L. Pittman, "Taming '10 Things I Hate About You': Shakespeare and the Teenage Film Audience", *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 32.2 (2004), 147.
[27] Wyatt et al., "Romance Fiction 101", 121.

> As a term for the action or process of making, for particular features or appearance, for a distinct style or pattern, the word had long been in use, but it is in the sixteenth century that *fashion* seems to come into wide currency as a way of designating the forming of a self.[28]

This "forming of a self" helps us understand the appetence of a contemporary audience for Shakespeare,[29] especially at a time when traditional roles are questioned and when diversity is far more represented in popular media. *The Taming of the Shrew* is all the more appropriate for contemporary concerns as the plot revolves around a woman resisting, or not, social pressure and a man's reshaping of her personality. The success of such process is mitigated and depends on the interpretation we make of her final monologue[30] while no soliloquy enables us to have access to her thoughts. Monique L. Pittman, as she studies *10 Things I Hate About You*, notes that the movie is based on the same reflection as Shakespeare's play: "the individual still must negotiate desire for independent selfhood with the overwhelming pressures that make freedom nearly impossible".[31] Nonetheless, Monique L. Pittman underlines that adapting Shakespeare's comedy into a romantic comedy alleviates its inherent violence: "The contradictions stridently voiced by *Taming* are so normalized by the film and ornamented by the vocabulary of teenage love that they slip past the audience's notice".[32] *Bridgerton* repeats such a scheme by presenting love as an overwhelming power that refashions people. Romantic love is presented as a transforming yet pleasurable force and thus appears as an easy solution that softens, and even eradicates reflection about conformity and gender-related social pressure.

5. Conclusion

Bridgerton raises questions about our inheritance of the character of the shrew and offers a representation of significant changes and upcoming challenges in our contemporary society, more specifically in terms of inheritance of the play *The Taming of the Shrew* in a third-wave-feminist society. Must we adapt it in a more feminist version in order to follow social changes or should we rather reveal the patriarchal violence at stake within its original plot? Can characters such as early modern shrews become feminist embodiments? It appears that the series actually turns away from such reflection and rather tames the plot by adapting its borrowings into romantic comedy in which love acts as a redeeming power. The series only borrows from Shakespeare, as it does from other authors, but it appears quite significant that it should borrow from one of its most controversial, if not misogynist, plays in order to please a contemporary audience. Contrary to the early modern play, Netflix depicts Kate as a character who loves her sister and does not finally recite a long monologue on the necessary submission of women. We may celebrate social progress behind the fact that misogynist tamers are now tamed instead of shrews in Shakespeare's adaptations, yet concluding with the celebration of a couple insists on the idea that bliss cannot exist outside of heterosexual marriage and that feminist characters might qualify their statements once they find love, evolving from shrews to more conventional feminine love-interests. It also suggests that misogynistic men may undergo drastic changes out of love, which is a controversial message to be sent to the audience. Both Shakespeare's and Van Dusen's Kates question social norms and reject patriarchal expectations, and yet, they finally quite conform to them, although Shakespeare's Kate does so after having suffered violent taming while Van Dusen's Kate does not. The Netflix series most certainly adds feminist elements to Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, celebrating female

[28] Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: from More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 2.
[29] José Ramón Díaz Fernández, "Teen Shakespeare Films: An Annotated Survey of Criticism", *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 26.2 (2008), 89-133.
[30] Anna Kamaralli enumerates the different interpretations given to Kate's final monologue in Kamaralli, *Shakespeare and the Shrew*, 93-94.
[31] Pittman, "Taming '10 Things I Hate About You'", 147.
[32] Ibid., 148.

friendship and promoting outspoken female characters, but these are finally quite consensual if not tantamount to feminist baiting. If Shakespeare's shrew has evolved as she now appears in different media and different stories, she is still expected to qualify her judgement and radical stances as the plot unfolds.

Roberta Zanoni

From *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to *Romeo and Juliet* through Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo+Juliet*. The *Levi's 501* advertisement

Abstract: The article deals with advertising as entailing adaptation practices through which Shakespeare's plays might find a new and popularised identity, and a new means for the reception of Shakespeare's plays by a large and contemporary audience. The paper will provide an analysis of the *Levi's 501* 2005 advertisement presented as an adaptation of 3.1 of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The advertisement will be compared to the famous cinema adaptation *William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet* by Baz Luhrmann (1996) to show how the latter influences the construction and interpretation of the advertisement as an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* rather than of 3.1 of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, of which, however, the advertisement reproduces several lines. The study of the advertisement will show the various adaptive strategies put into place. The article will delineate the presence of an intertextual net which comprises the advertisement, the film, and the plays themselves, an intertextual net whose various elements, if familiar to the audience, dialogue with each other to produce the connotative potential of the advertising message.

Keywords: A Midsummer Night's Dream, Romeo and Juliet, *Shakespeare*, *Baz Luhrmann*, *advertising*, *adaptation*

1. Advertising and Adaptation

One of the fields that are less commonly included in the critical dialogue concerning Shakespearean adaptations is that of advertising. As this article illuminates, in the space of advertising Shakespearean adaptation potentially finds a new and popularised presentation, constituting a new means for the reception of Shakespeare's plays by a large and contemporary audience. As Graham Holderness observes, "every act of scholarly reproduction, critical interpretation, theatrical performance, stage and screen adaptation, or fictional appropriation produces a new and hitherto unconceived Shakespeare".[1] In this article I examine the 2005 *Levi's 501* jeans Shakespearean advertisement[2] to show how it features examples of adaptation of two Shakespeare plays, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet*, as well as how the multi-layered adaptation is also in dialogue with Baz Luhrmann's screen adaptation *William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet* (1996).[3] I argue that, while the *Levi's 501* advertisement is presented as an adaptation of 3.1. of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the setting and the construction of the scene, along with the characters' costumes, language, and attitudes, all seem to refer to Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo+Juliet*. While parts of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are quoted directly in the advertisement, the meaning is altered by the visual representation which creates an intertextual connection to Luhrmann's film. I will show that in the passage from Shakespearean plays to advertising, various adaptive strategies are put into place, and that recognition of the Shakespearean citations elicits the presence of an intertextual net that comprises advertisements, plays, and other adaptations of the plays themselves.

As Linda Hutcheon outlines, the term adaptation is "broad enough to allow to treat not just films and stage productions, but also musical arrangements and song covers, visual art revisitations of prior works and comic book versions of history, poems put to music and remakes of films, and videogames and

[1] Graham Holderness, "Introduction: Creating Shakespeare", *Critical Survey*, 25.3 (2013), 1-3, 1.
[2] Noam Murro, *Levi's 501 Jeans, A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Bartle Bogle Hegarty, 2005. Available at: www.youtube.com.
[3] Baz Luhrmann, *William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet*, United States, 20th Century Fox, 1996.

interactive art".[4] Both Hutcheon and Douglas Lanier refer to advertising as possibly entailing adaptation. Hutcheon considers "the Volkswagen *Darth Vader Super Bowl* (2011) advertisement" as an adaptation[5] and Lanier claims that advertising appears along other "categor[ies] of contemporary pop culture" as featuring "examples of Shakespearean allusion or adaptation".[6] Advertising is, however, very seldom taken into consideration in critical debates on Shakespearean adaptation, due in part to its commercial context and the high level of variation undergone by the source material in such contexts. My article addresses this lacuna by adding advertising to the critical discussions on Shakespearean adaptation, thus bringing new perspectives to the fore: the *Levi's 501* example is one where the advertisement is in dialogue with both *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet* via the mediation of Luhrmann's film (itself in dialogue with *West Side Story*).

When talking about Shakespearean advertisements in general and the *Levi's 501* in particular I use the term adaptation as Linda Hutcheon and Julie Sanders intend it, as a term also describing "sequels, prequels, compression, and amplification" that "all have a role to play at different times in the adaptive mode".[7] Since it involves the passage from a genre to another, the advertising adaptation of plays can be seen as a "transpositional practice, casting a specific genre into another generic mode, an act of re-vision in itself" which might indulge in the "exercise of trimming and pruning"[8] as is the case with the one-minute-long *Levi's 501* advertisement which presents only one scene from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* while also alluding to the plot and main themes of *Romeo and Juliet*. The adaptive practices put into place by the *Levi's* advertisement partake in an attempt at making "texts 'relevant' or easily comprehensible to new audiences and readerships via the processes of proximation and updating".[9] The aim, in the case of advertising, is to make full use of the Shakespearean text, which is made more comprehensible in order to sell goods and to render commodities more appealing by associating them to Shakespeare's prestige and linguistic richness, unintentionally contributing to foster the proximation of the text to the contemporary audience. By doing so the "pleasure of the original representation"[10] is prolonged and memory is repeated.[11] Although this is not the main aim of Shakespearean advertising, in which the use of the Shakespearean material is deeply connected to the commercial end of the communication, at the same time, "juxtaposed readings that are crucial to the cultural operations of adaptation" are fostered by the advertising communication, thus enhancing "the ongoing experiences of pleasure for the reader or spectator in tracing the intertextual relationships".[12] We can talk of adaptation in regards to advertising since what is mostly relevant in this case is the "inherent sense of play, produced in part by the activation of our informed sense of similarity and difference between the texts being invoked, and the connected interplay of expectation and surprise, that for me lies at the heart of the experience of adaptation and appropriation".[13] In the space of similarity the *Levi's 501* plays on the verbal similarities with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* thus producing the audience's pleasure derived from the recognition of the reference.[14] The same feeling is produced by the recognition of the similarity with Luhrmann's visual poetics. This, however, clashes with the text being performed for a spectator familiar with the text of the play; the difference of the costumes, setting, and outcome of the encounter,

[4] Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, Second Edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 9.
[5] Ibid., 180.
[6] Douglas Lanier, *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2002), 3.
[7] Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 18.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] John Ellis, 'The Literary Adaptation: An Introduction', *Screen*, 23.1 (1982), 3-5, 4.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 25.
[13] Ibid.
[14] On the effect of brief citations to Shakespeare on screen see Alexa Alice Joubin and Victoria Bladen, eds., *Onscreen Allusions to Shakespeare: International Films, Television, and Theatre* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

united with the similarities highlighted, creates this sense of expectation and surprise that connects the adaptation with the adapted text.

This article also starts from the consideration that what has often been considered as "not Shakespeare",[15] "from popular songs to advertisements for beer",[16] as well as animes and videogames, or accidental references,[17] is now being reconsidered as part of the possible Shakespearean adaptations and appropriations that are gaining a place in the "continuum" of "the basic activities constituting Shakespeare studies".[18] As Desmet et al. note, "the more often people detect echoes of Shakespeare in particular works, the more definitively these works become part of the Shakespeare canon, whether or not they are 'really' Shakespeare",[19] and this can be true for advertising adaptations of Shakespeare's plays too. As the latest theories on adaptation posit, "an adaptation's double nature does not mean … that proximity or fidelity to the adapted text should be the criterion of judgment or the focus of analysis".[20] The association of advertising with adaptation is seen here in light of the consideration that "adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replication".[21]

Furthermore, including consideration of Shakespearean adaptation in the context of advertising adaptation accords with the "breakdown of the traditional distinction between 'high' and 'low' culture"[22] that has previously informed the relation between literature and other media forms. Discourses pertaining to film adaptation may be applied to advertising adaptation too, particularly where advertisements take the form of short narrative films. We can think of adaptation as a "multileveled negotiation of intertexts",[23] as Robert Stam argues, in which texts are "caught up in the ongoing whirl of intertextual reference and transformation, of texts generating other texts in an endless process of recycling, transformation, and transmutation, with no clear point of origin".[24]

The *Levi's 501* advertisement can be seen in terms of Hutcheon's concept of a "palimpsest" that viewers experience "through [their] memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation".[25] In this case, the palimpsestuous nature of the advertisement is accentuated by the presence of innumerable intertextual references. While the advertisement is presented as an adaptation of Act 3, Scene 1 of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the setting and the construction of the scene, along with the characters' costumes, language, and attitudes reference Luhrmann's *Romeo+Juliet*.[26] Thus, the film adaptation becomes the vehicle through which the advertisement evokes *Romeo and Juliet*.

2. *William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet* and Advertising

Luhrmann's *Romeo+Juliet* perfectly exemplifies Shakespeare's popularisation. The film stands as a milestone of contemporary adaptations of Shakespeare in popular culture: it has influenced the successive trends in films dedicated to teenage audiences – see, for instance, just to name one, the film *Warm*

[15] Christy Desmet et al., eds., *Shakespeare / Not Shakespeare* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).
[16] Christy Desmet et al., "Introduction" in Desmet et al., *Shakespeare / Not Shakespeare*, 3. Here the authors refer to Graham Holderness' *Tales from Shakespeare: Creative Collisions* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2014).
[17] Desmet et al., *Shakespeare / Not Shakespeare*.
[18] Holderness, *Tales from Shakespeare*, xi, quoted in Desmet et al., "Introduction", 3.
[19] Desmet et al., "Introduction", 12.
[20] Hutcheon and O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 6,7.
[21] Ibid., 7.
[22] Ian Olney, "Texts, Technologies, and Intertextualities: Film Adaptation in a Postmodern World", *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 38.3 (2010), 166-170, 168.
[23] Robert Stam, "Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation", in James Naremore, ed., *Film Adaptation* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 2000), 54-76, 67.
[24] Ibid., 66.
[25] Hutcheon and O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 8.
[26] On screen adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet*, see Victoria Bladen et al., eds., *Shakespeare on Screen: "Romeo and Juliet"* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2023).

Bodies by Jonathan Levine[27] – in general and in Shakespearean films in particular, as well as constituting a key example for productions in the field of popular culture, thus also influencing advertising. As I will show, the film's influence on the *Levi's 501* 2005 advertisement is one example. Another very clear instance of this phenomenon is David Lachapelle's 2005 short film advertisement for H&M's jeans – *Romeo & Juliet*, which is unmistakeably inspired by Baz Luhrmann's film. The *Levi's* advertisement came before the H&M one and the two ads are very similar in their construction as well as in the references to Baz Luhrmann's film. This might point to an influence of the *Levi's* ad on the H&M one. As Magdalena Cieślak points out when speaking of the H&M ad, it "decentre[s] Shakespeare as a source by appropriating Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo+Juliet* (1996), rather than the play-text, as a key hypotext".[28] As will be seen, the same process is at play in the *Levi's* advertising adaptation.

Luhrmann's film combines the plot, characters, and lines of Shakespeare's play with contemporary commercial and visual culture. As one reviewer Peter Travers observed:

> It's a good thing that Shakespeare gets his name in the title, or you might mistake the opening scenes for Quentin Tarantino's *Romeo and Juliet.* No dialogue, just gunshots, as two gang families – the Montagues and the Capulets (each has its name in lights on the roof of a high-rise) – go to war. Welcome to mythical Verona Beach, where the gangs fire on each other, and soldiers in choppers fire on them. Shot in Mexico in a style that might be called retrofuturistic, since it encompasses castles and armor, as well as bulletproof vests and boomboxes, the film reworks Shakespeare in a frenzy of jump cuts that makes most rock videos look like MTV on Midol.[29]

The pace of Luhrmann's film is video-clip like; accompanied by a soundtrack of contemporary songs, and several of the scenes are delivered in very fast shots (sometimes accelerated in Luhrmann's distinctive style). As the director commented:

> And as for the quick editing, that comes from the fact that I do not like to be bored. It's about rhythm. The opening sequence is very fast and it's trying to keep ahead of the audience. Even if you look at the play, the style of the piece is you come out and say this is what's gonna happen, they're gonna die. Then you introduce all the characters and they're actually little vignettes.[30]

Romeo+Juliet has become part of present-day popular culture, and a seminal film in the contemporary, post-modern, intertextual, and intermedial interpretation of Shakespeare. As one commentator Guy Lodge noted, in 2016, "Detachable angel wings became a default prom accessory; blue-tinted fairy lights were resourcefully draped over household fish tanks" and "two decades on, stray sounds and images from Luhrmann's film remain entirely vivid, if not entirely undated".[31] The film was an apt intertext for the *Levi's* advertisement as the film adaptation itself encompasses numerous quotations and objects of modernity which become simulacra of our contemporary world and popular culture, conveyed through a pastiche of images and sounds, typical of the present-day communication saturated by advertising, which is ultimately able to deconstruct and, at the same time, to reproduce Shakespeare for our age.

The connection of the film with the commercial world is elicited from the beginning. The first image the audience sees is that of a TV set which turns on, a newsreader recites the prologue of *Romeo and Juliet* and the scenes of the "brawls on the street" are shown as if they were live footage. The whole film is framed by television and adopts this medium's way of communicating and imagery. As Luhrmann

[27] See Magdalena Cieślak, "Decentring the Hypotext with Denim and Zombies: Jonathan Levine's *Warm Bodies* (2013) and David Lachapelle's *Romeo & Juliet* (2005)", in Bladen et al., *Shakespeare on Screen: "Romeo and Juliet"*, 125-139.
[28] Cieślak, "Decentring the Hypotext", 125.
[29] Peter Travers, "Review of *William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet"*, *Rolling Stone*, (November 1996).
[30] Pauline Adamek, "*Romeo and Juliet*: Interview with Baz Luhrmann", *POP-film* (November 1996).
[31] Guy Lodge, "*Romeo+Juliet* at 20: Baz Luhrmann's adaptation refuses to age", *The Guardian*, 1 November 2016, www.theguardian.com.

reflected, "Because we are so used to zapping, I have used the idea of television as the story teller. TV is the chorus of our lives".[32] As in televisual communication, multiple advertisements are interspersed in the scenes, often alluding to Shakespeare's other plays or famous quotations.

The first advertisements presented are that of *Montague Constructions*: "Retailed to Posterity by Montague Constructions", a quotation form *Richard III* Act 3, Scene 1 and that of *Phoenix gas* "Add more fuel to your fire", a quotation from *Henry VI*, *Part 3*, Act 5, Scene 4. From the first encounter of the Capulets with the Montagues onwards, an advertisement will accompany the whole film, that of "Wherefore. L'amour", a white word written in italics on a red background, patently referring to the Coca-Cola logo.[33] The recognition of the popular brand is inevitable, and the reference to it increases, once again, the popularisation of the Shakespearean subject and its link with advertising. The vision of the billboard in the film, even if its content is completely changed, leads to an immediate recognition of the Coca-Cola advertisement. This process could be paralleled with the manipulation of Shakespeare enacted by the director: in this case, the audience recognises the reference to the popular drink even if in a different shape, and similarly, Shakespeare is recognised even if in a different form. The reference is also to one of the most globalised and universal products and to the advertising linked to it, and this can possibly relate to the same ubiquity ascribable to Shakespeare and to *Romeo and Juliet*.

The first appearance of Romeo is associated to advertising too: he is first seen on the beach, sitting on an old carousel surrounded by crumbling walls on which some fading billboards are still visible. One, still intelligible, reads "Shoot Forth Thunder. ThunderBULLETS", a quotation from *Henry VI*, *Part 2*, Act 4, Scene 1. A few frames later, the motto of the Capulets appears in the background of the dialogue between Juliet's father and Paris: "Experience is by industry achiev'd", from *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Act 1, Scene 3. The Capulet and Montague boys, as they are called in the film, resemble two rival gangs and quarrel in the streets menacing each other with their contemporary 'swords': guns, which, in their turn, still bear the traces of the contemporary commercial culture since they are branded with the two rival families' symbols.

The film is thus particularly apt for adaptation by advertising because it already contains many references to it and is almost constructed as an advertisement due to its fast-pace, the presence of various shots, the use of pop songs as a musical commentary on the scenes, as well as the visual richness. Even though they might remain empty for some, the intertextual allusions to Shakespeare's other works are unremitting. The continuous references testify to a way of representing and reproducing previous works which can be seen to parallel the creations of audio-visual advertising, constantly alluding to something else, borrowing from other texts to convey their own message through film, using, as another reviewer Janet Maslin noted, "the hyperkinetic vocabulary of post-modern kitsch".[34] A similar tendency can be observed in the *Levi's 501* advertisement which signifies through alluding to and borrowing from other texts.

3. The *Levi's 501* Ad and Its Shakespearean Intertexts

The *Levi's 501* advertisement was directed by Noam Murro for the advertising agency Bartle Bogle Hegarty, which boasts a long-standing relation with Levi's as the first brand advertised by the company.[35] The Shakespearean advertisement, as James Hamilton describes, was "expected to continue

[32] Adamek, "*Romeo and Juliet*: Interview with Baz Luhrmann".
[33] The image is a distinguishing feature of Luhrmann's poetics also appearing in other films such as the previous *Strictly Ballroom* (1992) and the following *Moulin Rouge!* (2001).
[34] Janet Maslin, "Review of *William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet*", *The New York Times* (November 1996).
[35] From the agency's website: "We started in London in 1982 and our first ad for Levi's showed a herd of white sheep looking in one direction and one black sheep looking up and out in the opposite direction. This picture was accompanied by a simple

the flirtatious tone of Levi's current 'anti-fit' campaign".[36] The advertisement starts with the white text "A Midsummer Night's Dream. Act 3. Scene 1." on a red curtain which does not open on a theatre, as the audience might expect, but on an urban setting. The first parallel with Luhrmann's poetics is delineated from this opening scene. The label "Red Curtain Trilogy" has been given to the DVD boxed set containing three of the films directed by Luhrmann: *Strictly Ballroom* (1992), *Romeo+Juliet* (1996), and *Moulin Rouge!* (2001) and derives from the connection of the three films with theatre.[37] *Strictly Ballroom* and *Moulin Rouge!* also begin with a red curtain opening on the scene, while in *Romeo+Juliet* the reference to theatre stands in Shakespeare's language, and in the ruins of a theatre on the beach which provide the background for Romeo and Tybalt's fight.

Anett Koch thus speaks of a "'red curtain' aesthetics"[38] which has become a trademark for the director and was likely very well-known in 2005 to the audience of the advertisement. The traditionally theatrical opening of the red curtain on the advertisement's scene might be used to underline the discordance with the realistic urban scene which immediately follows it and to provoke the audience's surprise, thus increasing their curiosity. The red curtain, typically associated with theatre, is probably used to underline the connection with Shakespeare's theatre along with the presentation of the title, act and scene number of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* on the curtain itself, although it is not typically that of an Elizabethan theatre,[39] while it is interestingly reminiscent of the ones used by Baz Luhrmann in his films (see Fig. 1)

Fig. 1: Red curtain opening, *Levi's 501* advertisement, screen capture, *www.youtube.com*.

The advertisement curtain opens on a scene portraying some people near a city wall in front of whom a car is parked. The car model and the urban setting recall Luhrmann's film, which used vintage cars (see Fig. 2 and Fig. 3).[40] The indefinite urban American area is similar to the film's setting in Verona Beach, an undefined American seaside city reminiscent of Venice Beach for its name and of Miami for the

statement that read 'When the world zigs, zag'". Interestingly enough, a black sheep is now the logo of the agency, www.bartleboglehegarty.com.

[36] James Hamilton, "Shakespeare's Titania and Bottom inspire new Levi's ad", *Campaign UK* (2004), www.campaignlive.co.uk.

[37] See Louise Carey, *Baz Luhrmann's Red Curtain Trilogy: An Investigation of Theatrical Cinematic Techniques* (Design, Textiles, National College of Art and Design, Dublin. 2012) (doctoral dissertation).

[38] Anett Koch, *The Visual Aesthetics of Baz Luhrmann's "Red Curtain Cinema"* (Munich: GRIN Verlag, 2014).

[39] See Richard Hosley, "Shakespearian Stage Curtains: Then and Now", *College English*, 25.7 (1964), 488-492; Frederick Kiefer, "Curtains on the Shakespearean Stage", *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England*, 20 (2007), 151-186.

[40] In particular, the green car and the red one parked near the gang in the advertisement recall Tybalt's green car and Benvolio's red one in the opening scenes of the film for model and colour.

overall atmosphere. In the *Levi's* ad, a young man is walking on the pavement and starts delivering Bottom's lines when he encounters a group of Latino and Black American youths, who, by their attitude and clothes, suggest a gang. They recall the "boys" of Luhrmann's film, where the Montagues are visually connoted as white-Americans, the Capulets as Latinos, and Mercutio and the Prince as African Americans.[41]

Fig. 2: Urban setting, *Levi's 501* advertisement, screen capture, *www.youtube.com.*

Fig. 3: Riot scene of the Montagues against the Capulets, Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet*, screen capture.

The young man's voice-over says: "I see their knavery, this is to make an ass of me" (min. 0:06 of the advertisement, which corresponds to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 3.1.85);[42] he then encounters the gang, some of whose members are leaning on a wall. When the young man/Bottom passes by, one of them goes towards him and says: "O Bottom" (0:09, 3.1.82). Bottom then speaks to the camera, apparently unheard by the others: he seems to completely detach himself from the scene he is in and to speak directly to the audience. During this very short shot only the audience feels addressed directly, with Bottom apparently looking into their eyes. Bottom says "to frighten me if they could" (0:11, 3.1.85). The gang member continues speaking Snout's lines: "thou art changed, what do I see on thee?"

[41] The racial connotation of the characters resonates with *West Side Story*, in which Tony's group is formed by white Americans while his beloved Maria's family is of Puerto Rican origins.
[42] All quotations from the play are taken from this edition: William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in *William Shakespeare, Complete Works*, ed. by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2007), 365-412.

(0:13, 3.1.82) in an aggressive tone, as if in order to start a fight. Bottom's voice-over then exclaims: "but I will not stir from this place" (0:15, 3.1.85), while Bottom directly replies: "What do you see? You see an ass head of your own, do you?" (0:17, 3.1.83) and then moves away from them, his voice-over declaring: "I will walk up and down here, and I will sing" (0:24, 3.1.86-87). The atmosphere of the encounter, which in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was between friends, and in which Snout was afraid of and for Bottom, is completely reversed visually and Bottom seems the one who is menaced by the gang. The climate is one of tension and suspense, and the words of both are given a gravity that is absent from the comic original.

The different racial identity of the two protagonists of the advertisement – Bottom (Joshua Alba) is Latino, while Titania (Amanda Sudano, Donna Summer's daughter) is African American – and the hostility of the gang towards Bottom seem to be hinting at a divide between the two, and some sort of danger is felt looming on their relationship, similarly to the one characterising Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet's love.

The *Levi's* encounter, ostensibly evoking that between Bottom and Titania, seems to take place between a modern Romeo and Juliet, who are speaking of love in a most solemn way after Bottom/Romeo has been threatened by the other mechanicals, who, in this case, are portrayed as an adversary gang, although they speak their original Shakespearean lines. However faithful to Shakespeare's words, the advertisement transforms the original comic mechanicals' scene into a dark romance scene that starts with a potential fight, and where the male character seems to be in danger the whole time. The love of the advertisement becomes more romantic and turbulent in contrast to that from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* where the scene of the drug-induced love of the queen of the fairies for an ass-head creature was devised to generate laughter and derision, albeit with a potentially dark undercurrent.

While the setting and the characterisation of the gang are very close to the film *Romeo+Juliet*, the similarity between Luhrmann's Romeo (Leonardo DiCaprio) and the advertisement's Bottom, is more subtle, but it still helps delineate the parallel between the two adaptations. The *Levi's 501* Bottom is a young and handsome man, not the low, half-animal creature of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, so different from Titania that Oberon uses him to humiliate her. A similarity with variance can be observed in the protagonist's clothes. The *Levi's 501* clothes seem to be dark versions of some of the light and bright ones worn by Romeo and Juliet in Luhrmann's film. Alba and DiCaprio are wearing similar clothes: a shirt and jeans. His appearance, his clothes, the constant menace of the gang, and his courage in defying them, render Bottom more similar to his Baz-Luhrmann parallel than to his Shakespearean homonym. The black top Titania wears seems a dark version of the top of the white dress Juliet (Claire Danes) is most often seen wearing. Obviously, Titania is wearing jeans, as is the case with Juliet in the scene before her marriage with Romeo, which draws her near to the idea of a contemporary young woman portrayed in both film and advertisement. The hairstyle chosen for Titania in the ad recalls that of Juliet too.

Levi's Titania is a young and beautiful waitress, who does not possess any of the magical attributes of her namesake. She interrupts her work when she hears Bottom speak and asks: "What angel wakes me from my flowery bed?" (0:28, 3.1.92). Bottom/Alba, who is still walking alone, goes on with: "that they shall see I'm not afraid" (0:30, 3.1.87) at which Titania/Sudano responds "I pray thee gentle mortal sing again" (0:34, 3.1.99). Bottom/Alba turns, he sees her, and she says "mine ear is much enamour'd of thy note" (0:38, 3.1.100). The frame enlarges to show her from a high angle going towards Bottom/Alba as he goes towards her and say, "so is mine eye enthrallèd to thy shape" (0:42, 3.1.101). Then, a close shot frames the jeans, the two look at them and then at each other in the eyes, and Titania says: "I love thee" (0:48, 3.1.103). The last images show the two lovers staring at each other while the frame enlarges and distances from them till reaching a final overhead shot of the two and of the building and pavement on which they are standing. The advertisement is accompanied by the overture from

Mendelssohn's *Ein Sommernachtstraum* (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) (1842). This musical choice contributes to the creation of a dreamy atmosphere for the scene and helps to lead to the final moment of meeting and recognition between the two protagonists. The witty citation inserted by the advertisers stimulates the pleasure of recognition in people aware of the musical reference, and opens the ad to another series of intertextual connections with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* not directly referring to Shakespeare's play itself. At the same time, an audience less aware of this citation would only grasp the refined nature of the music which seems particularly apt to portray this meeting between two lovers.

All these additions and 'discontinuities' bring the advertising representation closer to the atmosphere of *Romeo and Juliet*. In the *Levi's* advertisement, Bottom/Alba defies danger to meet his beloved who hears him "sing" and is drawn to him by a mysterious force, as the "star-crossed" Romeo and Juliet were drawn to each other. The first kiss between Romeo and Juliet in Luhrmann's film resonates through the encounter of Bottom and Titania in the advertisement. The position of the two characters standing in front of each other, Romeo left and Juliet right, as Bottom and Titania are positioned in the shot, the camera's movement from far to a close up of their kiss, as well as the characters' appearance – Juliet and Titania/Sudano in particular are both wearing a tank top and their hair half-up – intensify the similarity of the scenes (see Fig. 4 and Fig. 5).

Fig. 4. The couple of lovers, *Levi's 501* advertisement, screen capture, *www.youtube.com.*

Fig. 5. The couple of lovers, Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet*, screen capture.

The connotations of romantic encounter between Bottom and Titania, expunged of any elements of the ridiculous, as in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, are then attached to the product advertised, and the dialogue becomes centred on the acceptance of Bottom's new "shape", which is what had actually

"enthrallèd" Titania's eye. The new shape is not ridiculous for the audience, and it is the same as Titania's jeans. The two characters, although being different, recognise each other thanks to the shape of their jeans. The product advertised, the jeans, is represented and plays a role in the commercial but its characteristics are not listed; the audience infers them from the discourses and atmosphere of the advertisement. The jeans become a status symbol: the members of the audience are told that with those particular jeans they will be part of the dreamlike world of the advertisement. In the *Levi's* advertisement, traditional advertising practices intersect with strategies that succeed in conveying to the audience a scene from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In this case, however, the references to and appropriation of Luhrmann's *Romeo+Juliet* superimpose a further message on the advertisement.

The advertisement might thus entail different types of reception: the audience less acquainted with Shakespeare will only assume it to be a version of one Shakespearean play – *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – from the opening title which states it clearly. This recognition creates a dreamlike and refined atmosphere for the product advertised, enhanced by the music opening the scene and by the reference to the dream in the title of the play. The reproduction of some of Shakespeare's lines, furthermore, gives a poetic air to the dialogues. The main purpose of the advertisement – namely that of attracting the audience's attention with an appealing story in order to prompt the purchase of the jeans by connecting it with specific concepts (dream, love and belonging) – is fulfilled even in the case of an audience unaware of all the Shakespearean connections present in the advertisement. An additional layer of familiarity with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, on the other hand, will entail the reaction of the audience whose wit will be stimulated by the genre reversal and by the wordplay and creative reinterpretation of the *Midsummer Night's Dream* dialogue, instrumental for the advertisement. Further layers of reception are created through the references to *Romeo and Juliet* mediated through the adaptations of Luhrmann and *West Side Story*. In all cases, the product advertised, the jeans, is given a meaning through the Shakespearean intertexts and related atmospheres of the advertisement. The scenario created by the advertisers projects on to the object a series of attributes, which are more linked with the sensitivity of the audience than with tangible traits.

Far from being a mere exercise in style – although a complex and intertextually dense one – the use of these Shakespearean intertexts and the alteration of their referents go beyond the connection with Shakespeare's most famous love story. Shakespeare's words are adapted to the product advertised, the advertisement effectively playing on the word "shape", the leitmotiv of the advertisement, which is indeed promoting a new pair of jeans "with anti-fit", as the written words appearing under the brand and model number specify in the last shot. The advertisement also puns on the name of the character Bottom, which hints at the lower part of the body on which the jeans are worn, as well as quoting the line "I see their knavery, this is to make an ass of me", which entails a pun on the word "ass" and is heard just after a shot of the actor's jeans-clad "bottom". In this case, the identification of the Shakespearean material by the audience will increase the effectiveness of the communication. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Bottom is unaware of the transformation of his head into that of an ass, and his friends react when they see his shape has changed. The advertisement shifts this meaning: the gestures – the gangster/Snout yanks the young man's jeans – and the intonation of the actor uttering the lines: "O Bottom, thou art changed! What do I see on thee?" (3.1.82) denote a different referent for the words, namely, the jeans.

In the Shakespearean dialogue, the queen of the fairies is under a spell obliging her to fall in love with the first creature she sees upon waking; the spell makes her blind to Bottom's deformity, so much so that her eye is "enthrallèd to … [his] shape" (3.1.101). In the original play, the line was intended to make fun of the queen's debasement and of the incongruity of the monstrously transformed Bottom being praised for his shape by a queen. In the advertisement, the young woman speaks Titania's lines, but these are not addressed to an animal-like creature as part of Oberon's trick. Shakespeare's words here are taken literally, and no comic nuance is attached to them; the words maintain their literal meaning

since the young woman – this time not a queen but a waitress – is genuinely attracted by the young man, thanks to the new shape of his jeans, the same model she is wearing.

The advertisement is not only selling a commodity but a set of impressions which will be attached to the product in the moment of the purchase first, and afterwards in the moment of wearing the jeans. Only by wearing the jeans the spectator will be part of that community of people who think alike and will recognise and be recognised by them as happens in the advertisement. The urban setting and the portrayal of modern-day people helps the identification of the spectators with the people in the ad and implies that everyone could live such a marvellous adventure and be a Shakespearean character. The aim of the advertisement is to establish a relationship of complicity with the audience[43] (in this case further enhanced by the puns), often promoting a process of identification[44] through the representation of the real world of the audience. The use of Shakespeare's words in a contemporary setting demonstrates the appeal his works still have on contemporary audiences and their almost universal capacity to signify. It also testifies to the potential of popular culture to continually rework them and use them to convey newer significations and interpretations.

Knowingly or not, the advertisement also points to the links between the two plays *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, thus adding a further intertextual level of interpretation to the advertising message. The intertwining in the *Levi's* advertisement of references to and suggestions from both *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* implicitly points to the common critical perspective that the two plays "share some common ground…. The word diptych has been applied to them …, as if they formed different sides of the same coin".[45] Both plays present the same dilemma with different outcomes. As Rene Weis reflects, "as in *Romeo and Juliet*, so [in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*] too a young woman, Hermia, refuses to marry the man chosen for her by her father. The penalty, if she persists, is either the frigid virginal life of a nun, or death".[46]

The *Levi's* commercial thus underlines, with a change of genre, both the potential presence of comedy in *Romeo and Juliet* and of traces of tragedy in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The *Levi's* commercial romanticises as well as making more sombre – the threatening gang is just a block away from the couple – the tone of an otherwise comic encounter of an ass-head mechanical with a fairy queen. At the same time, these aspects mirror a similar potential direction towards tragedy observable in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where the flight of the daughter to the Athenian woods could have ended in tragedy but ultimately resolves in a comedic ending. Another trait the two plays have in common is the portrayal of youthful rebelliousness and the freedom as well as the dangers it entails. The advertisement represents a condensation of this theme by making the Titania figure a Juliet figure and the Bottom figure a Romeo figure.

4. Conclusion

The *Levi's 501* advertisement elicits and exploits various Shakespearean intertextual references that render the work a rich palimpsest. It consciously evokes in its adaptive process the presence of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in order to create particular effects, leading the audience to recognise Shakespeare and the advertisement's deliberate playing with and adaptation of the source. At the same time, the new work establishes a relation with the source that goes beyond the mere enlisting of recursive elements and instead brings new dimensions to the two plays invoked.

[43] Pasquale Barbella, "Shakespeare in Spot", in Mariacristina Cavecchi and Sara Soncini, eds., *Shakespeare Graffiti: Il Cigno di Avon nella Cultura di Massa* (Milan: CUEM, 2002), 79-84, 82.
[44] Ibid.
[45] William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. by René Weis, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 41.
[46] Ibid., 27.

Traditional adaptive practices – the use of the Shakespearean text, the reproduction of a setting, costumes and characters inspired by Baz Luhrmann's film – intertwine with advertising strategies – the focus on the jeans and on the word shape – in the *Levi's* advertisement. Although the advertisement's aim is to sell the jeans, it succeeds at the same time in conveying and transforming for the audience a scene of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as well as calling to their mind atmospheres connected to *Romeo and Juliet* mediated via popular film. In this sense, a series of layers of interpretations are superimposed onto the adaptation of Scene 3.1 of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

At the moment of reception, the audience may identify some or all of the intertextual references present in the advertisement. At the same time, the recognition of a particular play or scene will be the lens through which they comprehend and appreciate the advertising message. An audience familiar with the Shakespearean material will also be able to detect both continuity and experimentation. The audience's recognition of the Shakespearean intertexts and the frames of interpretation they employ to decode the advertising message are of particular interest since on this depends whether an adaptive passage has taken place. As Hutcheon observes: "in the end, it is the audience who must experience the adaptation *as an adaptation*".[47]

[47] Hutcheon and O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 172.

Diana Henderson

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!

[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.

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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

[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

[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

[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.

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

Campania felix plays in Laura Angiulli's film *Il re muore*
(2018; after William Shakespeare's *Richard II*)

Reviewed by Anna Maria Cimitile

Laura Angiulli's *Il re muore* (2018, "The king dies") is a film inspired by the Shakespearean historical tragedy *Richard II*. Angiulli is first and foremost a theatre director, and her film combines a deep understanding of the play as *theatre* – and of Shakespearean drama in general, as over the years Angiulli has staged a number of Shakespeare's texts at Galleria Toledo, Teatro Stabile d'Innovazione, which she founded in 1991 in Naples and has directed since its opening to this day – and an evident love for her region, Campania, which the Romans knew as *Campania felix*, a territory fraught with history, beautiful natural sites, and buildings and architectural remains from all epochs – from the classical age to the Renaissance and the Baroque, and beyond. Several of Campania's historical edifices or natural sites were chosen by Angiulli as suggestive locations for her film. Some of them are possibly not so well known as other sites are – not so famous as Pompei, for example – but they are an important presence in the shots and, in the film, they gain new life.

Angiulli's take on the Shakespearean play is to focus on its key moments/scenes, starting with the dialogue between John of Gaunt and the Duchess of Gloucester (scene 1.2 in *Richard II*); this is preceded by the opening titles shot, in which the characters are introduced one by one, shown as they walk by a coffin in a church to pay homage to the dead Duke of Gloucester, as we may infer. Indeed, in this art film, scenes from the Shakespearean play alternate with creative interpolations, which are rather brief shots with no dialogue, some of them almost oneiric in the blurred camera effect; they are added to refer to a past event, or to show a recollection (by one of the characters?) or even an imagining (as spectators might do?) of a past event. The cinematic language leaves interpretation open for those shots. Central to Angiulli's view is also the individuality of each character rather than their public role. Richard is shown as a little child grabbing a crown in the first shot, then as a young king (played by Luciano Dall'Aglio), then again as a young boy in a brief scene halfway through the film and elsewhere. In his fragility, and as his story reveals "the failure of an ideal" in Marjorie Garber's words, he is often shot in close-ups or appears alone 'on stage' – indeed, the film retains an important theatrical imprint in both recitation and choice of frames. In a similar way the Duchess of Gloucester (played by Alessandra D'Elia), the "lamenting chorus" in *Richard II* according to Peter Ure, appears in added scenes with no dialogue; in one, she is alone and silent as she walks barefoot among rough wooden crosses planted in the ground, by a lake, heading towards the water to take her life by drowning.

To go back to the use of some of Campania's historical venues: in the 'translation' from stage to cinema, the scenes of the playtext, some of which are shot in the style of *tableaux vivants*, have each a different setting; exploiting the region's long history, Angiulli shoots almost all the scenes in historical buildings and natural sites, thus placing the characters in a time-space that, in bringing together venues from different past epochs, is quite distant from the present of the spectators, while also being an *imaginary* past, as it does not belong to one specific period only. For all viewers, Angiulli re-creates a past time that is in fact a

combination of epochs; for the viewers who recognise the venues, that past is, besides, a *familiar present* in the shape of architectural remains. I have watched *Il re muore* several times over the years since its first release: the first time was at Galleria Toledo in January 2020, then at an open air summer screening, in the gardens of Villa Pignatelli in Naples (18th June 2022), when I besides had the honour of introducing the film to the audience, and several more times on the internet. Being a Shakespearean scholar and a spectator from this part of the world, every time I watched the film my first impression was confirmed: for me the chosen regional venues are one key feature in the film, a collective protagonist in its own right, playing an important part. Dating back to different epochs, all together they give a new meaning to the 'past', indeed to the 'pastness' of the past, by placing it in the *here and now* of natural sites, archaeological remains and historical edifices shown in their present state of conservation: Castel Sant'Elmo and Castel Capuano, the San Carlo theatre, the Capodimonte Museum and the Archivio Notarile in Naples, the Real Sito di Carditello in San Tammaro, the theatre/temple in Pietravairano, regional parks and lakes, and other venues. And this, I think, is the novelty of Angiulli's version of *Richard II*: in a film that does not set the story in the present (as Luhrmann's *Romeo+Juliet* [1996], or Almereyda's *Hamlet* [2000] do for other Shakespearean plays), but keeps it in the past, the director does not attempt to bring back to life the Middle Ages; she does not resort to 'masquerades' to reproduce the sense of what is past for us as being Richard II's present; in other words, she does not create a setting for the viewers of the film to enjoy an immersive experience of the Middle Ages. Rather, Angiulli leads us in a journey through what is extant today of past times, choosing as shooting locations more or less well-preserved – indeed, sometimes not so well preserved – historical sites.

In the use of historical venues – at times even decaying ones – I see Angiulli's personal, most original way of making the story of Richard II and its tragic conclusion stay with us, here and now: a story for all times in its 'non-actuality'.

The film was sponsored by Regione Campania and the Italian Ministry of Culture. It was screened at the 66th Taormina Film Fest (July 11-19, 2020). The full video can be viewed at MIT *Global Shakespeares: Video and Performance Archive* (*https://globalshakespeares.mit.edu/il-re-muore-angiulli-laura-2018/*).

Fig. 1: The Duchess of Gloucester takes her life. Screen capture from *Il re muore* (dir. Laura Angiulli, Italy, 2018: 29'25", https://globalshakespeares.mit.edu/il-re-muore-angiulli-laura-2018/)

Fig 2: "Sometimes am I king" (Richard II's monologue from Act 5, scene 5). Screen capture from *Il re muore* (dir. Laura Angiulli, Italy, 2018: 60'41", https://globalshakespeares.mit.edu/il-re-muore-angiulli-laura-2018/)

Sacrificio d'ammore (dir. Carlo Cerciello)
Performed at the Attianese Park, Pianura (Naples), 22nd September 2024
After John Ford's *Love's Sacrifice* (1633)

Reviewed by Roberto D'Avascio

John Ford, the Elizabethan playwright, arrived in Pianura, a far western outskirts of Naples, in the last days of September 2024. The project "Affabulazione", financed by the Municipality of Naples and Italian Ministry of Culture, made it possible to stage *Love's Sacrifice* in the small popular amphitheatrE of the Attianese Park. In Naples, the Elizabethan text has been the battlefield of a series of International workshops with professional actors, starting from a new Italian translation by Gian Maria Cervo and Roberto D'Avascio. David Petrarca – director at Goodman Theatre in Chicago from 1988 until 2005 and the well-known director of HBO's *Games of Throne* and *True Blood* – worked on this text in the first theatre workshop, leading the actors to a passionate reading on the topic of lie and fake news in contemporary society. The last step of the project was the performance – directed by Carlo Cerciello – from a second translation of Ford's playtext into Neapolitan language. Ford's drama has become *Sacrificio d'ammore*. This new dramaturgy has turned the original, tragic love triangle into the terrible revenge of Carlo Gesualdo da Venosa (1566-1613), the famous madrigalist, against his wife's betrayal.

John Ford was an English playwight and poet of the Caroline period. He was born in Islington in Devon in 1586 and later left home to study law at Middle Temple in London. After publishing poems and pamphlets, he began an intense dramatic writing from 1621, first collaborating with more experienced playwrights – Massinger, Dekker, Wester, Rowley, Middleton, Fletcher – and then as solo artist from 1626, writing tragic plays, which dealt mainly with the extreme conflicts between passion and conscience, love and duty, individual and society: first the tragicomedy *The Lover's Melancholy*, then the tragedies *Love's Sacrifice* and *The Broken Heart*, and lastly *The Chronicle History of Perkin Warbeck: A Strange Truth* (written c1629-1634) – a play highly praied by T. S. Eliot, and the last English historical tragedy before the closure of theatres by the Puritans in 1642. However, John Ford is best known above all for the violent tragedy *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, which deals with the topic of incest. Linked to Catholic circles of the court – the Earl of Arundel, diplomat, courtier and art collector was the leader of this coterie – Ford was a major playwright during the reign of Charles I Stuart and he was defined as "the last Elizabethan playwright" by Italian scholar Agostino Lombardo. His dramatic work was re-evaluated at the beginning of the twentieth century by Antonin Artaud, who took Ford's plays as a model for his own "theatre of cruelty", comparing the actors' activity to that of a plague patient and defining the features of a theatrical revolution starting from the violent, ritual and bloody scenes of Ford's play-writing.

The date of *Love's Sacrifice*'s first performance is uncertain; the play was first published in 1633 by the bookseller Hugh Beeston. Ford dedicated the play to his cousin John Ford of Gray's Inn and the title page of the first quarto states that it was acted by Queen Henrietta's Men at the Cockpit Theatre. John Ford largely based the main plot of his playwriting on the complex and tormented life of Carlo Gesualdo, who murdered his first wife Maria D'Avalos and her lover Fabrizio Carafa. The play, however, reshuffles the historical cards about location and characters: the setting is moved from Naples to Pavia, Gesualdo becomes Philippo Caraffa, Duke of Pavia, and Maria D'Avalos turns into Bianca; Roderico D'Avolos – literally like a devil (*diavolo* in Italian) – is the name of the Duke's secretary, the villain of the play. Ford employs a three-level plot structure to stage an Italian well-known story for the English audience. In the main plot the Duke of Pavia has recently married Bianca,

the beautiful young daughter of a Milanese gentleman. Fernando, his best friend, falls in love with the Duchess, who rejects him at first, but later admits her love for him. This is where their platonic relationship begins, made of furtive glances, kisses and hugs. Fiormonda, the widowed sister of the Duke, who has previously suffered from an unrequited love passion for Fernando, discovers the illegitimate attraction between her sister-in-law and her brother's best friend; she reveals the betrayal's crime to the Duke, angrily pushing him towards revenge. Although their betrayal is not physically consummated, the Duke kills his wife and causes the death of his friends, to end up committing suicide in the last scene of the play, and requesting, before that, to be buried with them.

David Petrarca worked on the new translation in June, teaching Italian actors how to stage an Elizabethan text, of which he provided his interpretation, in open air in the Attianese Park in Pianura, a difficult space for staging a play because the park is regularly attended by families with children, loud groups of students after school-time, young people jogging or cycling, and where there is besides a basketball playground near the amphitheatre. Petrarca told the actors of his experience in Central Park in New York, when he was a student going to see every summer the Shakespearean productions by Joseph Papp – a very famous American theatrical producer and director, founder of The Shakespeare Workshop and later of the Public Theatre. Petrarca drew inspiration from that kind of stage experience for his Neapolitan workshop. "The goal of the workshop", said Petrarca, "is both to clarify the text and to bring it into the modern era", in an attempt to find the right scenic energy of Ford's old playwriting. He created a new dramaturgy of *Love's Sacrifice*, focusing the workshop with the actors on making the female point of view more evident, and on looking at it in relationship to the male point of view. Recalling the basics if drama, he wanted theatre to be a cathartic experience.

When in September 2024 Carlo Cerciello, one of the most important theatre directors of the Neapolitan scene, began his workshop on the second translation of the play, this time into Neapolitan language, *Love's Sacrifice* turned into a new dramaturgy: the setting comes back to Naples and the Duke is now Carlo Gesualdo. In order to give communicative shape to an ancient language, Gian Maria Cervo has studied and selected verbal choices, expressions and strategies contained in the works of Giordano Bruno, Giambattista Marino, Giovan Battista della Porta, Giambattista Basile, Salvatore Di Giacomo, Eduardo Scarpetta, Eduardo De Filippo and in the "*farse cavaiole*", farces written by authors from Cava de' Tirreni in the Renaissance period. From Giordano Bruno *Sacrificio d'ammore* took several words which had clearly a Neapolitan root and had probably been italianized by the sixteenth-century philosopher and playwright, in an attempt to neapolitanize/re-neapolitanize them. Neapolitan had already lost its quality of official language in the Kingdom of Naples at the time when Ford's *Love's Sacrifice* was written, but the language was spoken by the nobles throughout the history of the Kingdom. Hence our attempt to play with the characters' mannerisms in the alternation of Italian and Neapolitan. The translation-rewriting adopted a strong strategy of voice differentiation between the characters: the character of Gesualdo quotes from the texts of the composer's madrigals, the jester speaks like a character of the "*farse cavaiole*", while his servant Jacopo – later turned into Jacopa by director Carlo Cerciello – talks like a Scarpetta character. The rewriting also offers an alternative version of Gesualdo's story by dealing straightforwardly with potential historical same-sex relationships.

The Neapolitan adaptation has a strong metatheatrical dimension. A prologue is added played by "Gioan Fordo" (a translation in ancient Italian/Neapolitan of Ford's name) in which there is a reference to the (broken?) friendship between Gesualdo and the famous painter Caravaggio and a comparison between Ford's original play and Caravaggio's *The Flagellation of Christ* (1607, which is supposed by some to have originally portrayed Gesualdo as one of the torturers) now at the Neapolitan Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte. Also there are quotes from *Il Candelaio* (1582, "The Candle-maker") by Giordano Bruno and from plays by Giambattista Della Porta; an excerpt of the prologue from Della Porta's *Cintia* (1601), spoken by a personification of the river Sebeto, which ran through

the Greek city of Neapolis (the present Naples), appears in the scene where Ferentes, the second villain in the play, is slained by the three women who get cheated by him. The actor speaking in the play-within-the-play in the scene quotes from "I see the high palaces, the golden roofs, the ornate loggias and the sacred temples of my great city reduced to a small breast, and one Naples reduced perhaps to another Naples", in some sort of both poetic and ironic self-reflection on the rewriting/reconstruction work of the adaptation. The final staging in the park became an articulated and happy performance, in which the actors underlined a grotesque dimension and played with the audience, as in a Elizabethan play.

Ford arrives in Naples, and Gesualdo comes back home with a revenge, wandering like a ghost in that part of his city, the beautiful Astroni crater, where he used to go hunting...

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