This special issue on *Experiencing Shakespeare in Digital Environments* explores the new frontiers of textual and performative spaces opened up by digital media in Shakespeare Studies. Against the background of the ongoing scholarly debate, where the outcomes of digital culture and their far-reaching implications have been examined from a variety of perspectives, the volume identifies three main areas of investigation. The articles of the first section illustrate how increasingly interactive and cross-networked digital environments affect our ways of approaching Shakespeare's textuality. They touch on a variety of topics that are gaining prominence in the debate, ranging from the digital turn in textual transmission and editorial mediation to the newly available tools and methodologies in source studies and Shakespeare pedagogy, with an eye to the specific cognitive, reading and learning abilities of digital natives. The second section investigates the changing notions of performance against the innovative modes of cross-mediality, trans-mediality, and inter-mediality. It dwells on how the remediation of theatre into the digital media circuit has not only problematized the concept of 'liveness' as an essential component of the medium itself, but has implied the creation of hybrid products and all sorts of paratexts that need to be understood within new models of global and local communication. As the articles included in this section show, Shakespearean performances – whether they are produced and put on in traditional 'centres', like the Globe in London, or in the elsewheres of the world – are increasingly broadcast through digital channels: they therefore constantly dialogue with each other, thus assuming intercultural meanings that challenge established ways of interpreting and criticizing Shakespeare. The third section is concerned with a broad spectrum of ways in which digital technologies impact the performance, adaptation and transmission of Shakespeare's works. Including discussions of Shakespeare DVDs, internet memes, televisual hacks, Virtual Reality (VR) installations and a live streaming broadcast from a prison, the contributions contemplate how the digital, in its myriad guises, permeates and updates both the production and reception of Shakespearean codes.

Chapters by:

Alessandra Squeo
Silvia Silvestri
Maristella Gatto
Michela Compagnoni
Orlagh Woods
Maria Elisa Montironi
Cristina Paravano

Mariacristina Cavecchi
Pierpaolo Martino
Carlotta Susca
Anita Orfini
Valeria Brucoli
Reto Winckler

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Experiencing Shakespeare in Digital Environments

Edited by

Alessandra Squeo

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UNIVERSITÀ DEL SALENTO

2021

LINGUE E LINGUAGGI

Coordinamento **SIBA**
UNIVERSITÀ DEL SALENTO

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Lingue e Linguaggi

PART III – ADAPTATIONS AND APPROPRIATIONS IN DIGITAL CONTEXTS

INTRODUCTION[*]

ALESSANDRA SQUEO[1], MADDALENA PENNACCHIA[2], RETO WINCKER[3]

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The aim of this special issue on *Experiencing Shakespeare in Digital Environments* is to explore the new frontiers of textual and performative spaces opened up by digital media in Shakespeare Studies. The impact of the digital turn on the way we engage with Shakespeare has been investigated at length by recent scholarship. Introducing *Shakespeare and the Digital World*, Christie Carson and Peter Kirwan have remarked on the "mutual importance of the 'digital' as a context that influences the study of Shakespeare and, conversely, the importance of Shakespeare as a case study to understand the developing nature of the digital world" (2014, p. 1). Against the background of the ongoing scholarly debate, where the outcomes of digital culture and their far-reaching implications in Shakespearean studies have been examined from a variety of perspectives (Estill, Silva 2018; Gossett 2021; Greatley-Hirsch, Craig 2014; Jenstad 2018; Kidnie 2021; Massai 2021), this volume focuses on how Shakespeare is experienced today in the here and now of the cyberspace, with an eye to the specific cognitive, reading and learning abilities of so-called 'digital natives' (Prensky 2001, 2011; Thomas 2011).

Without disregarding the many overlapping spaces and the cross-connections within intrinsically related topics, the contributions included in the three sections of this special issue identify three main areas of investigation: namely the fields of textual studies, digital scholarly editing and pedagogy; the ongoing research on new forms of cross-mediality, trans-mediality, and inter-mediality that are reconceptualizing the notion of Shakespeare's 'performance' in digital culture; the area of adaptation studies embracing the digital facets of appropriations and rewritings of Shakespeare's plays.

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[*] The Introduction is composed of three sections, authored as follows: section one (pp. 1-5) is by Alessandra Squeo, editor of the first part of the volume; section two (pp. 5-9) is by Maddalena Pennacchia, editor of the second part; section three (pp. 9-12) is by Reto Winckler, editor of the third part.

The first section of the volume (**Part I**) illustrates how increasingly interactive and cross-networked digital environments affect our ways of approaching Shakespeare's textuality, touching on a variety of topics that are gaining prominence in the debate. Scholars have shown how the new forms of textual transmission and editorial mediation afforded by digital environments are transforming our reading habits, as well as the possibilities of understanding and engaging with Shakespeare's playtexts (Carson 2006; Desmet 2017). By overcoming the constraints of the printed page, the fluid materiality of the electronic medium has appeared to adapt to the natural instability of Shakespeare's texts (Kastan 2001). More importantly, owing to their capacity to store and allow access to a virtually unlimited amount of materials, hypertextual scholarly editions, multimedia archives and a growing variety of web-based editorial projects allow the reader to navigate across the diverse variants of Shakespeare's multiple-text plays in association with a broad, continually expandable range of supplementary materials, including sources, critical apparatuses, digital facsimiles of the early editions, audio and visual documents (Gossett 2021; Massai 2021). Although not entirely unchallenged, such a radical reconfiguration of editorial practice "providing a complete list of textual variants and editorial conjectures, along with access to discussions of the merits and demerits of those readings, has long been recognized as a means of empowering the reader" (Rasmussen 2015, p. 391). In this perspective, Shakespeare readers have been reconceptualized as 'users' (Fazel, Geddes 2017) in online environments that encourage diverse forms of creative 'appropriation' of the playwright's works.

From a broader perspective, the variety of digital resources and tools burgeoning on the Web have been shown to have a fundamental impact on diverse areas of textual studies (Craig, Greatley-Hirsch 2017; Weinberg 2021). Thus, along with sophisticated electronic instruments that have inaugurated new directions in authorship attributions studies (Craig 2021), the newly available tools for data text mining, concordancing, and computer-assisted text analysis have expanded the possibilities of 'quantitative' approaches to the playwright's works (Hope, Witmore 2004; Jenstad *et al.* 2018), in combination with more traditional reading (Drucker 2021). Also, the affordances of the digital medium and cross-networked environments have had a significant impact on sources studies, in line with recent research directions in this field that have marked a shift in focus from direct forms of 'linear textual transmission' to more complex processes of cultural influence, 'intertextuality' and 'interdiscursivity' (Bigliazzi 2018). As Janelle Jenstad has pointed out, "linked digital editions enable us to represent Shakespeare as source and adaptor as well as originator", thus "destabil[izing] the canonical primacy of Shakespeare and to position his works in new ways: as sources for subsequent work *and* as adaptation of previous works" (2018, p. 280).

Similarly, light has been shed on the crucial effects of the digital turn on higher education and university teaching (Greatley-Hirsch 2012), where an apparently boundless range of possibilities are revolutionizing Shakespeare pedagogy, "a pedagogy that is at once appropriative of new digital tools (allowing us to improve what we already offered) and generated by those tools (opening up things previously impossible" (Kirwan 2014a, pp. 58-59). Along with the newly available possibilities of displaying digital facsimiles of original quarto and folio editions in the classroom and using video clips of digitalized performances and multimedia materials available online, "blogs, wikis or social media" are inaugurating new teaching and learning environments, "tak[ing] advantage of the relatively natural use of these media by Web 2.0 'natives' both to encourage critical reflection on personal development and to introduce students to a discursive environment that may, in some ways, reflect the cultures of orality" (Kirwan 2014b, p. 110).

The essays included in the first section of the volume illustrate different aspects of the digital turn in Shakespeare textual studies in line with this wide range of perspectives. In the light of the scholarly debate that has triggered new interest in a radical rethinking of the 'materiality' of the text (Squeo 2019), the first essay by **Alessandra Squeo** addresses the potentialities, as well as the challenges and prospects of the 'hyperediting' model (McGann 2001, p. 57) in the digital scholarly editions of the playwright's works. Identifying the *Internet Shakespeare Edition* of *King Lear* by Michael Best as a remarkable case in point, the essay explores the new possibilities afforded by the digital turn in textual transmission and editorial mediation. After briefly outlining *King Lear*'s complex editorial history in print, and the diverse solutions adopted by editors in coping with some of the problems raised by a play that has come down to us in different textual versions, the essay sheds light on what appear to be both the promises, and the potential perils, of letting the reader access the Q1, Q2 and F versions of the tragedy along with a huge amount of multimedia materials available at the click of the mouse. Considering the ongoing paradigm shift from 'editing' to 'archiving', the second part of the essay dwells on the increasing development of interoperable digital resources and tools, including the sibling projects of the *LEMDO* platform (*Linked Early Modern Drama Online*), *LEME* (*Lexicons of Early Modern English*), and the *Global Shakespeare Video and Performance Archive*. In this perspective, the essay eventually conjectures on the possible development of a new generation of editorial projects as multi-layered, collaborative, and flexible 'knowledge-sites' (Shillingsburg 2006), designed to allow access to networked digital resources and to offer new insights into Shakespeare's textual heritage, meeting the needs and interests of different readerships.

The second essay by **Silvia Silvestri** deals with the crucial transformations brought about by the digital turn in Shakespeare source studies. Exploring the

manifold theoretical background that has witnessed a new surge of interest in the complex forms of circulation, transformation and adaptation of Shakespeare's playtexts (Bigliazzi 2018; Britton, Walter 2018) in what has been labelled as source studies "in the Google Age" (Greatley-Hirsch, Johnson 2018, p. 254), the essay considers how the digital is transforming the way scholars identify, visualise, and analyse Shakespeare's diverse sources, thus dovetailing "'old source study' and more contemporary approaches to textual and cultural analysis" (Britton, Walter 2018, p. 1). The two digital archives of Shakespeare's classical (*SCS*) and European narrative sources (*SENS*) of the *Skenè* Research Centre directed by Silvia Bigliazzi at the University of Verona are taken into account as pioneering instances in this respect. The essay illustrates how, in line with this model, the author has created a corpus of significant scenes taken from sixteenth-century English and French translations of Ariosto's *Suppositi* – a play that famously filtered into *The Taming of the Shrew* via Gascoigne's *Supposes* – as part of her PhD project. Along with hyperlinks that favour internal crosschecks, the digitalized texts included in the corpus contain cross-references to a variety of tools and resources, embracing the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, *Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana* (*GDLI*), and *Trésor de la Langue Française informatisé* (*TLFi*). After showing how digital environments can improve the visualisation and analysis of Shakespeare's long-known source texts, the second part of the essay dwells on how digital tools can prove equally useful in laying bare yet-unidentified forms of intertextual exchange. Taking into account the controversial case of McCarthy and Schlueter's computational analysis of George North's *A Brief Discourse of Rebellion and Rebels,* the essay considers both the potentialities and limits of digital tools in this research field.

The final two essays of the first section draw attention to the impact of the digital turn on Shakespeare pedagogy within a context in which "the number of digital initiatives designed to support teaching – from e-books to virtual learning environments, open-access online courses to tablet devices in the live classroom – has proliferated" (Kirwan 2014a, p. 58). Starting from the assumption that the myth of the digital natives being 'naturally' fluent in the use of ICT has been repeatedly rehearsed, revised, and eventually challenged (Prensky 2001, 2011; Thomas 2011) but not yet comprehensively explored on the basis of empirical evidence, the third essay by **Maristella Gatto** reports the results of a teaching experiment carried out at the University of Bari with a corpus linguistics/stylistics approach to *The Merchant of Venice*. After outlining the paradigm shifts brought about by the digital turn in reading practice – from 'qualitative' to 'quantitative', from 'horizontal' to 'vertical', and from 'close' to 'distant' reading models – the essay illustrates the outcomes of the classroom activities carried out with a group of post-graduate students in Specialized Translation who were encouraged to explore a digital version of Shakespeare's playtext using a selection of tools and resources for corpus-based analysis. Focusing on 'bond' as one of the most

'resonant' words in the comedy, students were guided to see how digital tools can help lay bare the play's deviation from a common lexicogrammatical pattern in early modern English that associated 'bond' with the affective and moral fields, thus shedding new light on the play's exclusive use of the word in its emerging economic meaning. In broader terms, using *The Merchant of Venice* as a case study, the essay reflects on how teaching activities based on digitally-enhanced critical reading can improve the students' comprehension and critical appreciation of the playwright's text by also honing their digital reading skills.

The fourth essay by **Michela Compagnoni** addresses the issue of the digital turn in Shakespeare pedagogy from a different but related perspective. With a view to assessing the didactic potentialities of Shakespeare digital editions in Italian secondary schools, the essay illustrates the aims of an experimental template that will be made available on the website of the Silvano Toti Globe Theatre Archive in Rome as part of a broader research project on "The Potentialities of Shakespeare's Theatre for L2 Learning" directed by Maddalena Pennacchia at Roma Tre University. Choosing *Cymbeline* as a working example, the essay shows how a digital edition of the play, supported by critical apparatuses and including guided learning activities, could be used to meet the needs of a target group of students. With the aim of improving specific linguistic, cultural and digital skills, the template will include linguistic exercises on the modernised text of *Cymbeline*, guided activities of translation and comparison between Shakespeare's play and its sources, as well as web-based research activities on a selection of topics, using provided links. The project is in line with the aims of an increasing variety of virtual and blended learning environments that are designed both to help students use digital technologies and to enhance awareness of their own digital competences. The availability of the template on website of the Silvano Toti Globe Theatre Archive acquires particular relevance in the light of what the current Covid global health crisis has shown to be the huge potential of online open-access resources in learning environments.

The second section of the volume (**Part II**) investigates from different points of view the changing notion of performance in relation to the practices of inter-mediality and the related concepts of cross-mediality and trans-mediality. Intermediality can be considered as an umbrella term (Rajewski 2005) whose prefix is suggestive of the blank space opening between media (inter-media), a blank space which stands for their material and/or conceptual difference (media specificity). 'Inter', however, is also suggestive of the necessary 'relation' between media: in fact, the blank space of difference is also a paradoxical space of convergence, a space of participation without belonging, in which new hybrid cultural products can be generated. Shakespeare's writing foreruns such dynamics and presents itself as a particularly poignant case of early modern intermediality (Pennacchia 2012), being 'suspended' between two media which

are not commensurable: print and theatre. As David Scott Kastan puts it "the printed text and the performed play are not related as origin and effect […] they are dissimilar and discontinuous modes of production" (2001, p. 7). As a playwright working for the Elizabethan entertainment industry, Shakespeare's relationship with the printing press has always raised controversial issues in the specialised scholarship. The writing 'by' Shakespeare which actually reached us through print transmission has got a history of its own which should never be forgotten when thinking of its intermedial quality. W.B. Worthen, in introducing his study about "the stage performance of scripted drama" (2004 p. 1), contends that "taking print as synonymous with 'writing' […] ignores the densely mediated ways in which written language gains public status" (p. 20). Historically, Shakespeare's texts have been fixed on the page only (and luckily) thanks to the commitment of Shakespeare's fellow actors, Heminge and Condell, who curated the First Folio in 1623: by apparently leaving others the task of editing his plays, Shakespeare created texts that do not want to 'govern' the performance. That is why, I believe, his writing has gained an extraordinary amount of what Worthen calls the 'force' of dramatic performativity. It is perhaps this intrinsic force that allows for the exceptional transformational drive of Shakespeare's play-texts, and their adaptability to every and each new device that appears on the communication scene. The digital turn, whose sway we are still far from having thoroughly ascertained and acknowledged, has therefore deeply impacted on the way we experience the performance of Shakespeare's textuality. It is a truism that every director, every actor, every theatre practitioner who participates in the production of a play co-creates the show, but the point is that with the digital turn, the performative force inscribed in Shakespeare's texts has dizzily increased; today every individual in the audience can actually experience new forms of actual co-creation. Against a rapidly evolving technological background, and within a culture where users of social media are also producers of contents and constantly encouraged to perform their own reception and interactive reaction to the wealth of materials at their disposal in the cyberspace, the Shakespearean reader/ spectator's agency has been acquiring more and more relevance. If live and recorded productions of all kinds are available on the internet as has never happened before, Shakespeare can be 'performed' by prosumers through all sorts of new media: FB, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok and whatever is coming next, up to the point that the 'corpus' of the 'inventor' of human communication, as both a biographical and textual myth, has increasingly acquired the status of an international marketing booster to sell all kinds of merchandise, especially, and quite ironically, high-tech communication devices such as smart phones. While Shakespeare's writing travels through and across the media circuit adapting to all sorts of new digital environments (trans-mediality and cross-mediality), theatre scholars have begun to rethink the space of performance. On one side, that space is marked by the presence on stage of several media and by

increasingly explicit and dramatically significant intermediality (Chapple, Kattenbelt 2006); on the other side, though, the actual walls of theatres as we used to know them have fallen down. Suffice here to think of the National Theatre Live project where cinema and theatre converged for the first time. Launched in 2009, the project deeply impacted *the* theatre as an institutional space and discourse, also creating new models of spectatorship and participation. We are now fully aware of how digital communication and the internet have changed our understanding of space and time, but since those kinds of experiments, the concept itself of theatrical performance as an ancient human practice of people meeting 'here and now' to see other people acting 'here and now' has been utterly questioned, together with the concept of 'liveness' (Aebischer *et al.* 2018). The essays in this section exemplify and demonstrate how the notion of what 'performing Shakespeare' means today has deeply changed and been put to the test by digital culture.

This section opens with an essay which explores the reactions of Shakespeare's online community to the cultural politics of the Globe in London. Taking its cue from the public controversy born from Emma Rice's resignation as Artistic Director – due to her 'excessive' penchant for contemporary sound and lighting technology – the essay offers a broader reflection on the negotiations that theatrical institutions engage in today with the current digital environment. Since its opening, in 1997, the Globe has been promoting its mission as a popular theatre venue and an educational institution, refusing accusations of being mainly a tourist attraction, and presenting itself as a place where memory of the past and national identity can be fostered and preserved. This has led, according to **Orlagh Woods**, to a dangerously illiberal claim on what performing Shakespeare should truly mean, which ultimately denies the value of what is abundantly produced in Shakespeare's multiverse, including the manifold reactions to performances circulating through the online fan-communities. As Woods makes clear, referencing a crucial critical debate, a contradiction seems to lie at the heart of the London Globe: the theatre has boosted its website and social media in order to establish a brand identity and to foster a strong commitment to historical accuracy in new audiences; however, such celebration of multimedia in the digital environment clashes with the reprobation of new technologies inside the theatre. Such tension signals a deeper and unsolved question, namely "who is Shakespeare for?"

In the second essay of the section, **Maria Elisa Montironi** sifts through the numerous profiles which have been opened under the name of Katherina Minola on Facebook – a social medium which she regards, with the help of critical theory, as a staging space for the self – in order to examine how *The Taming of the Shrew* has been adapted and appropriated. As Montironi makes clear, the perlocutionary prompt provided by Facebook ("what is on your mind") determines the specific approach to performing the famous Shakespearean

character in such a medium. Kate's thoughts are confidentially shared with the community of Facebook, taking a small number of renowned situations in the plot as a cue to elicit Katherina's personal reactions. Moreover, Kate's language is most often than not contemporary English, and mostly the net-speak, with its abbreviations, hyper-links, hashtags, and emoticons; rarely precise quotes of the play-text occur, while a mock Elizabethan language is used mostly to a farcical or comical effect. By examining Facebook profiles devoted to the *Shrew* in the context of current theories on the creative potentialities of the Web 2.0, Montironi also highlights grassroots reactions in comparison to the professional critics' and adapters' reception, showing insights into the way the Web changes how we receive Shakespeare, yet also and surprisingly does not modify some conservative attitudes.

The third contribution to the section is by **Cristina Paravano**, who investigates the myth of Shakespeare as a successful brand which can help selling any kind of merchandise and in particular communication devices, such as cell phones with their many gadgets and services. The Bard's 'faces' (as creative reinterpretations of the Chandos and Droeshout portraits), as well as all kinds of famous quotes from his works, are reproduced on the cover of cell phone cases and covers, while in advertisement campaigns his characters become the spokespersons of the firms' messages. The essay focusses in particular on the use of *Romeo and Juliet* to promote mobile communication providers in a series of commercials which were produced in different national contexts (American, French, and Italian) to be broadcast on television. These ads perform the story of the two famous tragic lovers, leaving aside the actual words of the play-text and taking their cue, instead, from already existing popular adaptations for cinema and television. In those commercials cell phones are presented as the greatest invention of the age of digital interconnectivity, showing, by a wink to young consumers, how such devices could have even avoided the gloomy events of the most famous tragedy in the history of modern theatre.

Romeo and Juliet, as a tragic story of separation and death, is again the play under investigation in the essay which closes the section. **Maria Cristina Cavecchi** devotes her engaging contribution to two bold experiments that integrate theatre and digital media: Nawar Bulbul's 2015 *Romeo and Juliet* in Amman, Jordan, and Giuseppe Scutellà's 2018 *Romeo Montecchi: innocente o colpevole?* in Milan. In both productions the actors could not be onstage together, for war reasons in the case of bombed out Syria, and for lack of personal freedom, in the case of an Italian juvenile detention centre. Live theatre had to be integrated with Skype interaction and videotaped reproductions so that some of the actors were replaced by their virtual avatars. While acknowledging how problematized the issue of liveness has become in contemporary theatre productions which make use of digital communication technologies, the essay is passionately concerned with ethical issues that compels the audience to participate actively in a

performance which asks for reflections and answers about what constitutes essential Shakespeare, as well as why and how his work is so relevant for specific communities with local social and political concerns that have to rely precisely on those digital technologies which have created the phenomenon of globalisation to become visible and be heard outside their locality.

The third section of this special issue (**Part III**) is concerned with a broad spectrum of ways in which digital technologies impact the performance, adaptation and transmission of Shakespeare's works. Including discussions of Shakespeare DVDs, internet memes, televisual hacks, Virtual Reality (VR) installations and a live streaming broadcast from a prison, the contributions contemplate how the digital, in its myriad guises, permeates and updates both the production and reception of Shakespearean codes. While the five articles in this section cover a wide area, they share an interest in how the digital remediation of Shakespeare's works demands a redefinition of the identity, experience and function of what used to be the spectator or reader in Shakespeare's day. The DVD provides the "Shakespeare user" (Fazel, Geddes 2017) with the power to personalise her access to the previously pre-determined flow of the cinematic Shakespeare experience and to look 'behind the scenes' of the movie's production process, while the Shakespeare-themed internet meme invites users to not only consume snippets of Shakespeare but also participate in the creation of new "Shakespeare" themselves (Voigts 2018). The viewers of the live-streaming broadcast of a theatrical performance and a television series might seem closer to the traditional audience member, but in both cases the user's experience is modified by the medium in question to the effect of demarcating a clear distinction. The audience of a live-streamed theatrical performance is subject to a geographical displacement effect which draws the liveness of the experience into question at the very moment in which it enables it (Stone 2016). Television series, meanwhile, have evolved a level of complexity which demands the viewer's intense engagement with the show and its characters (Mittel 2015), in addition to incorporating the audience into the action by various forms of voice-over, direct address and fourth wall breaks. Finally, the VR technology arguably presents an even more radical break with the previous separation of actors from spectators and consumers from producers of Shakespeare. The digital technology enables the spectator, who now becomes an immersant, to experience the world of a Shakespeare play in a virtually simulated environment which the immersant enters both mentally and physically, losing all distance to, and therefore arguably truly becoming part of, the Shakespearean story which is playing out all around her. What the papers in this section illustrate, therefore, is the potential of digital technologies to bring Shakespeare closer to his audience by making his works interactive, by transforming Shakespeare from a product to be consumed to an ongoing process in whose creation we all participate.

In his article about the DVD version of Baz Luhrmann's 1996 film of *Romeo+Juliet*, **Pierpaolo Martino** investigates how the format of the Digital Video Disc transforms the experience of watching the film from passive exposure to active, arguably political engagement. The digital format enables the emergence of an enhanced sense of agency on the part of the user by enabling her to exert some control over how the film is played, and by providing apparently intimate access to the production process in the form of various extras, breaking the cinematic illusion. Yet it is the DVD menus themselves which give rise to particularly astute and pertinent observations in Martino's contribution. In detailed discussions of the semiotic relationship between the visual aspects of the title menu and the loop of an instrumental fragment of the Radiohead song "Talk Show Host" which plays in the background but also features in the film, as well as of the significance of the Radiohead song "Exit Music (for a film)" whose lyrics become readable thanks to the DVD's digital technology, Martino outlines how new meaning is created in a series of complex interactions between visual, auditory and interactive elements, as well as between these elements and Shakespeare's text. Ultimately, Martino locates in the Digital Video Disc technology "a semiotics of the unpredictable and unexpected" which, in subjecting the cinematic narrative to viewer control, potentially subverts established hierarchies of form and content.

Moving from the DVD to the internet, **Carlotta Susca**'s timely contribution outlines the emergence of Shakespeare-inflected internet memes during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Building on Limor Shifman's theory (2013), Susca analyses a number of Shakespeare-related memes to make a strong case for her thesis that Shakespeare's classic status can itself be understood as founded on the "*meminess*" of his works – "a unique combination of elements which favours its time travelling in the form of memes, even if this results in modifications and distortions". Setting the internet memes into dialogue with other modernising forms of adaptation which likewise contribute to Shakespeare's continuing survival, Susca tackles the seeming tangentiality of Shakespeare adaptation in internet memes head-on, proving that internet memes indeed provide an excellent example of how Shakespeare's works remain relevant in the digital age. Not only do they link Shakespeare to themes with urgent and universal contemporary relevance, like the need to wash one's hands during the pandemic or the desire (and social pressure) to do something useful while in quarantine, but they also bring an element of interactivity to Shakespeare adaptation which fits in with many of the other digital adaptations discussed in this section.

The final three articles in this issue deal with digitally mediated version of *Hamlet*. **Anita Orfini**'s contribution consists in a detailed description and careful consideration of the meanings of the Virtual Reality (VR) installation *Hamlet Encounters* (CREW, 2018). Situating the work in the context of both the

Shakespeare play and other VR installations, Orfini focuses chiefly on the implications which the combining of Virtual Reality and theatrical play have for the experience of the user. Even though both share the feature of liveness, the two media differ fundamentally in VR's dissolution of the "binary separation of meaning and experience" which holds in most forms of theatre. In the digital illusion created by VR, the distance between actor and spectator is nullified; more than that, both are free to move around as they please in the same virtual environment. This, as Orfini stresses, leads to a loss of critical distance on the part of the experiencer, which to her mind ultimately persists in spite of CREW seeking to counteract it through providing the immersant with a number of opportunities to look behind the scenes and appreciate the real-life process that is necessary for the creation of the illusion. The most innovative part of Orfini's discussion, however, is the way in which she links the immersant's experience of disorientation in the virtual world to the unmooring of Hamlet's mind and world in Shakespeare's text. Understanding the ontological re-orientation which VR forces the immersant to adopt as a metaphor for Hamlet's time out of joint as well as for his madness, the digital technology is re-conceptualised by Orfini not as yet another medium into which the play has been transposed, but as a tool whose very mediality contributes to enriching the meanings of Shakespeare's tragedy by literally putting the spectator into Hamlet's shoes.

Valeria Brucoli recounts how the digital technology of live streaming enables the transcendence of solid prison walls in her account of *Hamlet in Rebibbia*. Reading the production comparatively against the earlier film *Caesar Must Die* (Taviani, Taviani 2012), which was produced by the same creative team and likewise featured inmates of Rome's Rebibbia prison as its actors, Brucoli contemplates the differences between staging a theatrical performance, making a film around scenes from such a performance, and broadcasting the performance itself from the prison's stage to other venues via live streaming. She stresses how the format of the live broadcast allows for a combination of the liveness characteristic of theatrical performance with the ability of technology to overcome spatial distance, giving rise to a simultaneity of experience among geographically separated audiences which acquires particular poignancy in a production in which the live performance takes place in a space defined as limiting and immovable. In a manner which dovetails with Anita Orfini's thoughts on the confluence of the meanings of *Hamlet* with the experience of the spectator who is immersed in VR, Brucoli also shows how this transcendent quality is reflected in the language of the production, for which Shakespeare's text was translated into the local dialects of the performing inmates, aligning Shakespeare's question of "Who's there?" – Hamlet or the prisoner who plays the role? – with contemplations about the simultaneous, digitally enabled presence and absence of the performance outside of Rebibbia's walls.

Finally, **Reto Winckler** analyses the television series *Mr. Robot* (Esmail, 2015-2019) as a hack of the Shakespearean source code of *Hamlet*, repurposing a process from the world of computer programming as an intellectual tool for grappling with the complex interrelations between literary, cinematic and televisual texts. After a theoretical section which, based on previous work by Winckler (2021), makes a case for understanding artistic adaptation as computer hacking through conceptually aligning adaptation with legal varieties of hacking and appropriation with illegal ones, Winckler proceeds to show how *Mr. Robot* can be understood as a complex update, port and fork of the Shakespearean source code. The process of artistic hacking is traced through a focus on two themes central to both *Hamlet* and *Mr. Robot*: the manipulation of the audience by the protagonist and the portrayal of the hero's madness. Winckler argues that *Mr. Robot*, by means of televisual as well as computer technology, radically intensifies the unreliability of the hero's mind and the ambiguous nature of the Ghost already prominent in *Hamlet*, achieving a thematic updating of Shakespeare's code by means of porting of the play to a new medium, and thereby forking an independent work of art out of the Elizabethan code. In the final section of the paper, Winckler then uses the perspective provided by the analysis of *Mr. Robot* as *Hamlet*-hack to double back to the Shakespearean source code, arguing that the plot and character inconsistencies which characterise the final act of *Hamlet* can be reconciled if we think of *Hamlet* in terms of a modern-day television series.

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PART I | The digital turn in textual studies, scholarly editing and pedagogy

"SUCH STUFF AS 'TEXTS' ARE MADE ON"
Digital Materialities and (Hyper)editing
in *The Internet Shakespeare Edition* of *King Lear*

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Abstract – Against the background of increasingly pervasive digital technologies, much scholarly attention has been attracted, over the last few decades, by the impact of digital tools and resources in the field of Shakespearean textual studies, where several issues are still open to debate (Erne 2021; Estill 2019; Lavagnino 2014; Malone, Greatley-Hirsch 2021; Greatley-Hirsch, Jenstad 2016; Massai 2021). In the light of a radical rethinking of the 'materiality' of the text, this article more specifically addresses some of the affordances, as well as the possible dangers and prospects of digital scholarly editions of the playwright's works. Focusing on Michael Best's *Internet Shakespeare Edition* of *King Lear* (2001) as a remarkable case in point, the article illustrates how print-based views of textual transmission and editorial mediation are radically reconceptualized within an interactive environment (Driscoll, Pierazzo 2016) where readers are allowed to navigate across the diverse textual variants of the play, including old-spelling transcriptions of the early witnesses, and to access a huge amount of multimedia materials available at the click of the mouse (Best 2011). Considering the paradigm shift from 'editing' to 'archiving' (Desmet 2017; Galey 2014) and the more recent expansion of platforms hosting interoperable digital humanities projects (Jenstad *et al.* 2018; Malone, Greatley-Hirsch 2021), the article eventually illustrates how, in the wake of Best's pioneering model, a digital edition of *King Lear* could be further enhanced with dynamic links to other interoperable resources and tools. Their still partly unexplored hermeneutic potential invites reflection on how the affordances of the digital medium affect our engagement with and understanding of Shakespeare's textual heritage.

Keywords: digital scholarly editions; multimedia archives; interactivity; interoperability; *King Lear*.

1. Introduction

"In or about December 2008, the character of literary scholarship changed, and after that you had to either do digital humanities or have an opinion about it" (2014, p. 14): in these terms John Lavagnino has outlined the crucial transformations brought about by the digital turn in literary studies. In

particular, in the field of Shakespearean studies, the advent of digital scholarly editions – to use a broad "umbrella term" (Pierazzo 2014b, p. 17) – has radically reconceptualized the practices of textual transmission and editorial mediation in ways that have attracted increasing academic attention. In 2006, the choice of dedicating an issue of the *Shakespeare Survey* to "Editing Shakespeare" for "the first time in fifty-four years" was itself proof, according to Edward Petcher, of a "concern that has been gaining in currency since at least as early as 1988, when Randall McLeod chose 'Crisis in Editing' as the theme for the annual Conference of Editorial Problems at the University of Toronto" (2006, p. 20). In this context, the last two decades have seen a particularly rich outpouring of studies on the new horizons opened up by Shakespeare digital editing (Best 2009; Carson 2006; Desmet 2017; Dawson 2008; Erne, Kidnie 2004; Estill 2019; Galey 2014; Greatley-Hirsch, Jenstad 2016; Gossett 2021; Malone, Greatley-Hirsch 2021; Massai 2021; Werstine 2008), whose far-reaching implications have not been fully explored.

"Is digital simply a new medium for 'old' methods or is it an entirely new methodology?" asks Elena Pierazzo, suggesting that "computer-assisted scholarly editing" is going far beyond the mere aim of "simplifying the traditional editorial work" (2014b, p. 21). More specifically, positing that "digital editions follow a digital paradigm, just as printed editions have been following a paradigm that was shaped by the technical limitations and cultural practices of typography and book printing", Patrick Sahle has identified the main innovation in the hypertextual logic inaugurated by the new medium, where "the pervasive linkage between different contents and parts promote a modularized structure and a module-oriented vision of scholarly editions" (2016, pp. 27, 29). But the critical debate in this field is far from unanimous and different perspectives have emerged in the analysis of the transition from print to digital editing. If it is unquestionable that "electronic editions are able to facilitate dynamic interaction with its contents by and between users" (Greatley-Hirsch 2011, p. 574), it has not gone unnoticed that "the digital medium introduces additional tasks to those involved in print, and complicates the task of producing and maintaining a critical edition. Digital editions are not for the faint of heart" (Greatley-Hirsch, Jenstad 2016, p. 107).

On the other hand, some scholars have claimed that the experience of consulting a critical apparatus by means of hypertextual links is neither simpler nor more rewarding for the reader (Lavagnino 2004). Furthermore, the long-established pillars of editorial control have appeared to be dangerously undermined by the advent of a new "Barthesian reader" who is allowed to navigate across the multiple hyperlinks branching from the text in a general "climate of distrust" of the editor (Dawson 2008, p. 161). Many questions are still open to debate. How does the cognitive load entailed by the

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process of selecting links impinge on the readers' understanding of the playtexts? And what is the borderline between necessary editorial mediation and undesirable intrusiveness in digital environments?

Without claiming any exhaustiveness in the face of such complex issues, this article addresses some of these questions by focusing on specific cases in point in Shakespearean studies. It suggests that both the potentialities and pitfalls of digital editing may be better explored in the light of a broader research perspective, embracing the theoretical contribution of new media studies on the new 'materiality' of the text and new 'textual spaces'. Applied to the distinctive features of Shakespeare's playtexts, and to the particular problems they raise for the editor, this perspective lets us bring into sharper focus a complex scenario that has been labeled as the "crisis of editing" by some scholars, while also appearing to others as "a golden age of editorial theory" (Fraistat, Flanders 2013, pp. 1-2).

2. Rethinking the materiality of the text: the theoretical background

Seminal studies have long illustrated how the notions of the 'text' and 'textual space' are largely contingent upon specific technological circumstances (Bolter 1991; Eisenstein 1979; Landow 1992, 2003; McLuhan 1962, 1964; Ong 1982). Without overlooking the perils of technological determinism – bearing in mind that "technologies of representation are simultaneously material artefacts and social constructions" (Bolter, Grusin 1999, p. 77) and that texts are neither "simple, monotechnological phenomena" nor the result of "a uniform progression of technologies over time" (Treharne, Willan 2019, p. 8) – it is still undeniable that the advent of the digital medium has redefined both the material practices of writing and the idea of textuality associated to them. "Unlike the special fixity of text reproduced by means of book technology", as George Landow has put it, the "electronic text always has variation, for no one state of version is ever final; it can always be changed" (1992, pp. 58-59, 64). More importantly, the hypertext, which allows readers to select their own paths through a range of *branching* possibilities,[1] has appeared to undermine print-inflected views of linear textuality (Eisenstein 1979) with revolutionary cultural outcomes: it "dissolves the fundamental fixity that provides the foundation of our critical theory and practice" (Landow 1996, p. 33).

[1] The first definition of hypertext dates back to Ted Nelson's *Literary Machines*: "By hypertext I mean non-sequential writing, text that *branches* and allows choices to the reader, best read at an interactive screen. As popularly conceived, this is a series of text chunks connected by links which offer the reader different pathways" (1981, p. 0/2, my emphasis).

The beginning of the new millennium has seen a rising scholarly interest in the technological factors that, in association with other cultural dynamics,[2] have reshaped the concept of 'text' (Chartier 1995; Finkelstein, McCleery 2013) against the background of "a textual revolution comparable to the one initiated by the invention of moveable type printing in the fifteenth century" (Shillingsburg 2006, p. 4). Regardless of whether we are in the process of closing the "Gutenberg parenthesis" (Pettit 2012) or still in the "late age of print" (Bolter 1991), thus redefining and 'remediating' (Bolter, Grusin 1999) the cultural significance of the book form, digital culture has unquestionably brought about a sort of "secondary orality" (Ong 1982; Pettit 2012) by "rapidly undoing that idealization of stability underpinning the age of print, and returning us to a kind of textuality which may have more in common with the pre-print era" (Sawday, Rhodes 2000, pp. 11-12).

The repercussions of such a new 'materiality' of the text have acquired particular relevance in Shakespearean studies, especially in the light of a growing interest in the textual instability of the playwright's works that started emerging in the late twentieth century (De Grazia, Stallybrass 1993; Orgel 1981; Taylor, Warren 1983). To a large extent, the natural impermanence of the electronic form, free from the rigidity of the printed page, has appeared to offer a suitable instrument through which to retrieve and lay bare the plays' *unstable* textual condition (Murphy 2007; Werstine 2008), bearing traces of their embeddedness in oral and manuscript tradition, as well as of the still imperfect printing technologies of the early modern quarto and folio editions in which we have received them.[3]

More specifically, the hypertext's potential to embed multiple textual layers has provided new editorial opportunities to exhibit Shakespeare's *plural* textuality by allowing the reader to navigate across the diverse versions of a playtext. This has appeared to be in line with the late-twentieth-century paradigm shift from the New Bibliographers' pursuit of the most 'authoritative' text to what was then emerging as the new orthodoxy of 'unediting' (Marcus 1996; McLeod 1982) and to the purposes of new material philology (Cerquiglini 1989). In Leah Marcus' own words, whereas "the idea of textual instability was profoundly disquieting, students now tend to be awed and charmed by the discovery of textual difference", preferring "an array of different texts, rather than a single textual "authority" (1996, p. 27).

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[2] George Landow himself has identified a 'convergence' between hypertextuality and the poststructuralist and deconstructionist episteme (1992 and 2003).

[3] Early modern printed books have been shown to be incompatible with the idea of a final, fixed version of the text, crystallized once and for all in the book form: "the text in flux, the text as process, was precisely what Renaissance printing practice preserved" (Orgel 1999, pp. 117-118). For further analysis of the capacity of the digital medium to offer more flexible visualizing solutions for lexical instability in Shakespeare, see Squeo (2019).

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As more recent trends in Shakespearean studies testify (Best 2009; Marcus 2007; Shillingsburg 2006), the hypertextual form permits to lay bare textual ambiguities and inconsistencies as "a field of interpretive possibilities" rather than as "a problem to solve" (Galey 2014).

3. The promises and perils of the hypertextual form: The *Internet Shakespeare Edition* of *King Lear*

Nowhere is Shakespeare's unstable and plural textuality better epitomized than in his multiple-text plays, such as *Hamlet*, *Othello*, or *King Lear*. Their long editorial history bears witness to the diverse strategies adopted by scholars to address the thorny issues raised by the different textual versions in which these plays have come down to us. In the case of *King Lear*, as is well known, we have two main texts,[4] the one printed by Nicholas Okes in 1608, known as the First Quarto, approximately 3,100 lines long, and the version of the tragedy included in the First Folio (1623), about 200 lines shorter, each containing parts which are omitted in the other. Thoroughly examined by scholars (Blayney 1982; Taylor-Warren 1983; see also Holland 2002; Knowles 2020; Milne 2002; Stone 1980; Taylor *et al.* 2016; Weis 1993), the numerous differences between Q1 and F1 go far beyond our scope: apart from a series of cuts, they include variants involving single words or entire lines, speech assignments to different characters as well as important changes in punctuation and stage directions. For the specific purpose of our analysis, suffice it to mention here the much quoted example of a textual variation that occurs at the end of the tragedy, in the scene of Lear's death, one of the most memorable moments in the play:

> Lear
> And my poor fool is hanged. No, no, no life?
> Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life,
> And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,
> Never, never, never, never, never.
> Pray you, undo this button. Thank you sir.
> Do you see this? Look on her. Look, her lips–
> Look there, look there.
> *He dies.*
>
> (*King Lear*, Folio, TLN 3277-84)[5]

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[4] The Second Quarto (1619) is largely regarded as a reprint of Q1.

[5] All the quotations are from M. Best (ed.), *King Lear* (Modern, Extended Folio 1623 and Modern, Extended Quarto 1608): https://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/doc/Lr_FMe/complete/. Through Line Numbers (TLNs) are used in the *ISE* to facilitate navigation between different versions of the same text.

In the king's famous seven-line speech in F1, while lamenting his daughter's death, Lear's last words "Do you see this? Look on her. Look, her lips–/look there" have been read as proof of his belief that Cordelia is coming back to life. These words are omitted in Lear's shorter speech in Q1 where, moreover, the king does not die immediately, but only after uttering the renowned line "Break heart, I prethee break", which is instead attributed to Kent in the Folio.

> Lear
> And my poor fool is hanged. No, no, life.
> Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life
> And thou no breath at all? Oh, thou wilt come no more.
> Never, never, never.
> Pray you, undo this button. Thank you sir.
> O, o, o, o.
>
> Edgar
> He faints. My lord, my lord!
>
> Lear
> Break heart, I prithee break.
> *[He dies]*
>   (*King Lear*, Quarto, TLN 3277-87)

The sweeping implications of these textual differences have been explored at length by scholars. Commenting on Lear's death in F1, Drew Milne has remarked on "the swift oscillation between his [the king's] joy that Cordelia may still live, and his grief for her death" (2002, p. 62). Lukas Erne, in turn, has pointed out that "if he dies believing Cordelia to be alive, he also dies in ignorance of her true state, his ignorance forming a last ironic contrast with our own knowledge, a contrast that is of course important in the play as early as the first scene" (2008, p. 91). By contrast, as Rene Weis has noticed, "Q's text affords no such mixed comfort to the audience" (2010, p. 11).

The problem of establishing which version should be offered to the readers and how to enhance their awareness of play's textual multiplicity has long been a crucial scholarly concern, as Lukas Erne (2008), among others, has illustrated. After a deep-rooted editorial tradition that aimed at producing a conflated text as the closest possible approximation to the lost 'original', a new trend inaugurated by Gary Taylor and Michael Warren (1983) has triggered renewed interest in the tragedy's different texts since the last decades of the twentieth century, assuming that Shakespeare himself revised the play for theatrical reasons.[6] This view has inspired many different

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[6] Brian Vickers's revisionist hypothesis in his divisive *The One King Lear* (2016) has been challenged by many scholars. See, for instance, Syme (2016).

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attempts to approach *The History of King Lear* (1608) and *The Tragedy of King Lear* (1623) as distinct works. Thus, the *Oxford Complete Works* (1986), under the general editorship of Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, famously included both texts. In the early 1990s, the *New Cambridge Series* published them separately – the Folio version in 1992, the Quarto text in 1994 –, a choice which however seemed to establish a form of hierarchy between them, as Erne has noticed, since only the 1992 edition has a full scholarly apparatus with introduction, textual notes, and editorial comment, "while the *History* is confined to the more lightly edited series" (2008, p. 97).

In his extensive exploration of the play's editorial history, the scholar reports many remarkable efforts that were made in the same years to show the tragedy's textual complexity within the inevitable constraints of the printed page. Thus, mostly based on the two texts of the *Oxford Complete Works*, the Norton edition chose to print them in parallel in the 1990s, the *History* on the left and the *Tragedy* on the right side, along with a third conflated text. A similar solution was adopted in 1993 by Longman's *King Lear: A Parallel Text Edition*, edited by René Weis. Also the editions opting for one text testify to noteworthy attempts to signal the different textual provenance of specific parts. In the Folger edition, for instance, pointed brackets indicate lines which are only in Q1, and square brackets those which appear only in F1, whereas Arden 3 offers a conflated version with variant readings in small superscript letters. In 1989, Michael Warren's *The Complete King Lear 1608-1623*, with parallel texts of photographic facsimiles, provided one of the most inventive editorial solutions: besides aligning corresponding sections of the two versions, Warren also offered a separate edition of facsimiles that, as Lukas Erne has pointed out, testify to "the limits of what a print edition can do":

> [they] do not come in codex format but consist of unbound fascicles, loose pieces of paper, one per page, allowing readers to use the edition any way they like, by reading one text sequentially or by putting next to each other the corresponding passages of more than one text. (2008, p. 99)

Seen against this background, the advent of the digital medium has undeniably provided ground-breaking solutions for editorial practice that are unthinkable in print. Predictably, *King Lear*'s complex textual issues have offered a major exploration topic in this field. In the wake of *The Arden Shakespeare CD-ROM: Text and Sources from Shakespeare Studies*, edited by Jonathan Bate in 1997 – to mention one of the first ventures in fixed media formats[7] – the *Cambridge King Lear CD-ROM: Text and Performance Archive* (2000), edited by Christie Carson and Jacky Bratton, provided a

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[7] For discussion of other early projects in interactive fixed media, see Carson (2006) and Malone and Greatley-Hirsch (2021).

'Finder Text' (a collation of Q1 and F1) with hyperlinks to images of the tragedy's several performances, alongside a rich apparatus of 'primary sources', 'editorial and critical material' and 'reference materials' (Carson 2006, p. 170).

More recently, much broader horizons have been opened up by the advent of the web-based "second-generation projects in digital editing" (Carson 2006, p. 168), a constantly growing production that does not fit into ready-made taxonomies (Greatley-Hirsch, Craig 2014) and responds to the needs of diverse readerships.[8] Interestingly, also forms of integration between print and digital media have been experimented with, as exemplified by the *New Oxford* and the third edition of *The Norton Shakespeare,* published between 2015 and 2017, which respond to different editorial purposes. Whilst the *New Oxford* digital version does not add new materials, but rather provides a digital transposition of the resources included in the printed section, with a view to enhancing the readers' access to them,[9] *Norton 3* offers additional resources that complement and expand those included in the printed volume,[10] counting variant versions of Shakespeare's texts, among other materials, a choice that is in line with the 'single-text editing' rationale underpinning the whole editorial project (Gossett 2021; Massai 2021).

Against such a constantly expanding scenario, the potentialities of born-digital editions are particularly exemplified by the *Internet Shakespeare Editions* (*ISE*), launched by Michael Best in 1996 and freely available on the

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[8] The different features and purposes of extant digital editions of Shakespeare's works go far beyond the scope of these pages. Suffice it here to notice how, alongside web-based projects allowing free access to the public-domain Moby version of the playtexts – such as *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (MIT) begun by Jeremy Hylton in 1993, or the *Open Source Shakespeare* launched by Eric Johnson in 2003 – there are digital scholarly editions that provide fully annotated transcriptions of the playtexts' quarto or folio versions with a rich editorial apparatus. The scenario is manifold, ranging from with *The Internet Shakespeare Editions*, offering open-access peer-reviewed materials, to Gale's *The Shakespeare Collection,* only accessible by subscription, which contains the Arden Shakespeare in electronic form, scholarly introductions and references to several adaptations of the plays. *The Shakespeare Collection* on *Archives Unbound* has largely replaced Gale's previous *Shakespeare Collection* platform: https://libraries.indiana.edu/shakespeare-collection-archives-unbound.

[9] The volumes are meant for different readerships: *The Authorship Companion* and *Critical Reference Edition* are "For Scholars", whereas *The Modern Critical Edition* is meant "For Undergraduates, Lecturers, Actors, Play-lovers". The purchase of each of the printed volumes allows twelve months of free access to the online edition, which is meant "For All Users". The last two volumes, *The Complete Alternative Versions*: *Modern Critical Edition* (in modern spelling) and *The Complete Alternative Versions*: *Critical Reference Edition* (in original spelling) are forthcoming (Taylor *et al.* in press).

[10] Suzanne Gossett has remarked on the risk of making these online materials literally 'disappear': "Textual notes become even more invisible if banished to the ether, where a print reader must actively choose to encounter them, rather than being placed at the back of a volume" (2021, p. 216). The online section includes also links to the *YouTube Norton Shakespeare* channel that allows access to online video materials.

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Web. Currently staticized by the University of Victoria while it is updated to join the platform *LEMDO* (*Linked Early Modern Drama Online*),[11] *ISE* offers a remarkable case study which allows us to shed light on the several issues at stake in Shakespeare digital editing. In the case of *King Lear* (2001), edited by Best himself, the 'modern', 'extended modern' and 'old-spelling transcription' of both Q1 (1608) and F1 (1623), as well as the 'old-spelling transcription' of Q2 (1619), are "arranged in layers with the modern spelling text, the surface text and the old spelling transcription and facsimiles a click away" (2008, pp. 222-223). Within this hypertextual space, the reader is thus free to jump to a specific line, using the Through Line Numbers field, or to open any of the textual versions of the tragedy from the beginning. Best himself illustrates the advantages of the hypertextual form that

> makes the display of variant editions more visually intuitive […] the screen can show through parallel windows or color-coded text a fully inclusive edition where variant passages can be seen together or separately, and where readers can manipulate the result to create their own preferred or conflated text. (2011, p. 572)

Furthermore, choosing "Show variants" or "Display variant inline" from the left hand tool-box, the selected textual variants – as they appear in a wider range of other editions – are displayed either underlined (Fig. 1), or side by side, in different colors (Fig. 2). In both cases, pop-up windows may be opened to reveal the variants' textual provenance. Lear's final speech may be thus visualized in the following display modes that can be changed at the click of the mouse:

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[11] *ISE* (emeritus coordinating editor Michael Best) will join the platform *LEMDO* (coordinating editors Janelle Jenstad and Brett Greatley-Hirsch). For further details, see https://lemdo.uvic.ca/.
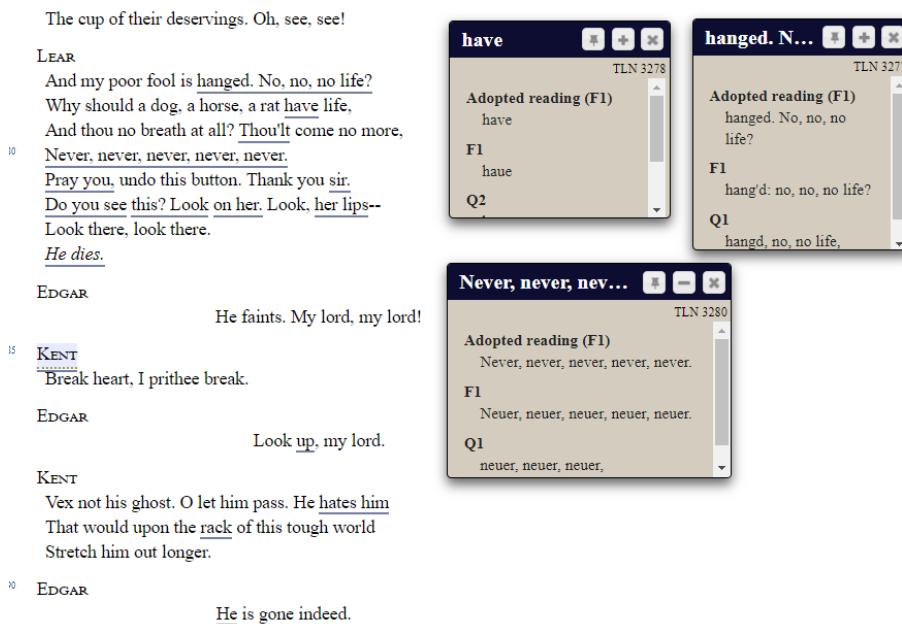
Figure 1

W. Shakespeare 2001, *King Lear* (Modern, Folio), Ed. Michael Best, in M. Best (emeritus coordinating editor), *Internet Shakespeare Editions*. Staticized by the University of Victoria 2018. Web. Accessed August 10, 2021. ise.uvic.ca
https://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/doc/Lr_FM/scene/5.3/
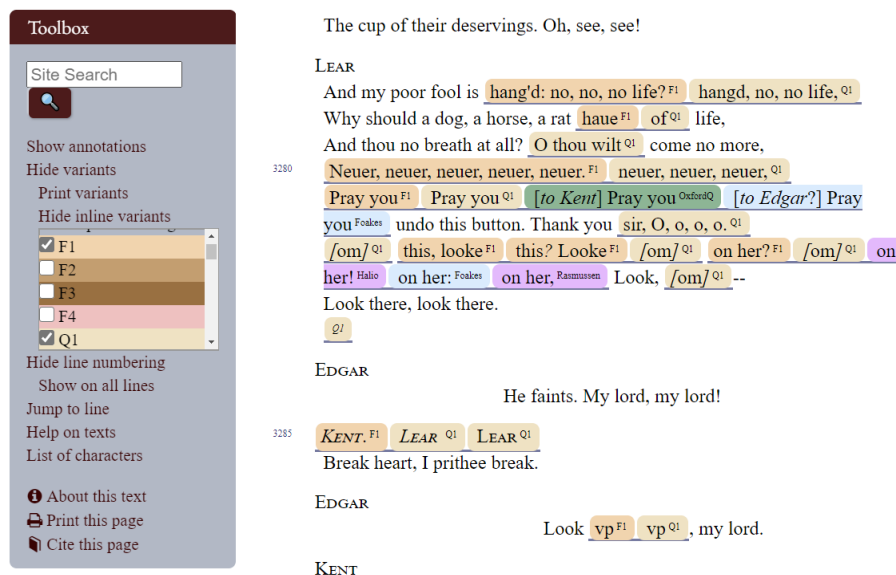
Figure 2

W. Shakespeare 2001, *King Lear* (Modern, Folio), Ed. Michael Best, in M. Best (emeritus coordinating editor), *Internet Shakespeare Editions*. Staticized by the University of Victoria 2018. Web. Accessed August 10, 2021. ise.uvic.ca
https://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/doc/Lr_FM/scene/5.3/

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The multi-layered space of Best's interactive edition encourages us to consider the play's textual versions as equivalent alternatives, thus undermining any hierarchical order between them, as the scholar points out: "my approach in editing *King Lear*, with the creation of two base and two extended texts, is effectively agnostic about the primacy of the two versions and makes no assumptions about the nature of the revision that created the differences between them" (2001, online). This approach largely responds to what Leah Marcus has categorized as the *unediting* purpose of exhibiting the plays' unstable textuality, "creat[ing] editions that stimulate readers to experience elements of 'undecidability' in their reading of Shakespeare" (2007, p. 142).

It is crucial to consider how such an editorial solution affects the hermeneutic potential of the scene. How does it add, for instance, to the reader's understanding of Lear's "swift oscillation" (Milne 2002, p. 62) between joy and grief? No doubt, as some scholars have argued, we also need to reflect on what kind of reader, or 'user' (Fazel, Geddes 2017) can mostly benefit from these 'textual performances'. In this sense, we should take into account also the risks of "amplifying the potential dangers of a radical indeterminacy" (Drakakis 2007, p. 232) within a context in which the line between editing and unediting, appropriate editorial support and unnecessary interference with the reader's textual experience, becomes increasingly difficult to draw. After all, Leah Marcus herself has admitted that an edition embracing all the textual potentialities of a play would be "so formless as to be unusable in practice for all but the most sophisticated readers" (2007, p. 142).

Nor are the solutions adopted to approach Shakespeare's textual multiplicity the sole thorny aspects that have drawn scholarly attention. Indeed, also the possibility to include theoretically unlimited levels of annotation and commentary – which the user may choose whether to show or hide with one click – has appeared to bring about both promises and potential challenges in digital scholarly editions. To a large extent, *ISE* epitomizes what Jerome McGann identified as the *hyperediting* model in "hypertexts [that] allow one to navigate through large masses of documents and to connect these documents, or parts of the documents, in complex ways" (2001, p. 57). In Best's *King Lear*, in particular, the main editorial apparatus is structured in three distinct levels responding to the readers' different interests and, accordingly requiring different forms of editorial mediation: "The first level is a simple gloss or explanatory phrase; the second is a full annotation to the level of an edition like the Arden; the third is reserved for full discussions of an important point, of the kind that might become an appendix in a print edition." (Best 2007, pp. 159-160). Additionally, the site hosts a selection of digital facsimiles (including two quartos and four folios, along with the editions by Rowe, Pope and Theobald), a wide range of extracts from the sources – comprising Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and*

Ireland, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *The History of the Kings of Britain*, Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and the anonymous *History of King Leir* – several documents from the literary, political, and social context, as well as performance materials related to *King Lear*'s film and stage adaptations.

A 'professional' reader interested in textual issues can thus currently choose to dwell on F1 and Q1 old-spelling transcriptions, and to explore the digital facsimiles of those editions, while a reader with different interests can opt for the modern version of the playtext provided as a "quick start", then following, for one, the links to the *Shakespeare in Performance* section, featuring images of several stage and film adaptations. Similarly, whereas the "Textual Introduction" offers an extensive scholarly examination of the play's textual problems and of the theoretical principles underlying its complex editorial history, the link to the more informative *Life & Times* website section provides a general outline of the social, historical, cultural and literary issues related to the tragedy.

Allowing access to such a huge variety of materials in interactive spaces that are clearly unimaginable on the printed page, Best's edition exemplifies what have appeared to be both the unquestionable advantages and the potential threats of the digital turn in editing. It has been argued that, whilst broadening the user's horizons by multiplying the reading paths, the hypertextual form is "far from being a universal panacea for all woes caused by printing technology", and attention has been drawn to the "new cognitive problems" raised by such flexible visualizations that "encourage a continuous switching between various points of views on the texts" (Apollon, Bélise 2014, p. 111). Undeniably, key issues should be taken into account when assessing what is gained and what is lost by allowing users to navigate across Shakespeare's textual variants and a wide range of supplementary information. Indeed, if it is beyond dispute that new generations of digital native students and scholars will increasingly expect innovative textual encounters with Shakespeare in the Web, one should not overlook the problem of establishing the amount of "information readers can reasonably be expected to absorb while simultaneously working their way through a play" (Erne, Kidnie 2004, p. 13). In this sense, too many links requiring decision-making processes while reading have proved to result in excessive cognitive load, often reducing textual comprehension (Madrid *et al.* 2009).

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4. The archival turn: towards new hermeneutic horizons

To a large extent, the ongoing reconfiguration of editorial practice has appeared to go far beyond what an *edition* may be reasonably expected to do, as testified by a lively debate in which terminological discrepancies often bear traces of deeper theoretical divergences. If Peter Shillingsburg has introduced the broader notion of "knowledge site" (2006, p. 88) and Kenneth Price proposes the definition of "thematic research collection" (2009, online), it can be argued that a general reconceptualization of editing in terms of *archiving* has emerged in the last few years (Dillen 2019). Indeed, many individual projects are currently designed in line with the trend identified by the MLA Scholarly Editions Committee of a few years ago: "a key trend in scholarly editing itself is toward the creation of an edition as a single perspective on a much-larger-scale text archive" (Young 2015, online). Needless to say, such distinctions remain fluid within a background in which "some projects that started by calling themselves editions have later changed their name to archive" […] and "some projects that started by calling themselves archives have later changed their name to edition" (Sahle 2016, p. 34).

Overall, the archive paradigm has appeared to be in tune with Shakespeare's plural textuality (Massai 2004, p. 103) and to provide, as Alan Galey has pointed out in *The Shakespearean Archive*, "a useful set of metaphors for thinking about the transmission and preservation of literary texts like Shakespeare's" considering, above all, "the degree to which his unstable textual archive is made to bear the weight of cultural heritage in Western tradition" (2014, pp. 1, 3). The MIT *Shakespeare Electronic Archive* – where digital versions of the playtexts and of primary materials are dynamically interlinked – demonstrates, among other instances, how useful the archival logic can be for approaching Shakespeare drama.

Many other questions arise, however, which are still at the core of the debate. In some measure, the archival turn has appeared to entail a weakening of the editorial function. Assuming that "in the future, an electronic Shakespeare edition will be treated more as an archive for searching than as a way of reading the plays from beginning to end" (Best 2007, pp. 154-155), it has been argued that the editor runs the risk of being reduced to a mere "redactor, mediator, and online publisher" whose only function is "to facilitate wider public use" (Apollon, Bélise 2014, p. 112). On the other hand, however, it has not gone unnoticed that digital archives undeniably require new, and more complex editorial strategies in order to guide the readers across their intricate interactive spaces.

Of course, a distinction is necessary between what Christy Desmet defines "crowd-sourced websites" where "anyone, anywhere, can upload any clip that they can lay their hands on and that catches their fancy", and

"scholarly archives" that are carefully planned and shaped by scholars" (2017, online). If it is true that "to edit entails *making choices*" (Paul 2014, p. 183, my emphasis), it is beyond dispute that the Shakespearean scholarly archives that are proliferating on the Web vindicate that archives *are* "edited", as Alan Galey has put it (2016, online). Wide-ranging though an archive may aspire to be, it necessarily requires, to begin with, a selection of the virtually limitless available materials in order to offer an acceptable amount of information (Massai 2004, p. 102). Neither is the very notions of archive, as such, incompatible with the 'authoritative' position of an invisible *power* that governs it. As Derrida reminds us: the word archive derives from the Greek *arkheion*, the house of the archons, who "were considered to possess the right to make or to represent the law […]. They do not only ensure the physical security of what is deposited and of the substrate. They are also accorded the hermeneutic right and competence. They have the power to interpret the archives" (1996, pp. 9-10).

But what is more important, and crucial to the theoretical perspective underpinning this article, is that the advent of new digital technologies significantly "reconfigures the agents and activities that define our textual culture" (Deegan, Sutherland 2009, p. 63). In this light, it cannot go unnoticed how the 'hyperediting' and 'archiving' models that are emerging in web-based environments inaugurate thoroughly new editorial strategies in line with a radical reshaping of print-inflected views of text, author, reader and, accordingly, of the editorial function.[12] As George Landow already claimed in the early 1990s, the "chains or trials of links" in new hypertextual spaces undeniably respond to the editor's criteria of relevance: they "might themselves constitute a new form of scholarly writing, and annotations in the form of such *guided tours* might conceivably become part of the future scholarly edition" (1992, p. 73). More recently, Michael Best has identified a new medium-specific form of 'multilinear' scholarly writing in hypertextual environments. In opposition to the traditional "linear argument leading to an overall thesis", where "all the traditional rhetorical devices to persuade will be used to claim that the argument is indeed conclusive" (2009, p. 36), Best has envisaged the birth of a "new generation of scholars, for whom the conventions of hypertextuality are instinctive", and who will be able to create a new "kind of criticism that uses the electronic medium to present alternatives rather than single lines of argument" (2009, p. 36).

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[12] Furthermore, "[i]n addition to traditional textual critical skills, the publisher of a digital edition requires technical expertise in programming and software development, textual encoding, interface design, methods of digitizing analogue materials, and digital content management" (Greatley-Hirsch, Jenstad 2016, p. 107).

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Today, the great affordances of the digital medium in this respect emerge particularly when considering the growing number of digital editions and archives whose links redirect users to external sources, to other "visuals, images, videos, blogs, and online web pages that host additional reading content (often replete with their own hyperlinks)" (Fazel, Geddes 2017, p. 2). This leads us to reflect on the still partly unexplored potential of interoperable digital projects and resources that are gaining increasing scholarly attention. "Broadly speaking", as Marina Buzzoni explains, interoperability is "the ability to share information in computing environments […] thus enhancing the possibility of interaction within the scientific community in time and extension" (2016, p. 60). Positing that "no project is an island […], as John Donne might have put it, were he alive today", Laura Estill and Andie Silva have remarked on "the importance of understanding digital resources as part of a larger, networked community" (2018, p. 141) within the more specific field of Shakespearean studies. Undeniably, a rising number of digital projects on early modern literature and culture are establishing connections with fully-searchable corpora, electronic databases, archives and bibliographies, thus substantiating the trend towards growing forms of interoperability in this area.[13]

In the light of these observations, it is worth bearing in mind that *ISE* itself is one of the outcomes of the same principles inspiring the *Renaissance Knowledge Base* (*RKB*), a huge computer-searchable library assembling primary and secondary sources related to the early modern period. Launched in the 1990s, *RKB* responded to the scholars' need to "navigate and explore [the] accumulated knowledge" in early modern studies:

> […] considerable related work was soon to follow, some by the principals of the RKB project and much by those beyond it, such as […] Michael Best (*Internet Shakespeare Editions*), Gregory Crane (*Perseus Digital Library*), Patricia Fumerton (*English Broadside Ballad Archive*), Ian Lancashire (*Lexicons of Early Modern English*), and Greg Waite (*Textbase of Early Tudor English*). (Siemens *et al.* 2011, online)

At present, the extant links between the *Internet Shakespeare Editions* and other projects, such as the *Queen's Men Editions*, are evidence of an important cross-referencing trend, which is most notably testified by design to include the two sibling websites within the broader frame of the above-mentioned platform

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[13] The *Map of Early Modern London* (*MoEML*) directed by Janelle Jenstad, which "is comprised of seven distinct interoperable projects", provides a remarkable instance in this regard. See website for details: http://mapoflondon.uvic.ca

LEMDO.[14] Interestingly, while navigating across the sources of *King Lear*, the reader of Best's edition can currently access the anonymous *History of King Leir* in the *Queen's Men Editions* website. Under the general editorship of Helen Ostovich, it includes two parallel sections for the play, respectively edited by Andrew Griffin and Peter Cockett: the former offering an old-spelling version of the 1605 playtext and a modernized one; the latter allowing access to the production archives and videos of the 2006 *Shakespeare and the Queen's Men Project*. Thus, while reading the modern version of the playtext, the user can access a video for each of the thirty-two scenes by selecting the corresponding link (Fig. 3). This is in line with the 'performance as research' principles underpinning the overall project (Ostovich *et al.* 2009) which places, as the website points out, "the production and performance of plays at the center of the research endeavor as an important and dynamic complement to library research on surviving texts" (online).

Figure 3
Anon., *King Leir* (Modern), in *Queen Men's Editions*. Gen. Eds. Helen Ostovich (text), Peter Cockett (performance), and Andrew Griffin (text). Staticized by the University of Victoria 2018. Web. Accessed August 10, 2021: http://qme.uvic.ca/edition/Leir/

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[14] Like *ISE*, also *QME* is currently staticized by the University of Victoria while the website is updated to join the platform *LEMDO* (*Linked Early Modern Drama Online*). *Digital Renaissance Editions* (*DRE*) will also join *LEMDO*: https://lemdo.uvic.ca/

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Begun as a "research-creation exercise in theatrical history" (Cockett 2009, p. 229), *QME* offers ground-breaking responses to the problems raised by the "profoundly complicated relationship that exists between script and performance", and provides a remarkable experiment in interdisciplinary approaches to early modern theatre: it "make[s] visible the productive tensions that emerge when textual editors come together with performance-oriented theatre scholars and practitioners to produce a digital edition" (Griffin 2014, p. 85).

It is tempting to imagine how dynamic links to other external digital resources and tools could enhance the affordances of a digital scholarly edition of Shakespeare's *King Lear* in the wake of Michael Best's pioneering model. New links directing the reader to Peter Donaldson's *Global Shakespeare Video and Performance Archive*, for instance, that currently includes various productions of the tragedy from different continents, could open up new perspectives on the performance of the text.[15] Similarly, a digital edition exploring the affordances of a ground-breaking visualization tool like *Simulated Environment for Theatre* (SET) would help users appreciate the relationship between the playtext and its potential on stage by means of a 3D "Stage view" where coloured avatar actors move on the screen, alongside the text, on scale models of early modern playhouses.[16] Thus, the crucial implications of the different textual versions of Lear's death illustrated above could be exemplified also by considering their staging potentialities.[17] This aspect acquires major relevance considering how "the digital edition is particularly well suited to the needs of the performance edition, and, indeed, resolves some of the longstanding challenges for editors wishing to edit for performance" (Greatley-Hirsch, Jenstad 2016, p. 108).

From a different perspective, with a view to offering insights into *King Lear*'s linguistic and poetic features – considering, for instance, how the semantic areas of madness, chaos, vision and blindness are woven into the play's complex linguistic texture – specific polysemic words in the playtext

[15] The "Global *King Lear* in Performance" section, in the "Study Modules" of Donaldson's archive, currently redirects the reader to the Folio version of the tragedy in the *ISE* website.

[16] Launched by a team of researchers in graphic design, theatre and digital humanities from several Universities across Canada, *SET* challenges the long-established "primary ontological integrity" of the text as the unique reference point for readers: its main focus is on "the process of moving from text to performance", and above all on the constant interaction between them. See Roberts-Smith *et al.* (2013), online.

[17] A remarkable model of a different solution in this respect is provided by *Richard Brome Online*, an online edition of the Caroline dramatist's texts, which "explore[s] their theatricality visually" by commissioning and recording performances of specific scenes: the short video clips included in the website, acted by members of the Royal Shakespeare Company, illustrate the staging potentialities of selected dramatic moments, "which are explored in workshop with professional actors and a director". See website: http://www.dhi.ac.uk/brome.

*L*ingue e
*L*inguaggi

could be profitably hyperlinked to a corpus-based tool of analysis like *LEME* (*Lexicons of Early Modern English*), which displays the lexical mobility of single words in Early Modern English over a chosen time span.[18] And still broader horizons could be disclosed by offering the user direct access to digitally-assisted tools of 'quantitative' reading. The project of a digital edition of *King Lear* including also a collection of precompiled corpora with guided search options could lay bare aspects of the text that would be hard to perceive at the level of close reading. In this way, users could be guided to explore the occurrence of particular lists or clusters of words in the play by comparison with their occurrence in the entire corpus of Shakespeare's works, or in a reference corpus of early modern texts within specific domains of interest, thus experimenting with innovative ways of approaching the play that go far beyond traditional concordances and unquestionably open new reading perspectives.[19]

5. Conclusion

The virtually boundless possibilities of the digital medium have prompted Shakespearean scholars to imagine futuristic scenarios:

> Imagine a corpus of videos of stage and screen performances of Shakespeare. Imagine that the script/play-text of each of these videos has been transcribed and is fully searchable, such that a user searching for 'love' is able to quickly navigate between instances of the word across the entire corpus, and therefore able to quickly compare different film and stage interpretations. Imagine the inclusion of additional layers of metadata – bibliographical information, as well as details and observations on technical aspects of the performances, such as lighting, music and sound; set design and location; costuming; camera angle; special effects; etc. – all tied to the video in time-specific, fully searchable utterances. (Greatley-Hirsch *et al.* 2009, p. 7)

Whether, and to what extent, such results will be achieved is clearly hard to foresee. Admittedly, the convergence of diverse tools and digital resources is "not only possible – because of the flexibility of the medium – but is already happening" (Jenstad *et al*. 2018, p. 4) and this promises to bring us closer to the integration of the two typologies of digital projects identified by Ray

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[18] For more in-depth analysis of the potential for convergence between *ISE* and *LEME*, see Jenstad *et al.* (2018, pp. 3-4).

[19] *Text Analysis Portal for Research* (PAoR archive: http://tapor.ca/home) is mentioned in the *ISE* "Making Links" section. For other instances in this respect, see the *DocuScope*-based "prosthetic reading" (Hope, Witmore 2004), or open-source tools for corpus-based analysis, such as *Voyant Tools* or *#Lancsbox* software. The affordances of a corpus linguistics/stylistics approach to Shakespeare are investigated at length in Maristella Gatto's article in this volume.

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Siemens, namely the *hypertext edition*, facilitating "a reader's interaction with the apparatus (textual, critical, and otherwise) that traditionally accompanies scholarly editions", and the *dynamic texts*, offering "text-retrieval and analysis software" (1998, online). Nonetheless, as Brett Greatley-Hirsch and Janelle Jenstad themselves have aptly pointed out, it would be a mistake to underestimate the thorny issues that still need to be faced in the practice of digital editing: unquestionably, "the alluring promises of digital editions blind many would-be editors to the sober realities of the undertaking" (2016, p. 107). Indeed, digital projects and tools raise problems of websites maintenance, cost and technological obsolescence, among others, which have been only partially addressed[20] and deserve particular attention in the light of the growing interoperability of web-based resources.

No doubt, within an experimentation field that is still in its infancy, each editorial project seems to be defined by a somewhat intrinsic *prototype* condition that makes it hardly comparable to any other project: "while the print technology has developed standard editorial templates and formats, more or less constrained by the physical boundaries of pages and bindings, the digital medium is still experimenting with the available possibilities and is not limited by space" (Pierazzo 2014b, p. 39). But what is certainly emerging within this rapidly evolving scenario is a shift from a print-based notion of the 'edition' as an individual, final *product* to a web-based view of 'editing' as an ongoing collaborative *process*. Without disregarding that "collaboration is one of the most difficult aspects of the digital world" and that "there is little tradition for it in the humanities" (Shillingsburg 2017, p. 136), it is a matter of fact that "the digital edition is not hermetically sealed. It invites interaction, correction, and extension" (Greatley-Hirsch, Jenstad 2016, p. 111).

Considering that the capacity for continuous revision is one of the most remarkable features of digital projects, diverse models for dynamic interaction involving not only scholars but also expert readers/users have been explored with different purposes. As early as 2005, Paul Eggert introduced the notion of *work-site*, meant as a place where 'work' is constantly 'under construction' as the result of cooperative meaning-making processes: "[t]he work-site is text-construction site for the editor and expert reader; and it is the site of study of the work (of its finished textual versions and their annotation) for the first-time reader, as well as any position in between" (2005, p. 433). In the same years, Peter Shillingsburg proposed the concept of *knowledge site* as a collaborative digital environment:

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[20] The *Shakespeare Quarto Archives* website, for instance, was withdrawn in April 2020 as "the technologies which it is built with have reached end-of-life": www.quartos.org. The SSHRC-funded *Endings Project* is currently creating guidelines, "policies and recommendations for digital scholarship practitioners" to build sustainable digital humanities projects with long-lasting resources (Carlin *et al.* 2016, online).

> […] a space and a shape for developing electronic editions that will serve not only as archives but as knowledge sites that would enable the kind of reading imagined. The space and shape I will try to describe is one where textual archives serve as a base for scholarly editions which serve in tandem with every other sort of literary scholarship to create knowledge sites of current and developing scholarship that can also serve as pedagogical tools in an environment where each user can choose an entry way, select a congenial set of enabling contextual materials, and emerge with a personalized interactive form of the work (serving the place of the well-marked and dog-eared book), always able to plug back in for more information or different perspectives. (2006: 88)

The more recent academic debate in this field has highlighted the radical reconceptualization of the role of the reader in digital environments as both *user* (Fazel, Geddes 2017) and *coworker* (Rasmussen 2016) and it has been shown how editorial practice may benefit from the contribution of content created collaboratively by web-communities.[21]

Regardless, however, of whether we are moving towards the integration of print and digital formats that "can in turn enhance usability and versatility of both paper and online editions" (Massai 2021, p. 256), or rather towards the further enhancement of born-digital editions and interoperable resources, also within collaborative spaces – which is hard to predict – it is the intrinsic flexibility of the new digital 'textual spaces' and their new 'materiality' that deserve particular attention. As this article has attempted to illustrate, it is this flexibility that lets us envisage promising directions for the development of Shakespearean editing. Stanley Wells has imagined a near future in which new editions will adjust to the diverse objectives of editors, those "who have in mind readers whose interest is mainly academic, who see the plays as primarily literary texts" and those who "conceive that their editions will be read by theatre-goers, and by students who are encouraged to think of the plays in theatrical terms, and may even be used by actors" (Wells 2016, p. 414). In the wake of these observations, it is tempting to imagine how, further improving the affordances of current digital models, the same editorial project could be designed to adapt to the different backgrounds, needs and interests of diverse readerships, offering various perspectives, levels of in-depth analysis and possibilities of 'active' engagement with the text.

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[21] The *Social Edition of the Devonshire Manuscript* (*BL MS 17,492*) directed by Ray Siemens offers a remarkable instance in this respect. Published as a Wikibook in 2015, it "brings communities together to engage in conversation around a text formed and reformed through an ongoing, iterative, public editorial process." https://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/The_Devonshire_Manuscript

Such a project would blur, or at least problematize, the rigid boundaries between the traditional categories we are familiar with: the *performance* edition, the "*reading* edition without any hint about a potentially complex tradition", the *critical* edition "with a critical apparatus and extensive commentary", and the "*documentary* edition (or editions) possibly accompanied by many facsimiles to allow inspection of the original documents by themselves" (Pierazzo 2014a, p. 8 my emphasis). And if it is true that "the changes in the way we work (the *heuristics* of editing)" always imply "also changes in the understanding of scholarly editing and of the texts we edit (the *hermeneutics* of editing)" (Driscoll, Pierazzo 2016, p. 3), the ongoing evolution promises to disclose new hermeneutic horizons in the study of early modern drama. By redefining both reading habits and editorial practices, as illustrated in these pages, the new 'materiality' of the digital medium affects our engagement with and understanding of Shakespeare's textual heritage.

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LINK IT "TO THE SOURCE FROM WHENCE IT CAME"
Shakespeare Source Study after the Digital Turn

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Abstract – This paper discusses the digitally inflected changes occurring in Shakespeare source study – a long-standing research field that burst back into prominence over the last few years. The recent publication of volumes such as *Shakespeare, Origins, and Originality* (Holland 2015), *Rethinking Shakespeare Source Study* (Britton, Walter 2018) or *Shakespeare's Resources* (Drakakis 2021) vouches indeed for a steady resurgence of interest in "the circulation, transformation and function of Shakespeare's sources" (Bigliazzi 2018, p. 13) – a rising tide heightened, no doubt, by the proliferation of electronic archives, digital critical editions, wiki databases, and corpus-based searching tools designed to bring early modern (inter)textuality into sharper focus. This "flood of digital possibilities" (Lavagnino 2014, p. 21) has greatly impacted on Shakespeare source criticism, modelling new ways to explore and identify the intertextual, subtextual, and contextual forms of influence that shaped the playwright's production. In this essay, such an ongoing shift of perspectives is examined by sorting through a series of digital methodologies and resources that show promise in improving how we visualise, analyse, and identify Shakespeare's diverse sources. Laying emphasis on the dovetailing of "'old source study' and more contemporary approaches to textual and cultural analysis" (Britton, Walter 2018, p. 1) fostered by the digital medium, the paper illustrates the benefits, limits, and prospects of digital editing and archiving, quantitative analyses, wiki databases, and digital thick mapping for the study of Shakespeare's creative process and early modern European theatricality *tout court*.

Keywords: Shakespeare source study; digital archiving; quantitative analyses; wiki databases; digital thick mapping.

1. Introduction

"Source study is, as we all know, the elephants' graveyard of literary history". These are the often-quoted words used by Stephen Greenblatt (1985, p. 163) to address a suspicion that has long haunted Shakespeareans: after decades of fruitful researches, has source criticism run its due course, morphing into a "tired terrain" (Harris 1994, p. 408), a "faint and overgrown" path (Bilton 2000, online) no longer worth following?

  More than fifty years have passed since the publication of the ground-

breaking *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (Bullough 1957-1975), but the recent appearance of volumes such as *Shakespeare, Origins, and Originality* (Holland 2015), *Rethinking Shakespeare Source Study* (Britton, Walter 2018), or *Shakespeare's Resources* (Drakakis 2021) vouches for a steady resurgence of interest in the "circulation, transformation and function of Shakespeare's sources" (Bigliazzi 2018, p. 13). A rising tide heightened, no doubt, by the digital turn in Humanities – the proliferation of electronic archives, wiki databases, and corpus-based searching tools that prompted a new approach to Shakespearean textuality and, by extension, to Shakespeare source study. Bringing an unprecedented amount of primary texts to scholars' fingertips and offering new ways to view, collect, and cross-examine data, these technologies pledge to provide "new models for bringing together what might be considered an 'old source study'", i.e. the rather static linear investigations championed by Positivism, and the "more contemporary approaches to textual and cultural analysis" (Britton, Walter 2018, p. 1) fostered by New Historicism and Cultural Materialism, thereby complying with the dynamic reconceptualization of the notion of 'source' put forward between the 1980s and the 2000s.

Over those decades, scholars like Michail Bakhtin, Cesare Segre, Robert S. Miola, and Alessandro Serpieri started indeed to challenge linear models of intertextual transmission by developing the more inclusive paradigms of 'dialogism' (Bakhtin 1979; cited in Holquist 2002), 'interdiscursivity' (Segre 1984), 'indirect influence of traditions' (Miola 2000), 'polyphony' (Serpieri 2002), with the effect of calling attention to the inherent dynamism of early modern transtextual exchanges. This ignited, in turn, a crucial theoretical shift from stasis to motion, from sources understood as single texts or events to sources meant as heterogeneous "*relationship[s]* between that text or event" and the work that originated from it (Levin 1998, p. 226).

Relating this "infinite" conceptual "expansion" to Shakespearean source study, Stephen Lynch went on to remark that

> Shakespeare certainly […] chose (or accepted) particular texts to rewrite and refashion for the stage. Yet virtually all of Shakespeare's revisionary strategies were shaped and influenced by multiple forces beyond authorial control – not only the historical, political, and religious contexts of early modern England, but also the more particular forces that would bear upon a professional playwright, such as contemporary stage practices, generic decorum, audience expectations, the number and qualities of available actors, state censorship, and even the geographical locus and marginal cultural status of the theater itself. (1998, p. 2)

The digital realm seems particularly suited to thematise this broadened view of source relations, as the platforms and tools there harboured can illuminate not only lexical and narrative borrowings but also the less visible, subtextual

modes of intercultural and environmental influence that contributed to shaping Shakespeare's plays. In this sense, one of the main advantages of source study "in the Google Age" is precisely that it needs "no longer deal in the categorization of correspondences into linear structural relationships, but in mapping complex webs of connotation and resonance" (Greatley-Hirsch, Johnson 2018, p. 254) that transcend verbal congruences to include "sources for which there is no evidence of textual transmission" (Britton, Walter 2018, p. 6) and even non-verbal, immaterial forms of contextual agency.

In what follows, this ongoing shift of perspectives will be examined by sorting through a series of digital resources that show promise in improving how we visualise, analyse, and identify Shakespeare's diverse sources. First, attention will be paid to the traditional research paradigm of linear transmission, arguing for the affordances of open-access multilingual archives for more comprehensive, multivariate research into the textuality of long-known Shakespearean sources. Then, light will be shed on the impact of string-matching algorithms, crowdsourced scholarly databases, and digital thick mapping on the identification of previously unnoticed connections – both textual and non-textual in nature –, discussing these tools' strengths and prospects without glossing over their potential weaknesses.

2. Tradition revisited: exploring Shakespeare's long-known sources in digital environments

Let us start by considering the ways in which digital technologies can affect the most traditional mode of investigation in the genealogy of Shakespeare's plays – linear transmission. In this respect, it will not come as a surprise that the majority of the playwright's direct sources have long been pinpointed and examined, mainly through the lens of stemmatics:[1] Geoffrey Bullough's extensive, though not necessarily accurate, survey is a testament to the positivistic faith in "linear certainty" (Houlahan 2013, p. 158), i.e. in the possibility of identifying "the single prior source of any given story […] with surety in the progression of one story to the next" (Houlahan 2013, p. 158). This belief was rooted in an assumed capacity to single out specific works that could have been within Shakespeare's reach at a given time, therefore leaving unmistakable lexical traces on his production.

While there certainly are cases in which this method proves rewarding – one can think, for instance, of the parallels between North's translation of

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[1] This methodology, originally employed in classical and medieval editing, allows to describe intertextual relationships in hierarchical terms, distinguishing between hypothetical archetypal texts and their subsequent variations and corruptions.

Plutarch's *Lives* and *Anthony and Cleopatra* – such a narrow view of Shakespeare's compositional *iter* showed all its limitations in the long run. Not coincidentally, Bullough himself appeared increasingly dissatisfied with the unevenness of his classification: "his adoption of the category of 'analogue' indicates unease with the more straightforward linear derivations that inform the categories of 'probable source', 'source', and 'possible source'", John Drakakis points out (2018, p. 58), thus signposting the more blurred, at times unintentional intertextual transactions that permeate Shakespearean textuality.

If Bullough never came to question the playwright's authorial intentionality, projecting his proclivity "to incorporate allusions, attitudes, and ideas which he might otherwise have omitted" onto his "immediate literary milieu" (Bullough 1975, p. 345), Kenneth Muir opened up to the possibility that Shakespeare "relied on his unconscious mind" (1977, p. 253) for some of the contaminations at the basis of his works. "We cannot hope to track down more than a small fraction of the passages which Shakespeare made use of", he admits, "for there is no reason to doubt that he was influenced by conversation as well as by the written word, and often he must have composed lines which resemble those of earlier poets to whom he was not even indirectly indebted" (1977, p. 15).

Taking the argument one step further, Lynch suggested that

> though traditional source studies have tended to see sources as static building blocks that Shakespeare picked over, rearranged, and artfully improved, the sources themselves can be reexamined as products of intertextuality – endlessly complex, multilayered fields of interpretation that Shakespeare refashioned and reconfigured into alternative fields of interpretation. We can reconsider the source texts not merely as raw material for plot and character, but as dynamic and often inconsistent texts involving layers of implicit and subtextual suggestions. (1998, p. 1)

Such a widened consideration of source relations does not undermine one-to-one verbal parallels in favour of more evanescent, slippery modes of "subtextual" (Lynch 1998, p. 1) interaction. On the contrary, it allows to reconcile these interconnected instances by laying emphasis on the dynamic processes of intentional *and* unintentional transformation that underlie linear transmission, paving the way towards a more mindful application of this research paradigm.

Silvia Bigliazzi and the members of the *Skenè* Research Centre (University of Verona) are currently reaping the fruits of this change of views and, what is more, they are exploring its implications by relying upon digital technologies, specifically on digital editing and archiving.

The research prospects of these instruments are well-known to early modernists. Ever since the 1990s, digital scholarship practitioners in the field

have put to test their affordances by launching various websites – *Internet Shakespeare Editions (ISE)*, *Digital Renaissance Editions* (*DRE*), *Queen's Men Editions* (*QME*) to name but a few – envisaged to host authoritative digital-born editions of early modern plays and related high-standard critical apparatuses,[2] thus capitalising upon the preservation and dissemination granted by unrestricted online publications. At the time of writing, said resources are being brought together on a brand-new platform, *Linked Early Modern Drama Online* (*LEMDO*), a "TEI encoding, editing and anthology-building" database (*LEMDO*, online) designed to facilitate connections among the texts and tools nested in each sibling project and conjure up a multivocal, not exclusively Shakespearean reflection of early modern theatricality.

Against such a lively backdrop, what is truly new and alluring about *Skenè*'s project is the set-up of two digital archives devoted to Shakespeare's classical (*SCS*) and European narrative sources (*SENS*), meant to enable simultaneous multilingual and multimodal search into their early modern editions. The stated aim of these corpora *in fieri* is to illuminate what "Shakespeare and his contemporaries actually read" (*SENS*, online) by foregrounding the culturally and linguistically inflected phenomena of dissemination, translation, and adaptation that impinged on his sources throughout the Renaissance. "While we tend to take for granted the textual stability of sources", *SENS*'s homepage points out, "a closer exploration of the actual editions that may have been available at the time shows relevant textual differences bearing upon their reception" (online). It is desirable, therefore, to recover these works' textuality and restore them to the cultural milieu from which they stemmed, so as to gain a deeper understanding of the translative and/or adaptive alterations that may have affected Shakespeare's reinterpretation of them.

Grouping the playwright's classical and European narrative sources under one digital roof and favouring visualisations and comparisons "based on advanced" textual "segmentation and intermodal criteria of analysis" (*SENS*, online), *Skenè* holds the promise of creating the first open-access, easily searchable archive entirely focused on Shakespeare's source texts. Such a scholarly resource could fill in the gaps of Shakespeare source study by promoting intercultural reading into his plays' genealogy, giving new prominence to the web of intertextual, interdiscursive, mythopoetic practices that informed his – but virtually any of his contemporaries' – creative process.

In line with this model, I am also testing myself the advantages (and possible drawbacks) of this digitally inflected approach to early modern intertextuality while working on my PhD project, namely on the creation of an HTML-encoded corpus of meaningful scenes taken from sixteenth-century

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[2] For a recent critical overview of some of these resources, see Massai 2021.

English and French translations of Ariosto's *Suppositi* – a play that famously filtered in *The Taming of the Shrew* via Gascoigne's *Supposes*.

In the light of Bigliazzi's call for more extensive investigations into the genetic makeup of early modern European drama (2018, p. 39), I am preparing a sample of critically edited, interlinked, and hypertextual extracts of the playtexts covered by my research, selected on the basis of the philological, stylistic, thematic, and performative insights they offer with regards to their own textuality and the wider dynamics of transnational circulation and transformation that shaped them. To thematise such aspects, these digitized scripts are to be implemented with hyperlinks that will allow not only to toggle between the items in the corpus, thereby favouring internal crosschecks, but also to reach external scholarly resources that could make their "discursive environment" (Siemon 2009, p. 28) more intelligible. In line with this rationale, tricky lexemes will be unravelled thanks to cross-references to *Lexicons of Early Modern English* (*LEME*), the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, *Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana* (*GDLI*), and *Trésor de la Langue Française informatisé* (*TLFi*), which will also help to retrace these words' diachronic evolution and clarify "how contemporaries of Shakespeare understood" them (Lancashire, Tersigni 2017, p. 29). Hotlinks to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (*ODNB*), *Enciclopedia Treccani*, or *British History Online* (*BHO*) will then provide a valuable historical framing for the personalities and events alluded to by the playwrights, just like tags to the *Internet Archive,* the *British Library*, and *Gallica* will enable the visualisation of digital facsimiles of relevant primary sources both internal and external to the corpus.

An archive thus structured is of course not intended as a self-contained experiment, but rather as a testbed for further expansions aimed to improve the shareability and usability of its dataset. The ultimate goal is to promote awareness on how and why certain scripts were appropriated and refashioned in the early modern period, in an effort to throw their European circulation into relief without isolating them from their contextual frame of reference. In this sense, to quote Catherine Belsey,

> Writing, any writing, is unthinkable outside the existence of shared conventions of storytelling or staging, genre and decorum, not to mention the language itself in which they are intelligible. In that sense, all writing finds its origins somewhere else and its limited originality resides in its difference from what has gone before. Moreover, the places where writing originates are not themselves moments of pure origin. Habits of narrative, theatre, propriety, meaning emerge from previous practices in an infinite regress. (2015, p. 62)

Given the theoretical and methodological propositions hitherto recalled, source-oriented multilingual archives could be of great help in exploring such

"infinite" (Belsey 2015, p. 62) stratifications of borrowings and resonances, democratizing data accessibility while also building free new tools meant to enable a more comprehensive assessment of early modern (inter)textuality.

3. Unearthing new sources through digital tools: from unnoticed intertextual relations to immaterial influences

If the above-cited experiments testify to the value digital projects can add to the visualisation and analysis of Shakespeare's long-known sources, computer-aided searches and digital technologies could prove equally useful in illuminating the blind spots in the field, i.e. yet-unidentified forms of intertextual and subtextual exchange.

A pertinent, albeit divisive, example is given by Dennis McCarthy and June Schlueter's computational analysis of George North's *A Brief Discourse of Rebellion and Rebels* – a 1576 political treatise their study heralds as "a newly uncovered manuscript source for Shakespeare's plays" (McCarthy, Schlueter 2018, front cover). According to the editors, the assessment of this work – "one of the most influential Shakespearean source texts in any form", they claim (McCarthy, Schlueter 2018, p. 1) – was granted by an integrated use of *Early English Books Online-Text Creation Partnership* (*EEBO-TCP*, Phase II) and a freely-available plagiarism software application, *WCopyfind*. Following a methodology conveniently equated to "literary DNA" sequencing (McCarthy, Schlueter 2018, p. 2), McCarthy and Schlueter ran the database's over 60,000 digitized documents through the programme in search for parallel wordings and unique correspondences, thereby tracing "more than twenty Shakespearean monologues and passages back to North's essay" (2018, p. 3).

In presenting such results, the researchers rule out the possibility of happenstance by leveraging on the density and extent of the correspondences that link their 13,000-word manuscript to considerably longer Shakespearean plays – a set of specular passages "offered in the same context and sharing multiple words, phrases, and word groupings that were not merely unusual for Shakespeare but unique in the EEBO database" (McCarthy, Schlueter 2018, p. 89).

These premises are enticing, but the mixed responses drawn by the study are enough to curb unbridled enthusiasm. Whereas David Bevington marked McCarthy and Schlueter's findings as "impressive", hailing North's manuscript as "a truly significant" new Shakespearean source (McCarthy, Schlueter 2018, back cover), and Andrea Campana has acknowledged them the merit of having moved the exploration of "the milieu in which the canon of Shakespeare was written […] light years ahead" (Campana 2019, p. 193),

other early modernists have embraced more cautious, if not openly sceptical positions. It is "a stretch", Alan Stewart warns, "to believe that […] often commonplace discussions" such as those centred on the distortive effect of mirrors "are absolute proof of a borrowing" (2019, pp. 1155-1156) between North's *Discourse* and Shakespeare's *Richard III* (see McCarthy, Schlueter 2018, pp. 16-18). On a similar note, Rhodri Lewis finds it "slightly bewildering that anyone could see fit to discuss the representation of bees, hierarchy, and political order in early modern literature without referring to Book 4 of Virgil's *Georgics*" (2018, p. 516), as is the case in *A Brief Discourse* and Act I of *Henry V* (see McCarthy, Schlueter 2018, pp. 21-27). On top of that, the scholar questions the narrowness of McCarthy and Schlueter's textual sample, thereby contesting its probative value:

> It draws not on the complete corpus of early modern writing in English, whether preserved in print or manuscript; nor on the complete corpus of early modern English printed material registered in Pollard and Redgrave; nor even on that part of the body registered in Pollard and Redgrave which is reproduced in facsimile on EEBO. Instead, it depends on those parts of Pollard and Redgrave (currently around fifty percent) whose facsimiles have been digitally transcribed by EEBO-TCP. (Lewis 2018, p. 515)

McCarthy has fiercely countered these allegations, blaming Lewis's scathing review on the scholar's biased approach and "innocence of the field" (2018, online) of source study. Lewis, however, is not the only academic to have shown perplexity over McCarthy and Schlueter's *modus operandi*[3] – a fact that makes it legitimate to wonder whether the statistical, multivariate analysis they employed can be considered as a reliable new tool for Shakespeare source study. If so, what is the benchmark against which to measure its trustworthiness and applicability?

To come to grips with the issue, let us go back to the theoretical framework that supports these researchers' methodology. McCarthy and Schlueter were among the first to introduce string-matching algorithms into Shakespeare source study, but the employment of anti-plagiarism programmes in early modern literary studies, particularly in authorship attribution inquiries, is not trailblazing *per se* – Brian Vickers's publications alone speak volumes on the subject.[4] As is known, the viability of this method reposes on the widely accepted view of language as a "shared system" used by each person

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[3] See for instance Boyle 2018; De Benedictis 2019; Hess 2019.
[4] See Vickers 2008, 2009, 2014. See also Macdonald 2007; Palmer 2009; Taylor *et al.* 2017 and, for an overview of the related methodologies, Craig 2021.

in special and individual ways. Literary language is only an extreme form of
this self-expression. Writers, in fact, often seek to use language in new ways to
express their own sensibility, their own particular vision and interpretation.
This is especially helpful, then, because the data will show those particularities
and can establish individual profiles of literary writers more quickly. (Craig,
Kinney 2009, p. 8)

When correctly identified and collated with external evidence, this linguistic
fingerprinting can therefore contribute to tracing spurious or anonymous
works back to their alleged author. By the same token, distinctive verbal
parallels, pinpointed through the joint use of searchable databases, plagiarism
software, and processing algorithms, could be used to establish genetic links
between differently authored texts, with the result of unveiling hidden
intertextual relationships.

This computational approach to source study is clearly up-to-date and
exciting, yet it should never be forgotten that digital quantitative analyses are
not *ipso facto* unbiased or error-proof. More often than not, they actually
create a false perception of objectivity and reliability, induced by the
automatic data processing computers carry out. Even though machine-
assisted analytical procedures reduce the likelihood of human error, allowing
for quicker and more systematic textual siftings, it is indeed important to
remark that the input that triggers and organizes such processes depends
entirely on the operator's choices – a factor that makes room for all sorts of
procedural shortcomings. Furthermore, any dataset – be it gathered via pre-
digital or digital instruments – acquires meaning only when interpreted by
flesh and blood scholars: computers may give "literary criticism (and its
associated concerns such as authorship, development or influence) the means
by which we may substantially advance our knowledge of Shakespeare", but
the related findings will always have to be analysed by the human critic for
their "utility and interpretation to be determined" (Craig, Kinney 2009, p. 7).

This interpretative task is then further complicated by the disputable
nature of any quantitative survey's results:

The quantitative approach leads to measured uncertainty rather than absolute
findings. The methods foreground the possibility that a pattern is the result of
chance, for instance. Tests for statistical significance frame the result: is it the
sort of difference that we could expect to appear now and then, even when
there is no genuine underlying contrast, or, on the other hand, is it so marked
and persistent that it would take hundreds of trials of random data to come up
with something similar – or thousands, or millions? (Craig, Greatley-Hirsch
2017, p. 3)

This intrinsic margin of error could also be widened by the limited capacity
of digital archives themselves, which cannot be expected to cover the full

range of early modern English (let alone European) writing, even if operated in conjunction with one another. In the case of *EEBO-TCP*, for instance, we are offered painstakingly marked-up transcriptions of English-language works, but each record is still based on "one edition" (in most cases "the first"[5]) of said works, thus obscuring previous manuscript renderings and reprints. It follows that any crosscheck run through this corpus alone is doomed to lead to partial conclusions.

With these caveats in place, it is necessary to clarify that my aim here is not to discredit digital quantitative analyses or textual collations altogether – it would be anachronistic and quite short-sighted to do so – but rather to call attention to the potential pitfalls involved in such methodologies. Whereas it is evident that the joint use of string-matching software and machine-readable databases enables faster, more accurate comparisons among texts, increasing the chances of revealing unnoticed verbal correspondences, it is important not to overlook these procedures' limitations in terms of scope, objectivity, and capacity, with a view to encouraging rigorously scrutinized approaches to them. After all, one needs only to look away from binary, source-derivative relationships and consider the broader theatrical context Shakespeare participated in to become fully aware of such inherent deficiencies.

Roslyn L. Knutson, David McInnis, and Matthew Steggle have for example underlined that "no account of early modern literary culture is complete without the acknowledgment of" the substantial "lacunae" (2020, p. 2) that obscure the field – a copious amount of losses that, in the case of drama, encompasses not only playtexts but also non-performative documents, events, and even people associated with the early modern theatrical scene. We have hitherto discussed how digital technology can impact the visualisation and cross-examination of readily available textual matter, i.e. sources and derivatives whose linguistic makeup is materially at our disposal. What happens if we take into account lost or even intangible source material? Could partially irretrievable scripts and non-textual influences be put into starker relief in computer-aided Shakespeare source study?

The *Lost Plays Database* (*LPD*) offers a case in point in the matter. Created in 2009 by editors Knutson, McInnis, and Steggle[6] and now hosted on the Folger Shakespeare Library's website, the *LPD* is a wiki-style open-access publication designed to provide "the tools and the canvas" (McInnis 2014, p. 46) as well as scrupulous editorial supervision for more extensive,

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[5] *EEBO-TCP*, "Frequently Asked Questions": https://textcreationpartnership.org/faq/.

[6] At present, the Editors in charge of the *LPD* are David McInnis, Matthew Steggle, and Misha Teramura, with the contribution of Roslyn L. Knutson as Editor Emerita: https://lostplays.folger.edu/About_Us.

collaborative investigations into the "dark matter" (Borlik 2016, p. 158) of early modern English drama. For the purposes of this project, information about lost plays is gathered by means of voluntary scholarly contributions (hence the wiki format), but the database itself is not open to public editing: the editors reserve the right to check the aspiring contributors' academic background and motivation before allowing them to create or edit content for the *LPD*, thus ensuring quality control without discouraging committed, knowledgeable collaborations. As for the entries themselves, they are "organised according to a pre-designed template" (McInnis 2014, p. 47) tailored to include a rich array of textual and performative data that can be browsed through thanks to a sidebar menu and a search box located at the top right corner of each webpage.

In broad terms, these snippets of evidence contribute to bringing early modern English theatricality into sharper focus, painting a more detailed picture of the kinds of plays that were performed in England between 1570 and 1642. When examined from the viewpoint of Shakespeare source study, however, this contextual background can prove invaluable in suggesting *why* the playwright was drawn to specific themes, motifs, storylines – and, consequently, source texts – within a given timespan, with the result of illuminating the environmental influences that impinged on his creativity.

Let us think, for example, of the genesis of *Hamlet*. Linear research into its genealogy has long revealed that Shakespeare resorted to Saxo Grammaticus's *Historia Danica* and Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques* to flesh out his Danish prince – a discovery that has "obvious value for author-centric" source inquiries into the play (McInnis 2018, p. 300). Nonetheless, the assessment of this tragedy's inception becomes much more nuanced if we browse through the *LPD* and learn that, in the last decade of the sixteenth century, at least five lost plays, mostly staged by The Admiral's, had exploited analogous Danish motifs in equally tragic scenarios.[7] On a similar note, crosschecks between the Lord Chamberlain's and the Admiral's repertories for the years 1599-1600 reveal a shared interest in serial English history plays, displayed by their concurrent offerings of Shakespeare's *Henry V* and the lost *Oldcastle* (Chamberlain's), *2 Henry Richmond*, and *Owen Tudor* (both Admiral's) (Knutson 2004, 2005).

Although not probative, such contingencies show the presence of common dramatic patterns in Shakespeare's ambience, highlighting subtle forms of mutual influence that could explain why he decided to engage with

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[7] In his analysis, McInnis recalls *The Tanner of Denmark* (1592, Strange's), the anonymous *Hamlet* (1594, Admiral's or Chamberlain's), *Cutlack* (Admiral's, 1594), *1&2 Earl Godwin and his Three Sons* (1598, Admiral's), and *A Danish Tragedy* (1602, Admiral's). He extrapolates such information from the diaries of Philip Henslowe, long-standing manager of the Admiral's (McInnis 2018, pp. 300-301).

certain topics at specific moments in his career. As Janet Clare argues, the "matter and practice of plays" were indeed "trafficked amongst playwrights and amongst communities of spectators" (2014, p. 18) in the Tudor Age, according to complex dynamics of competition and negotiation dictated by the marketplace logic of London's playhouses. This "matrix of professional and commercial rivalry" (Clare 2014, p. 18) cannot be separated from early modern scripts, which were conceived as fully-fledged commodities designed to meet audience demands and rival flanking theatre companies. It is only natural, therefore, that playwrights like Shakespeare felt impelled to look around for inspiration, so as to come up with scripts that could be both different from other circulating plays and in line with the emerging or consolidated trends of the season. In view of this creative interdependence, crowdsourced scholarly researches into lost Renaissance drama could prove useful for clarifying whether and how Shakespeare reacted to the works of his contemporaries and predecessors, laying bare the latent contextual influences that shaped his production.

On a complementary basis, the *LPD* may offer another enticing, albeit remote and insidious, prospect to Shakespeare source study: the possibility of coming across lost plays that bear enough textual or paratextual traces to be interlocked with other surviving scripts, thus qualifying as potential sources for them. To remain within the bounds of Shakespearean drama, David McInnis (2021, pp. 62-66; see also 2018, p. 300) mentions the case of *Hester and Ahasuerus* – an anonymous Biblical play that "appears in Henslowe's diary on 3 June 1594 in the list of plays offered by the Admiral's men and Chamberlain's men playing at the playhouse of Newington" (Knutson 2012, online). No manuscript or printed copy has come down to us, but a German translation of it, *Comoedia von der Königin Esther und hoffertigen Haman*, can still be found in a collection published in Leipzig in 1620. According to Martin Wiggins, this version features a "shrew-taming sub-plot, which includes an incident in which the clown's wife is forced to say that black is white in order to avoid her husband's violence" – an episode that may "be the source of the sun/moon incident in *The Taming of the Shrew*" (2014, p. 265).

In truth, here we move on treacherous ground – we have no notion of the original play, and an alternative source for the scene has been identified in *El Conde Lucanor*[8] – but the perils of the task do not diminish the database's potential for broadening the spectrum of Shakespeare source study, supplementing linear investigations with more extensive contextual

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[8] See Hodgdon 2010, p. 60. This narrative congruence does not exclude the possibility that Shakespeare actually came across *Hester and Ahasueros*. For all we know, this Biblical play may have been influenced by Juan Manuel's material in its own turn, or it may have been entirely independent from it.

information. Scrolling through the *LPD* we may not stumble upon unacknowledged sources of Shakespeare's plays, but we can surely gain a clearer idea of the milieu that nurtured them, of the external influences that encroached on their textuality and aesthetics.

For specular reasons, it is also worthwhile to pay attention to the physical space Shakespeare inhabited, i.e. early modern London – a vibrant background that proved instrumental in the conception of his plays. As is known, many Elizabethan and Jacobean scripts are indeed hinged on an intimate familiarity with this city's topography and its streets often appear as settings in Renaissance history plays, including Shakespeare's *Henry IV* and *Henry VIII*. What is more, recent scholarship has pointed out that London bears a certain agency even upon Shakespearean plays that are not set in England, such as *Romeo and Juliet* or *The Merchant of Venice*.[9] It goes without saying, then, that a better framing of this geographical and cultural milieu would greatly improve our understanding of early modern drama as a whole, while also helping to enlighten these locations' generative impact on Shakespeare's creativity.

The *Map of Early Modern London* (*MoEML*) shows promise in unlocking such potential. Drawing content from six databases, which in turn serve seven interoperable projects – a digital edition of Agas's birds-eye-view map of London, two repositories of primary and secondary sources replete with London-related information (*Library* and *Encyclopedia*), a TEI-encoded, versioned edition of Stow's *Survey of London*, an anthology of old-spelling and modern editions of Elizabethan, Jacobean and Caroline mayoral shows (forthcoming), the *London Parish* project (forthcoming), and the *Browsing the Bookstalls of St. Paul's* project (forthcoming) – this platform enables the reconnaissance of sixteenth and seventeenth-century London through an intuitive map interface, structured to "plot people, historical documents, literary works, and recent critical research onto topography and the built environment" (*MoEML*, online). Users are also welcome to customise their virtual ramblings through the Renaissance capital by drawing their own routes of interest, which can then be bookmarked and downloaded for non-commercial purposes. This interactive approach to digital thick mapping[10] appears very promising with regards to Shakespeare source study, as it could help to gauge a better sense of Shakespeare's spatial and cultural frame of reference and reveal previously neglected sources of inspiration for his plays. To prove this point, let us briefly turn back to *The Taming of the Shrew*.

[9] On the subject, see Crawford *et al.* 2014. For a detailed survey of Shakespeare's topographical references to London, see Dustangheer 2020.

[10] An interesting overview of this method is offered in Presner *et al.* 2014 and Richardson 2018.

This comedy is famously set in Italy, precisely in Padua: its characters occasionally speak Italian, they bear Italian names and travel across the North of the Peninsula throughout the course of action. In Act 4.3 Petruchio and Kate are in Verona, but they are about to set off to Padua to attend Bianca's wedding. Owing to such a sound Italian ambience, it is all the more peculiar to hear Petruchio ask Grumio to bring his horses "unto Long-lane end" (4.3.179)[11] before departure – a toponym that must have rung a bell with the play's sixteenth-century London audience. At that time, Long Lane was indeed a street located on the outskirts of the capital, connecting Aldergate street to Smithfield Market – a piece of information *MoEML* brings just one click away from any informed user. Typing the street's name in the upper-right search bar of its Agas Map, we can highlight the location, zoom in and out to get a clearer idea of its surroundings, and even gain access to several in-built primary sources that mention the street, among which we find Stow's *Survey of London*. Consulting this versioned edition of the account, we learn that the street was "a lane, truelie called Long, […] inclosed with Innes, Brewhouses, and large tenements of the west side" (Stow, Fitz-Stephen 2021, online) – a suburban scenario that perfectly fits the scene conjured up by *The Shrew*. Then, if we reach out to the descriptive *Gazetteer*, letter L, we are provided with a table that lists all known spelling variants for the toponym, including "Long-lane" (*MoEML*, online), i.e. the variant featured in the *First Folio* edition of the play.

At the moment, many of said references are available only as drafts, empty documents or are still undergoing peer review – the project is *in fieri*, after all – but everything suggests that, when duly completed, a digital resource like *MoEML* will positively affect Shakespeare source study, allowing for a more accurate assessment of the connections between the playwright's works and the spatio-cultural milieu in which they were conceived and performed.

4. Conclusion

In this brief excursus, I have tried to shed light on the digitally inflected changes occurring in Shakespeare source study – a resurrecting research field (Walter, Klann 2018) that burst back into prominence in the last few years. Since the 1990s, electronic resources and computational methods have become "one inescapable element of Shakespeare studies" (Lavagnino 2014, p. 22), and Shakespeare source criticism has accordingly capitalised upon this "flood of digital possibilities" (Lavagnino 2014, p. 21) to rethink the study of

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[11] The quotation is from Shakespeare (2017, p. 150).

linear transmission and start to identify more indirect yet pervasive forms of subtextual and contextual influence.

Notwithstanding the challenges posed by these methodologies, the gains digital tools and resources promise to bring to Shakespeare source study remain significant. To borrow Carson and Kirwan's insight, while "'Shakespeare' as a cultural concept may be in a state of perpetual change, the specific and temporally contingent effect of the impact of digital technology in recent years has been the foregrounding of multiplicity" (2014, p. 239). More often than ever before, today "we are studying Shakespeare*s*" (Carson, Kirwan 2014, p. 239), profiting from new instruments and research methods to reconceptualise not only the playwright's textuality *per se* but also the multi-layered creative process that underpins it.

One of the major problems with 'old-fashioned' source study is that "the sources identified have so often remained inert in the process of interpretation, dead bones uncovered in the living text but with few implications for its final shape" (Belsey 2015, p. 62). What digital technologies seem to offer is precisely a way to dust off those bones and put them on a better display, bringing new light on their hermeneutic value for the study of Shakespeare's textuality and early modern European theatricality *tout court*.

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VERTICAL AND DISTANT READING OF SHAKESPEARE WITH DIGITAL NATIVES
The case of *The Merchant of Venice*

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Abstract – Over the past decades, the myth of the digital natives being 'naturally' fluent in the use of ICT has been repeatedly rehearsed, revised, and eventually challenged (Prensky 2001a, 2009; Thomas 2011), but probably not yet comprehensively explored on the basis of empirical evidence. Especially in a teaching context, such competence has been more assumed than tested, and the gap between imagined and real skills runs the risk of leaving a grey area where neither the potential is fully exploited nor the limitations are fully addressed. With this in mind, the present article reports on the results of a teaching experience carried out with university students – namely, a corpus linguistics/stylistics exploration of Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice* in digital format. While the pervasiveness of digital technology in everyday life has been seen as having a significant impact on the interaction with text from a very young age, it seems in fact that new digitally enhanced reading skills still need to be self-consciously developed in learners. The use of corpus linguistics resources and tools in the literature class can therefore be seen as a useful contribution to the development of such skills and a way to raise awareness of shifts occurring in digital reading compared to print-based reading. In particular, by experimenting with vertical (Tognini Bonelli 2001) and distant (Moretti 2013) reading, and by engaging with quantitative and qualitative analysis of language data, students can both attain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of Shakespeare's innovative use of language and develop useful digital reading skills that can be profitably exploited in different contexts.

Keywords: Digital natives; Corpus stylistics; *The Merchant of Venice*.

1. Introduction

Since the emergence of the notion of "digital natives", derived from publications by Tapscott (1998) and Prensky (2001a, 2001b) and further supported by a range of other popular appropriations of the term, the new generations have been often acritically assumed to possess knowledge and skills that should allow them to move in the digital world in a natural, fluent way. The very fact that younger people's lives appear to be saturated with digital media has led to the claim that 'digital natives' (roughly identified as

those born after 1980) might have developed different learning styles and behaviours, in terms of abilities, preferences, attitudes, and even "productiveness" (i.e. focused attention, deep processing, and persistence), precisely as a consequence of their virtually total immersion in digital technology since early childhood and during adolescence (Thompson 2013, p. 12). However, this assumption has not gone unchallenged. Indeed, ICT ownership and experiences, as well as confidence with ICT devices, do not necessarily imply competent use, and the overall conclusion of many recent studies is that digital natives are not necessarily ICT literates. On the contrary, it is advocated that information literacy should be explicitly enhanced with hands-on and minds-on courses (Šorgo *et al.* 2016).

Prensky himself, in his contribution to the book *Deconstructing Digital Natives*, maintains that "having grown up with digital technology as toys, Digital Natives are much more at ease with its use than the generation that did not. But this surely doesn't mean they know everything, or even want to" (Thomas 2011, p. 27). It is precisely this gap between supposed or assumed fluency and actual knowledge and competence that has made him revise his concept of digital nativeness in terms of "digital wisdom" (Prensky 2011, p. 30). Digital wisdom, according to Prensky, is a twofold concept which encompasses the "wisdom arising from the use of digital technology to access cognitive power beyond our innate capacity" and the "wisdom in the prudent use of technology to enhance our capabilities". Technology alone, he argues, "will not replace intuition, good judgment, problem-solving abilities, and a clear moral compass" (2011, p. 18).

It is against this complex background that views about the supposed technological fluency by digital natives have been recently challenged. While the use of digital technology for basic communication seems to be most common among the younger generations, very few engage in more complex activities, and there appears to be evidence of a restricted range of technologies, centred mostly on mobile phone features and basic web use (e.g., sending an email or looking up information). Furthermore, it can well be argued that many so-called digital natives are no more intensive users of digital media than many adult digital immigrants (Buckingham 2011, p. X). As far as digital reading skills are concerned, already a decade ago, the *OECD* report PISA 2009 indicated that "identifying effective strategies to teach digital reading skills is an important objective for instructional policies" (*OECD* 2011, online). More recently, studies comparing/contrasting the reading skills of students engaged with either print or digital media have found controversial evidence of a mismatch between self-perception by the students as to their actual performance as readers of digital text and the results of objective assessments. As reported in Singer *et al.* (2016, p. 155), while results demonstrated a clear preference by students for digital texts, and students

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themselves predicted better comprehension when reading digitally, their performance at specific reading tasks was not consistent with stated preferences and outcome predictions. Thus, the nature of literacy is undoubtedly changing as new technologies enter people's lives and their learning environments, but it cannot be taken for granted that the reading skills of the so-called digital natives have changed accordingly.

In this context, the present article will focus on the need for the development of specific reading abilities, in order to help the younger generations exploit to the full the potential of reading digital text, by taking advantage of specific tools and methods. In particular, we advocate the importance of familiarizing the students with novel and innovative ways of looking at texts from the perspective of corpus linguistics, as a unique opportunity for a rewarding investigation of texts in the non-linear medium of digital space. Taking Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* as a case in point, the article will show how corpus linguistics/stylistics methods can help students gain new insights into texts, while contributing to the development of their digital reading skills in more general terms.

2. Corpus linguistics/stylistics and the reading of digital texts

While the pervasiveness of digital text in educational settings has been increasingly acknowledged as having a major impact on the experience of reading and of learning-through-reading, it is still a debated issue whether a radical change is going on in reading processes, or – conversely – if new media are merely new places to use the same reading skills and processes developed through experience with traditional print-based media.

As a matter of fact, the overlap between traditional print-based reading and new ways of reading allowed by the digital nature of texts is substantial, and there seems to be good reason to question whether observable changes in the reading style can truly herald a fundamental – Kuhnian – paradigm shift in reading and reading research (Spiro, DeSchryver 2015). Certainly one perceptual factor that has been playing a role into processing differences between digital and printed text is related to the interruption of sequential reading. In order to exploit to the full the potential of non-sequential reading in the digital environment, particularly interesting can be the contribution of specific approaches to reading texts in the field of corpus linguistics and corpus stylistics.

As is well known, corpus linguistics is the study of corpora. A corpus, in general English, is nothing more than a *body* of writings that constitutes a unified whole, such as for instance the works of a single writer. In the last few

decades, however, this basic and quite general concept has undergone a process of specialization so that in modern linguistics the word 'corpus' refers to a specific object of scientific enquiry, as suggested in a much-quoted definition by McEnery and Wilson, according to whom "a corpus in modern linguistics, in contrast to being simply body of text, might more accurately be described as a finite-sized body of machine-readable text, sampled in order to be maximally representative of the language variety under consideration" (McEnery,Wilson 2001, p. 32). In the context of corpus linguistics, corpus stylistics is the application of the corpus linguistics approach to literary texts in order to investigate style, especially in terms of observation of repeated patterns and/or deviance from given observable norms (Mahlberg 2013).

　　　Furthermore, the empirical methods which are at the heart of corpus linguistics/stylistics, along with the centrality of the digital text in this approach, have enabled the importation of quantitative, especially computational linguistics, models into the realm of the investigation of language and literature. In particular, the contribution that corpus linguistics/stylistics can bring to ICT education for digital natives, with specific reference to reading styles, can be subsumed under the following shifts in reading texts. Firstly, digital, i.e. computationally enhanced, ways of reading texts provide an opportunity for quantitative insights into text analysis which can support observations made at a qualitative level. A typical example in this respect is the shift from the notion of key word (subjectively identified by the reader or critic) to the concept of *keyword* (objectively and computationally defined, e.g., Scott 2010). Secondly, reading digital texts with the help of specific tools offers a new perspective, which is exemplified at its best by the shift from horizontal to vertical reading (Tognini Bonelli 2001). Finally, digital tools can support approaches that complement close reading of the text and provide an opportunity for the simultaneous reading of more than one text, i.e. a corpus of texts, in ways that have implications for what has been termed as "distant reading" (Moretti 2013).

3. Reading at a crossroads? Three shifts in the digital reading of *The Merchant of Venice*

3.1. From qualitative to quantitive: reading for keywords

It is one of the main strengths of corpus linguistics that it allows exploration of huge collections of texts, and that data from different corpora can be computed and compared. Thus, the study of a literary text, or of a corpus of literary texts, can greatly benefit from comparison with corpora compiled with other literary (or non-literary) texts on the basis of different criteria and with different aims (e.g. by author, by epoch, or to represent general usage). In particular, corpus

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stylistics can use quantitative methods to provide evidence of deviation from the norm, and account for such phenomena as psychological prominence, salience and foregrounding (Leech, Short 2007; Mahlberg 2013). As far as deviation in concerned, Mahlberg (2013, p. 9) reinterprets these concepts in the light of corpus stylitics as follows:

1. primary deviation may be described by comparing a textual example to a general purpose corpus (i.e. a corpus that is taken as a sufficiently diverse sample of the language as a whole).
2. secondary deviation may be described by comparing a textual example to a corpus of all the works by the author.
3. tertiary deviation may be described by comparing a textual example to the whole text from which it is taken.

With the use of corpus linguistics/stylistics methods, data relating to a specific work by a given author can be read with reference to the data obtained from a corpus made up of all his/her works, or can be compared – in terms of frequency of occurrence of single lexical items or clusters – with data from corpora representing general usage in order to highlight forms of deviance from the norm. In this way, corpus tools have provided literary investigation with a new, empirical way to conceive of key words. Rather than being identified simply on the basis of psychological prominence or salience, or as a consequence of the acknowledgment of an assumed literary relevance (Leech, Short 2007), words that play a major role in defining the characteristics of a given text can be identified on the basis of more objective criteria. In corpus linguistics, 'keyness' in text can thus be 'measured' and 'counted' on the basis of relative frequency, by comparing the frequency of occurrence of each word in a given text or corpus of texts with frequency in another corpus taken as a reference. Words that are thus computed as being unusually frequent in a text or corpus are counted as keywords (See Fig. 1).
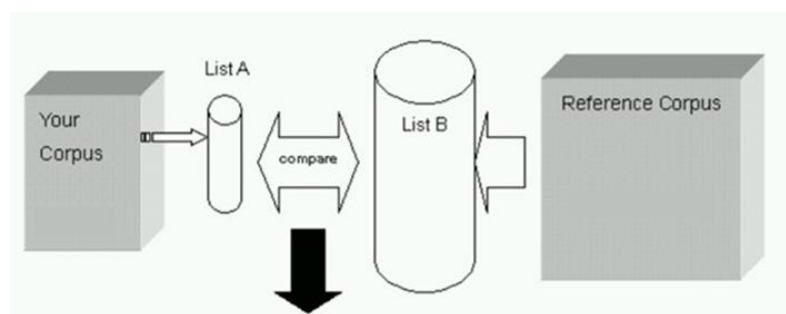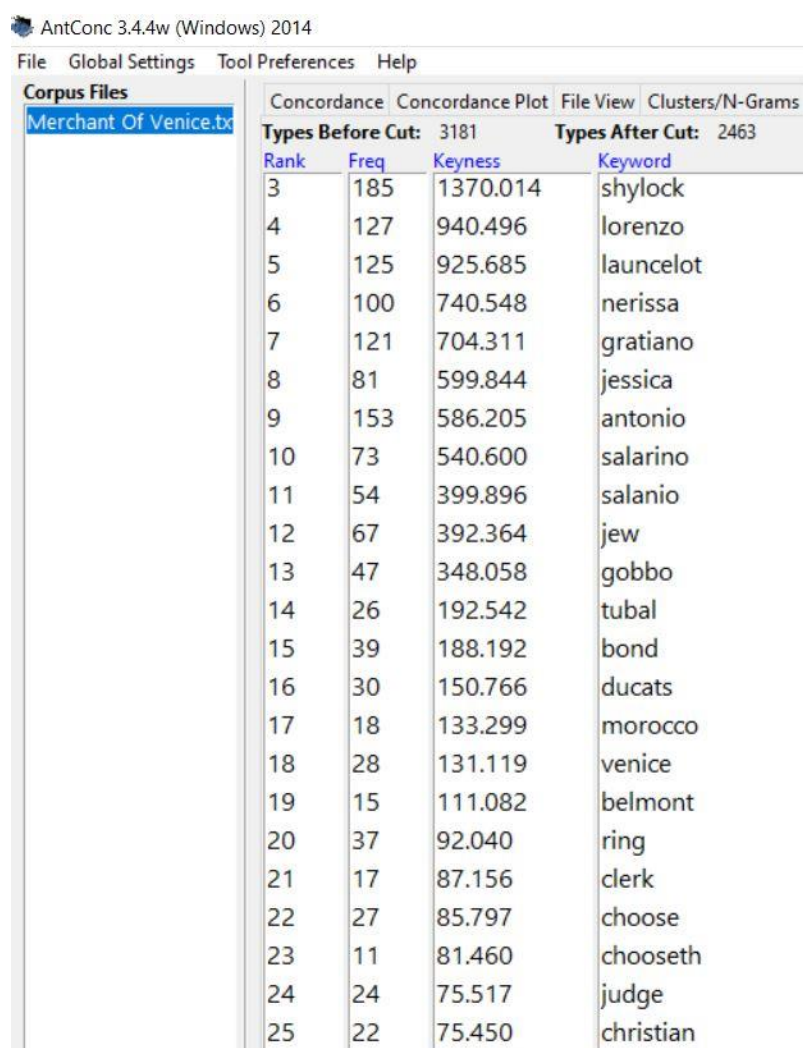
Figure 1
The process for the retrieval of keywords by comparing data from two corpora (adapted from: https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/fss/courses/ling/corpus/blue/l03_2.htm).

It goes without saying that the relationship between frequency of occurrence and psychological salience, let alone literary relevance, is far from being

straightforward and unidirectional. However, the computation of keywords can well contribute to identifying fundamental aspects of the texts being read. By way of example, by comparing the wordlist computed for *The Merchant of Venice* (22836 words) with both the complete Shakespeare corpus (910660 words) and with a corpus of English literary texts (7 million words) written over a period of nearly two centuries around *The Merchant of Venice* (1450-1650), two lists of keywords can be produced. Below, Figure 2 reports the list of keywords obtained by comparing *The Merchant of Venice* with the complete corpus of Shakespeare's plays.

AntConc 3.4.4w (Windows) 2014			
File Global Settings Tool Preferences Help			

Corpus Files	Concordance Concordance Plot File View Clusters/N-Grams		
Merchant Of Venice.txt	Types Before Cut: 3181	Types After Cut: 2463	

Rank	Freq	Keyness	Keyword
3	185	1370.014	shylock
4	127	940.496	lorenzo
5	125	925.685	launcelot
6	100	740.548	nerissa
7	121	704.311	gratiano
8	81	599.844	jessica
9	153	586.205	antonio
10	73	540.600	salarino
11	54	399.896	salanio
12	67	392.364	jew
13	47	348.058	gobbo
14	26	192.542	tubal
15	39	188.192	bond
16	30	150.766	ducats
17	18	133.299	morocco
18	28	131.119	venice
19	15	111.082	belmont
20	37	92.040	ring
21	17	87.156	clerk
22	27	85.797	choose
23	11	81.460	chooseth
24	24	75.517	judge
25	22	75.450	christian

Figure 2
Keywords from *The Merchant of Venice* obtained through comparison with the complete Shakespeare Corpus using *AntConc* 3.5.8.

If proper names and the word Jew are excluded, which are obviously more frequent in this play than in all other plays by Shakespeare, as they refer to the characters of the play, the first content keyword in *The Merchant of Venice*

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seems to be "bond". Similarly, the keywords computed by comparing *The Merchant of Venice* and a reference corpus of English literary texts dating from 1450 to 1650 (see Figure 3 below) include the characters of the play and personal pronouns or possessives (such as I, you, my, me…), a *datum* easily explained with reference to the genre of the play. Deictic forms are typical of drama (even though insistence on 'my' or 'me' is of course also specifically meaningful with reference to the plot of the *Merchant*), whereas the corpus of English literary texts used as a testbed also includes different genres. It can be therefore assumed that the first general content keyword is again "bond".

AntConc 3.5.8 (Windows) 2019

File   Global Settings   Tool Preferences   Help

Corpus Files — Merchant Of Venice N

Concordance Concordance Plot File View Clusters/N-Grams Collocates Word List

Keyword Types: 196   Keyword Tokens: 9612   Search Hits: 0

Rank	Freq	Keyness	Effect	Keyword
1	269	+ 3085.99	0.0228	portia
2	193	+ 2230.42	0.0164	bassanio
3	185	+ 2137.9	0.0158	shylock
4	125	+ 1408.57	0.0107	launcelot
5	121	+ 1397.97	0.0103	gratiano
6	153	+ 1392.54	0.013	antonio
7	127	+ 1215.55	0.0108	lorenzo
8	100	+ 1155.26	0.0086	nerissa
9	81	+ 935.69	0.0069	jessica
10	73	+ 843.25	0.0063	salarino
11	699	+ 665.61	0.0148	i
12	447	+ 660.36	0.0162	you
13	54	+ 623.73	0.0046	salanio
14	47	+ 542.86	0.004	gobbo
15	363	+ 505.32	0.0144	my
16	67	+ 492.72	0.0057	jew
17	262	+ 371.24	0.0123	me
18	26	+ 300.28	0.0022	tubal
19	39	+ 262.21	0.0033	bond
20	185	+ 192.71	0.0091	d

Figure 3
Keywords from *The Merchant of Venice* obtained through comparison with the English Literature Corpus (1450-1650) using *AntConc* 3.5.8.

Such quantitative prominence of "bond" (which occurs 39 times in *The Merchant of Venice* amounting to over 50% of total occurrences of "bond" in the Shakespeare's corpus) is not alien to its literary relevance which scholars have long recognized in a number of critical interpretations of the play that have investigated the pervasiveness of an emerging market culture in the play at different levels, and many scholars have without any doubt labelled bond as one of the key words in the play (Turner 1999; Serpieri 1999 and more recently

Lanier 2019). It is therefore no surprise to notice – as also argued in literature discussing Shakespeare's economic language – that *The Merchant of Venice* has the highest number of references to financial bonds in the Shakespeare Corpus (Thomas 2008). Nonetheless, as a word covering such diverse meanings as literal bonds (used to restrain physically), bonds between parents/children, lovers, friends; non-financial contracts or obligations; legal documents designating financial obligation, 'bond' stands out as a word that definitely embodies all the transmutative potentialities of language at the time of Shakespeare (Elam 2007). In the words of Lanier, "bond" actually embodies the concept of resonance in Shakespeare's play:

> In writing resonance designates how an aptly chosen word, phrase or image has multiple significances at once, some literal, some symbolic, some connotative, some by association, some even related to the word's sound or the image's sensual qualities. A resonant word or image sets in motion several themes or ideas at once, and a skilful writer can draw out develop those multiple qualities in the course of a tale. Shakespeare often uses a single resonant word – or a cluster of semantically relate words – to serve as a thematic centre for a play. […] As Shakespeare repeats these key words throughout a play, associating themwith various actions, images and bit of dialogue, they have the effect of pulling together and mutually amplifying different thematic strands of the play. In *The Merchant of Venice* one such key word is 'bond' and its related words 'bind' and 'bound'. (2019, p. 79)

3.2. From horizontal to vertical: reading concordances

A second basic concept which can be seen as crucial to enhancing the potential of digital reading in higher education students is the "concordance" line. A concordance is by definition a list of the words contained in a text or a corpus arranged in some order (generally alphabetical) and with a certain amount of co-text accompanying them. This is a sort of homecoming of a concept which has had a wide currency in literary studies and has been redefined in corpus linguistics under the impact of the new technologies. Using a concordancer, a computer can display words in their textual environments with the node word aligned and highlighted (the so-called Key-Word-in-Context format) and the user can reorder the co-text left or right of the word under analysis on the basis of specific criteria.

Concordances have however dramatically changed their face in the computer age, and the shift related to the new medium entails indeed a more radical change than it might appear at first glance. In the context of corpus linguistics, electronic concordances have definitely made evident the impact of non-sequential vertical reading. In the words of Tognini Bonelli,

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> a text exists in a unique communicative context as a single, unified language event mediated between two (sets of) participants; the corpus, on the other hand, brings together many different texts a therefore cannot be identified with a unique communicative event […]. This difference entails a different 'reading' of the two: the text is to be read horizontally, from left to right, paying attention to the boundaries between larger units such as clauses, sentences and paragraphs. A corpus, examined at frost in KWIC format with node word aligned in the centre is read vertically, scanning for the repeated patterns present in the co-text of the node. (2001, p. 2)

A corpus is therefore in the position to offer the reader simultaneous access to the individual instance of language use at the level of syntagmatic patterning as well as to alternatives available on the paradigmatic axis, and makes the reader see patterns of repetition across one and the same, or across many different texts. This can in turn contribute in novel ways to the appreciation of stylistic features in a literary text.

At their basics, concordance lines give the student the possibility to explore the way a writer uses a word in one or more texts, but also to compare single words, or set of words, in works by many different authors. It is above all due to this innovative way of reading that corpus linguistics richly contributes to, and complements, more traditional ways of interpreting literary texts. By momentarily breaking the integrity and the horizontal sequential linearity of the written text enabling 'vertical' readings, at intratextual and intertextual level, concordance lines offer the analyst access to the simultaneous exploration of different texts, and of the discourses they bear trace of.

By way of example, reading vertically through the concordance lines for the word "bond", the students could easily find evidence of the rhetorical patterning which is one of the most prominent stylistic resources in Shakespeare's plays (Lanier 2019). Indeed, the inspection of concordance lines clearly foregrounds instances of repeated patterns as "Let him look to his bond" or "I'll/I will/I would have my bond" (see lines 4-6 and 9-14 in Table 1 below) and many more. Approaching the text through the lens of a vertical reading thus shows how the word 'bond' benefits from stylistic devices such as parallelism or the constant occurrence in end-focus position followed by some punctuation mark, which may have indirectly contributed to the perception of its role as one of the key words in the play.

envious plea Of forfeiture, of justice, and his bond. JESSICA. When I was with him, I have
court; He shall have merely justice, and his bond. GRATIANO. A Daniel still say I; a second
thousand ducats- I think I may take his bond. BASSANIO. Be assured you may. SHYLOCK. I will
upon the mart; let him look to his bond: he was wont to call me usurer; let
call me usurer; let him look to his bond: he was wont to lend money for a
a Christian courtesy; let him look to his bond. SALARINO. Why, I am sure, if he forfeit,
notary's; Give him direction for this merry bond, And I will go and purse the ducats
'll have my bond; speak not against my bond. I have sworn an oath that I will
yet, good Shylock. SHYLOCK. I'll have my bond; speak not against my bond. I have sworn
hear me speak. SHYLOCK. I'll have my bond. I will not hear thee speak; I'll
not hear thee speak; I'll have my bond; and therefore speak no more. I'll not
sworn an oath that I will have my bond. Thou call'dst me dog before thou hadst
'll have no speaking; I will have my bond. [Exit.] SALARINO. It is the most impenetrable
would not draw them; I would have my bond. DUKE. How shalt thou hope for mercy, rendering

Table 1
Concordance lines for "bond" from *The Merchant of Venice* (sample) using *AntConc*
3.5.8.

Furthermore, "bond" performs a decisive role in pointing to the interdiscursive nature of Shakespeare's preference for the economic value of "bond" in *The Merchant of Venice*, as it invariably points to Shakespeare's almost exclusive use of this word in this play in its newly coined economic meaning, as suggested by such collocations as "the penalty and forfeit of my bond", "rail the seal off my bond", "single bond", "confess the bond", "deface the bond", etc.. This also is made evident when scrolling the screen for recurring pattern of usage:

grow cruel, my estate is very low, my bond to the Jew is forfeit; and since, in
To have the due and forfeit of my bond. If you deny it, let the danger light
the law, The penalty and forfeit of my bond. PORTIA. Is he not able to discharge the
thou canst rail the seal from off my bond, Thou but offend'st thy lungs to speak
To alter me. I stay here on my bond. ANTONIO. Most heartily I do beseech the court
of the time; And for the Jew's bond which he hath of me, Let it not
to a notary, seal me there Your single bond; and, in a merry sport, If you repay
, so he says. PORTIA. Do you confess the bond? ANTONIO. I do. PORTIA. Then must the Jew
more? Pay him six thousand, and deface the bond; Double six thousand, and then treble that, Befor
death. SHYLOCK. Is it so nominated in the bond? PORTIA. It is not so express'd; but
. I cannot find it; 'tis not in the bond. PORTIA. You, merchant, have you anything to say
! SHYLOCK. I take this offer then: pay the bond thrice, And let the Christian go. BASSANIO. Here
bosom. SHYLOCK. Ay, 'his breast': So says the bond:--doth it not, noble judge?-- 'Nearest his heart'
. Take thrice thy money; bid me tear the bond. SHYLOCK. When it is paid according to the
the penalty, Which here appeareth due upon the bond. SHYLOCK. 'Tis very true. O wise and upright
. I pray you, let me look upon the bond. SHYLOCK. Here 'tis, most reverend doctor; here
two months, that's a month before This bond expires, I do expect return Of thrice three

Table 2
Concordance lines for "bond" form *The Merchant of Venice* (sample)
using *AntConc* 3.5.8.

The examples reported show how corpus tools can not only provide quantitative data to investigate a given textual phenomenon in a more

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systematic and objective way, but also offer qualitative insight which can help digital readers trace a linguistic feature exhaustively throughout a whole text (or a corpus of texts). In this sense, corpus linguistics offers a gateway to a different approach in reading with which students can profitably familiarize.

3.3. From close to distant: reading more data

As mentioned above, it is also a fundamental characteristic of corpus linguistics that it enhables the simultaneous reading of many texts, thus pointing to forms of "distant reading" not dissimilar, in principle from the more radical perspectives adopted in works which apply the technology of big data to the study of literary phenomena (Moretti 2013). While close reading is based on the ability of reading a text "without dissolving its structure, distant reading does the exact opposite. It aims to generate an abstract view by shifting from observing textual content to visualizing global features of a single or of multiple text(s)" (Jänicke *et al* 2015, online). Similarly, concordance lines across many texts can be seen as a form of distant reading which provides insight into a summation of decontextualized excerpts from different texts, and helps the reader making generalizations and inferences on the basis of more textual data. This is the case, for instance, of a simultaneous vertical reading of the complete corpus of Shakespeare's plays for occurrences of the word "bond", in order to consider patterns of usage of "bond" by Shakespeare outside *The Merchant of Venice*. In this case the concordance lines for "bond" seem to suggest that in all his other works Shakespeare used the word "bond" only in its general meaning of affective relationship, as shown by repeated collocation with love (9 occurrences) and by a semantic preference for nouns relating to familiar relationships (child, daughter, wife, fellowship, wedlock, sister, childhood, son, father, marriage) or other forms of mutual loyalty (fellowship, oath, duty, treason). All these meanings are epitomized by such famous quotes as Cordelia's "I love your majesty according to my bond" in *King Lear* (1.1.87-8),[1] or "a contract of eternal bond of love" in *Twelfth Night* (5.1.145).[2] The only instances of Shakespeare's use of 'bond' in the newly-coined sense of written deed (instrument) outside *The Merchant* seem to be from *Macbeth*, as in "Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond/Which keeps me pale!" (*Macbeth* 3.2.49-50).[3] See Table 3 below for a sample of concordance lines from the Shakespeare Corpus (*Merchant* excluded):

---

[1] The quotation is from Shakespeare (2005, p. 103).
[2] The quotation is from Shakespeare (2004, p. 151).
[3] The quotation is from Shakespeare (1999, p. 172).

```
of your power,  Should, notwithstanding that your  bond of duty,  As 'twere in love's particular,
            lies,  And lies, and lies: there is my  bond of faith  To tie thee to my strong
          'Il make assurance double sure,  And take a  bond of fate: thou shalt not live; That I
        -day betwixt my love and me  For everlasting  bond of fellowship,—  Upon that day either prepare to
     him suddenly convey'd from hence.  Cancel his  bond of life, dear God! I pray,  That I
uth and me. <PRIEST>  <90%>  A contract of eternal  bond of love,  Confirm'd by mutual joinder of
          be.  Besides, you know  Prosperity's the very  bond of love,  Whose fresh complexion and whose heart
        need, if you were gentle Brutus.  Within the  bond of marriage, tell me, Brutus,  Is it excepted,
   company; whose loves  Are dearer than the natural  bond of sisters.  But I can tell you that
                     fond,  To trust man on his oath or  bond;  Or a harlot for her weeping; Or a
       my freedom at tray-trip, and become thy  bond-slave? </BELCH>  <AGUECHEEK> <46%>  I' faith, or
             now, not king: Thy state of law is  bond-slave to the law,  And— </GAUNT>  <K. RICHARD> <2
      ; For if such actions may have passage free,  Bond-slaves and pagans shall our statesmen be. </BRABA
             cause  To prick us to redress? what other  bond  Than secret Romans, that have spoke the word
   > <85%>  Bound to himself! what doth he with a  bond  That he is bound to? Wife, thou art
       bend; Spoke with how manifold and strong a  bond  The child was bound to the father; sir,
     prove it too, against mine honour aught,  My  bond to wedlock, or my love and duty,  Against
```

Table 3
Concordance lines for "bond" from the complete Shakespeare Corpus
(*Merchant* excluded).

A distinctive use of "bond" in the *Merchant of Venice* can also be highlighted through comparison with a reference corpus made up of English Literary texts belonging to the same period (1450-1650).[4] The 120 concordances for "bond" from this second reference corpus mostly retain the basic meanings of 'being captive' (as shown by repeated collocation with such words as free, fetter, liberty, and by the compounds bond-man and bond-woman). See Table 4 below for a sample of concordance lines:

```
              Free-man;  If not, stay here a  Bond-man to thy Slave,  And dead, be
         his house, and vseth him as his  bond-man, and putteth him to labour, or
  through which he may peep out,  Such  bond men to their harness to fight are
       to Gentlemen or Marchants to bee their  bond-men, to haue during their life meate,
ge Cater,  John Busbridge, Thomas Horton, William  Bond Mer-  chant-Taylor of London, William Cotton,
   , fayth giuen back againe,  Who would imagine  bond more sure could be?  Loue flies to
           after shall not say there past  A bond more than our loves, to tie our
         the Black-Friers.  12 Item, to Master John  Bond my Countrey-man, chiefe Secretarie unto My
contain himselfe within the compasse of that  bond /neither  whereby it should his consent euer
         there was neither Jew nor Greeke, neither  bond 28<  nor free, neither male nor female : omnes
                  Must be my song,  And from my  bond now must I break ; Since she so
              are worse, if to be slaves, and  bond  To Caesar's slave be such, the          mankind
           Good turnes be counted, as a seruile  bond,  To bind their doers, to receiue their
   these lines :  Another! — why shall liberty be  bond?  True heart may not be bond, but
      set so light my liberty !  Making me  bond when I was free :  Ah ! my heart,
             pleasure and vanity only, or as a  bond-woman, to acquire and gain to her
      ? Against my will to take away my  bond-woman?  _Gov._ She was no lawful prize,
      ._ She was no lawful prize, therefore no  bond-woman: She's of that Country we
           , but to no purpose: But for your  bond-woman--  _Hip._ Let her pine and dye;
              her free born, and she prove a  bond-woman, there is impediment of estate and
```

Table 4
Concordance lines for "bond" from the English Literature Corpus 1450-1650 (abridged).

---

[4] The *English Literature Corpus 1450-1650* was created *ad hoc* for previous research by the same author. See Gatto (2014) for further information.

Another large group of occurrences exemplifies instead the meaning of "bond" relating to affective relations, which is especially realised by the lexicogrammar pattern "BOND of + N", where "bond" is followed by a noun referring to some kind of affective bond (union, friendship, love, peace), as shown in Table 5 below:

```
                           of faith. This, however, is the _only_  bond of union between the different portions of
                    keepe vnitee    Of the spirit in the  bond of peace.    Which is nedeful to all
         Philip did acquite king Richard from this  bond of marrying his sister, and king Richard
         20 dayes against the Turkes army, with a  bond of the citie in the summe of 12000
                       one according to his abilitie in the  bond of loue, he ayded them at his
             we have in dreams,   When, sleep, the  bond of senses, locks them up,   Such shall
                      ,   But such a [warre] as breakes no  bond of peace.    Speake thou faire words, Ile
        rfei- ture*.   Imprisonment.   Entring into  bond of a thousand pound.   How the  Company
          herselfe, being of age thereto.  And the  bond of the Manchilde with a Shield and
                      in the Holy Spirit," as being the  bond of union between us and Christ.  So
          and inanimate forms, and which is the  bond of time, and rises up from its
                        to her  Ma tle for that infinite  bond of dett and dutie, w ch both
                   , 6   Ere you your daughter link in holy  bond 7   Of wedlock to that new unknown guest: 8
        bond, thence > [Faery Land] faithful bond > [a  bond of faith]  7   To this his native soil
             still open layd, 8   Are bound with commun  bond of frailtee,   To succour wretched wights, whom
        I > ever, continually  8   Are bound with common  bond of frailty, 9  To succour wretched wights, whom
                   , wliieh seems to have been the great  bond of union between the noble hearted Surrey
        time. This circumstance would form an additional  bond of  union between Surrey and himself. Surrey'
                     not do it (in case) without  any  bond of treaties, only upon his offer, being
                , that your Majesty  cannot think in such  bond of friendship any equality : protesting  therefor
                 , by  levies in his Low Parties, giving  bond of some towns there for the same.
        : and this was considereit  to bean inviolable  bond of obligation. Tfie reverence  with which women
            you of your  own accord dissolve that  bond of promise which binds  you to me."
```

Table 5
Concordance lines for "bond" from the English Literature Corpus 1450-1650 (sample).

This last datum can be taken as evidence of Shakespeare's deliberate use of the word "bond" in *The Merchant of Venice* in a way that definitely departs from the typical usage of his times, a phenomenon which can be interpreted through the concepts of primary and secondary deviation mentioned in Section 3.1. of the present article. Significantly, no instance is found in *The Merchant of Venice* for the pattern "the BOND of + Noun". Such deviation from the norm seems to highlight Shakespeare's awareness of and alertness to the changing meanings of the word "bond" under the socio-cultural constraints of an emerging capitalist society in England, and points to the fact that he almost single-handedly gave great resonance to the new economic meaning of "bond" which is at the heart of the relatively recent debate on Shakespeare's works in the light of New Criticism (Squeo 2012).

4. Vertical and distant reading in the classroom

On the basis of the potential of a digital reading experience of *The Merchant of Venice*, as described in the previous section, this last section briefly reports on classroom activities carried out with students at the University of Bari, as part of the 'English Linguistics and Translation Studies' module for post-graduate students in Specialized Translation.

The students were already familiar with the play and with key critical literature about its context, as *The Merchant of Venice* was on their reading list for the 'English Culture' module. Accordingly, the activities proposed where explicitly aimed at providing an enhanced reading experience based on the integration of all the reading skills mentioned in this article. The basic assumption was that despite being all "digital natives" the students might still benefit from being explicitly introduced to tools and resources for a digitally-enhanced reading of literary texts. The fact that they were already familiar with *The Merchant of Venice* in particular was considered as an opportunity, rather than a drawback. In this way they were in the best position for a very much desirable integration of all the reading approaches and skills at their disposal. During the activities a questionnaire was submitted for immediate feedback.[5]

The first activity proposed was based on the integration of qualitative and quantitative aspects in the retrieval of key words. The students were first asked which words could be considered as key words on the basis of their experience of the play, and from their answers a list of 7 words was obtained which was then submitted to the whole group. They were then asked to make hypotheses about the relative frequency of occurrence of their key words in the text, before resorting to digital tools for the computation of raw frequency and of relative frequency of words in terms of keywords (see Section 3.1. above).

As shown in the image below, over half of the group had already gained the impression that "bond" could be one such a key word:

*L*ingue e
*L*inguaggi

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3. Which of the words listed in Question 2 is the most frequent in the text on the basis of your experience as a reader?

32 risposte

- MONEY
- BOND
- USURY
- GOOD
- VENTURE
- DUCATS
- CHOOSE
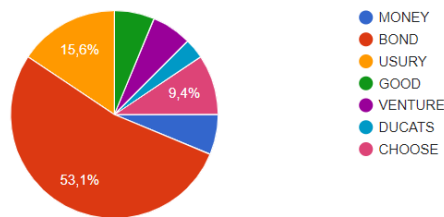
Figure 4
Questionnaire submitted to the students during the activity (sample).

The students were then involved in the activities described in Sections 3 of this article and were asked to explore in particular concordance lines for "bond". When asked for feedback, they mostly acknowledged that reading vertically had helped them see patterns they could not have noticed otherwise (58,1 %) and that this digital experience of the text had certainly added to their previous experience with more traditional forms of linear, horizontal reading (25,8 %):

8 Now let's look at the Merchant of Venice from a different reading perspective. Let's read it VERTICALLY, i.e. through concordance lines for specific words, using the Keyword in context format. Here is a sample of concordance lines for BOND sorted to the left. Does this different view change your comprehension of the text?

31 risposte

- It helps me see pattens I wouldn't have noticed otherwise
- My perception of the text does not change much
- Reading vertically is useless and frustrating
- Reading vertically can be useful in complementic traditional horizontal reading
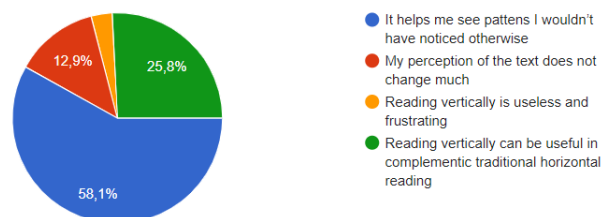
Figure 5
Questionnaire submitted to the students during the activity (sample).

The students were finally encouraged to explore the text by themselves using the tools and resources at their disposal (the free software AntConc, a digital version of *The Merchant of Venice*, and the corpora referred to in Section 3). In particular they were instructed to sort concordance lines to the left and to the right, to observe different patterns. In this way they had the opportunity to notice features beyond the usual lexico-grammar patterns, such as punctuation.

Indeed, something they had not noticed through their traditional close reading of the text was that the word "bond" is almost invariably followed by some punctuation mark, and very often it is the last word pronounced by a character on the stage, as clearly shown by concordance lines for "bond" sorted to the right (See Table 6):

months; you told me so. Well then, your bond; and, let me see. But hear you, Methought
to a notary, seal me there Your single bond; and, in a merry sport, If you repay
, in faith; I'll seal to such a bond, And say there is much kindness in the
notary's; Give him direction for this merry bond, And I will go and purse the ducats
not hear thee speak; I'll have my bond; and therefore speak no more. I'll not
, so he says. PORTIA. Do you confess the bond? ANTONIO. I do. PORTIA. Then must the Jew
To alter me. I stay here on my bond. ANTONIO. Most heartily I do beseech the court
thousand ducats- I think I may take his bond. BASSANIO. Be assured you may. SHYLOCK. I will
bosom. SHYLOCK. Ay, 'his breast': So says the bond:--doth it not, noble judge?-- 'Nearest his heart'
. Tarry a little; there is something else. This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood;
more? Pay him six thousand, and deface the bond; Double six thousand, and then treble that, Befor
would not draw them; I would have my bond. DUKE. How shalt thou hope for mercy, rendering
'll have no speaking; I will have my bond. [Exit.] SALARINO. It is the most impenetrable
two months, that's a month before This bond expires, I do expect return Of thrice three
. BASSANIO. You shall not seal to such a bond for me; I'll rather dwell in my
court; He shall have merely justice, and his bond. GRATIANO. A Daniel still say I; a second
upon the mart; let him look to his bond: he was wont to call me usurer; let
call me usurer; let him look to his bond: he was wont to lend money for a
'll have my bond; speak not against my bond. I have sworn an oath that I will
hear me speak. SHYLOCK. I'll have my bond. I will not hear thee speak; I'll
To have the due and forfeit of my bond. If you deny it, let the danger light

Table 6
Concordance lines for "bond" from *The Merchant of Venice* (sample).

This peculiarity was largely discussed in the classroom, as it could be well considered as an interesting feature accounting for the perceived keyness of the word "bond" when interpreted not only in terms of literary relevance because of the obvious role the term plays in the plot, but also in the light of its frequency of occurrence, of its salience and of its psychological prominence (Leech 2007, pp. 39-41). Final position in the sentence, or focus position before punctuation a mark, definitely contributes − it was acknowledged − to the enduring resonance of this word in the reader's mind, according to the principle of end-focus and climax (Leech 2007, pp. 170-172; 179ss), thus producing an immediate foregrounding effect.

The exploration of the data set at their disposal proved rewarding also in other respects, even when the tool's output was apparently not so inspiring. For instance, when the students decided to consider concordance lines for a different keyword, among the ones listed in the keyword list in Figure 2. Attention was focused on the words "choose" and "chooseth". In this case concordance line provided at first no more than obvious evidence of repetition of the refrain "Who chooseth me shall get…", something that the students had

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well experienced first-hand while reading the play. Nonetheless they decided to shift from mere vertical reading to distant reading and see where in the play was the word "choos*" more frequent. For this activity they turned to the "Plot view" tool in AntConc which revealed at a glance patterns of frequency of "choos*" in the corpus of Shakespeare's plays and in *The Merchant of Venice* in particular (see Fig. 6 below):
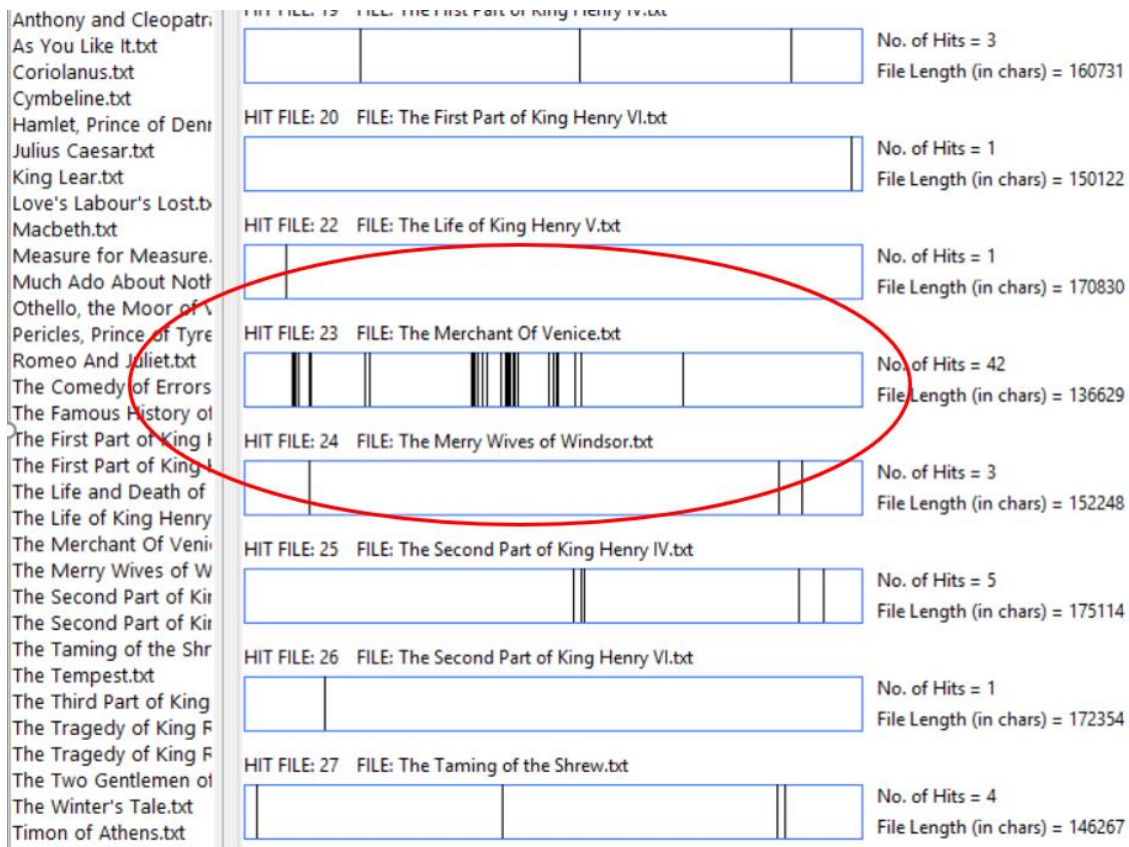
Figure 6
Plot view for "choos*" from the complete Shakespeare Corpus.

The tool's output makes here immediately evident not only the relative higher frequency, in *The Merchant of Venice*, of a word which Portia herself highlights as a key word when she says "O me, the word 'choose!'" (1.2.19)[6] at the beginning of the play, but also its pivotal role in the plot's structure – at the heart of the play. This evidence prompted classroom discussions on the importance of the theme of "choice" in the play, which resulted in closer inspection of new areas in the text which had been previously neglected.

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[6] The quotation is from Shakespeare (2003, p. 78).

5. Conclusion

The nature of literacy is undoubtedly rapidly changing as new technologies enter people's lives and their learning environments. In the past few decades a variety of text forms and media for presenting such texts have emerged, with their full array of possibilities and challenges for the students, which in turn call for new ways of reading. Particularly interesting to this end are corpus query tools that have enabled a shift from qualitative to quantitative, from horizontal to vertical and from close to distant focus in digital reading. Using *The Merchant of Venice* as a case study, the three shifts described suggest that a familiarity with corpus linguistics/stylistics tools and methods can be seen as a useful complement and enhancement of the ICT skills the so-called digital natives supposedly possess, and enhance their experience and comprehension of the text. This is true especially in higher education in the humanities, where these tools offer new and unprecedented ways to *read* the text, which can pave the way to a deeper appreciation of its stylistic effects as well as to an appreciation of specific phenomena in one or more than one text, comparing data from different sources.

The teaching experience discussed in the article calls, however, for further investigation in several respects. In particular, more data are required to estimate the real impact of teaching activities based on digitally-enhanced critical reading of literary texts on both the comprehension and critical appreciation of the text on the one hand, and on the development and improvement of general digital reading skills on the other. Furthermore, in a world were students appear to be chronically distracted rather than aided by technology, several studies have demonstrated that overuse of digital technology can result in cognitive deficiencies, a problem that needs to be seriously addressed. Indeed, as reported in Casey, "many of our students cannot focus on extended tasks, they cannot retain important information, they cannot filter out irrelevancy, they cannot appropriately process emotion, and so forth" (2019, p. 112). In addition, when engaging with electronic texts we read in the shape of an F and not only tend to store the information in a part of the brain not designed for long-term memory, but also tend to miss most of a text's content (Nielsen 2006; Pernice 2017). Yet, teachers are under constant pressure to include "digital humanities" in their classroom, even though pedagogical studies have shown that digital interactions can impede learning. So it is of crucial importance to further explore the best way to teach close reading and critical analysis in a digitally saturated environment.

In this context, the digitally-enhanced approaches to reading a literary text discussed in this article have hopefully contributed to an initial evaluation of best practices for the use of digital humanities in education to foster critical reading and thinking skills in the classroom.

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INTERDISCIPLINARY USES OF DIGITAL EDITIONS FOR ITALIAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* and the Silvano Toti Globe Theatre Archive

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Abstract – Just as digital technologies have become an essential part of research in the Humanities field, digital editing of early modern texts has undergone considerable changes. The breadth of online materials and scholarly reflections on the rediscovery of Renaissance textuality as intrinsically fluid and unstable have paved the way for new theories and practices of editing that can also be used to help digital natives approach Shakespeare's multi-layered textual world. In this paper, I will outline the main features and learning objectives of an experimental template that will be made available on the website of the Silvano Toti Globe Theatre Archive. It will consist of new digital editions of selected scenes from Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* and from some of its presumed Italian narrative sources. The interface will show parallel texts of both modernised-spelling editions and facsimile reproductions; all texts will be TEI-based and interconnected through XML-encoded hyperlinks. These digital editions will be supported by critical apparatuses, learning activities for target groups of students and worksheets for their teachers. Students' resources will include linguistic exercises and activities aimed to foster their reflection on Shakespeare and cultural exchanges in the European Renaissance (as well as today), and to promote a more inclusive, intercultural and interdisciplinary view of Shakespearean texts and literature in general. Teachers will instead be provided with tips for class debate and interdisciplinary learning units also to be employed within CLIL thematic modules. The template is, therefore, dual in scope, as it is meant to develop both enduring understanding *and* specific linguistic, cultural, and digital skills. Especially now that the digital classroom has become the daily reality of millions of students all over world, an increasingly virtual and blended learning environment requires students not only to acquire new digital competences, but also to learn how to use digital technologies with greater awareness and critical thinking.

Keywords: *Cymbeline*; Shakespeare's Italian sources; digital editing; digital archives; digital natives.

1. Introduction

In this paper I will start from scholarly reflections on textual editing, digital tools, and younger generations to outline the main features and objectives of

an experimental template that will be made available on the website of the Silvano Toti Globe Theatre Archive for Italian high school students and teachers.

The creation of a digital template for high school students is one of the specific outputs of my Post-Doctoral Fellowship at Roma Tre University (co-funded by the Silvano Toti Foundation), which is part of the research project on "The Potentialities of Shakespeare's Theatre for L2 Learning" directed by Maddalena Pennacchia. This project is grounded in a broader theoretical and methodological research on the possible uses of Shakespeare's theatre and "aims to explore the field of teaching English as L2 by using Shakespeare's poetry for the theatre, while also investigating the power of Shakespeare's dramatic poetry to create empathic relations among young people" (Pennacchia 2021). This research is at the basis of the educational activities carried out in collaboration with the staff of the Roman Globe and, of course, with the Silvano Toti Globe Theatre Digital Archive project.[1]

The template aims to put to use new digital editions of selected passages from Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* and from its possible Italian sources. The idea of focusing on Shakespeare's Italian narrative sources was prompted by the research carried out within the *SENS* Archive project coordinated by the *Skenè* Research Centre of the University of Verona directed by Silvia Bigliazzi, a project with which I was given the opportunity to collaborate for some time with other Roma Tre University scholars.[2] Moreover, the choice of *Cymbeline* was due to the fact that it is one of Shakespeare's five Roman plays and therefore in line with the "Shakespeare's Rome Project", an ongoing international Departmental research programme of Roma Tre University started in 2004 at the initiative of Maria Del Sapio Garbero.[3]

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[1] The Silvano Toti Globe Theatre Archive was created thanks to a formal agreement signed on 18 May 2018 between Politeama S.r.l. (artistic direction of the Silvano Toti Globe Theatre) and the Department of Foreign Languages, Literatures and Cultures of Roma Tre University. This digital archive has been created to collect all the materials related to the shows produced by or held at the Silvano Toti Globe Theatre since its foundation (2003-2020): recorded performances, pictures, translations, scripts, costume and scenography sketches, statistic data, press-releases. For copyright reasons, the Archive can only be consulted on site at the Multimedia Centre of the Department, where any visitor can register and have access to the materials. The Archive's Project is directed by Maddalena Pennacchia, who coordinates a team composed of: Simone Trecca and myself for Roma Tre University; Carlotta Proietti, Susanna Proietti, Loredana Scaramella and Alessandro Fioroni for Politeama S.r.l., with the support of a Scientific Committee: Masolino d'Amico (Roma Tre University), Maria Del Sapio Garbero (Roma Tre University), Keir Elam (Bologna University), Viola Papetti (Roma Tre University), Gilberto Sacerdoti (Roma Tre University). See the website of the Silvano Toti Globe Theatre: https://bacheca.uniroma3.it/archivio-globe/.

[2] Shakespeare's Narrative Sources: Italian Novellas and their European Dissemination: https://skene.dlls.univr.it/sens/.

[3] Roma Tre's Shakespeare's Rome Project: https://bacheca.uniroma3.it/sriss/shakespeares-rome-project/.

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In the following pages I will especially focus on the possible interdisciplinary applications of this pedagogical tool and on its potential uses for the study of Shakespeare but also, and perhaps foremost, for foreign language learning, for the valorisation of intercultural exchanges in the European Renaissance and beyond, and for the development of digital skills.

Digital technologies, after all, have now fully become part of any Renaissance and Shakespearean scholar's everyday toolkit. The breadth of primary materials available online makes it possible to access large databases of information, consult fragile and rare documents and early editions at the click of a button, and explore the seemingly infinite possibilities connected with Shakespeare's elusive textuality also through new methods for encoding humanities data in electronic form thanks to the Text Encoding Initiative (Burnard *et al.* 2006; Pierazzo 2014). As is well known, the remarkably diversified number of online digital secondary resources within the cross-media landscape plus more sophisticated and accurate software programs and computing instruments allow scholars – as well as any user – to draw together collections of materials around any research topic in ways that not only delve into but also trigger the multiplicity of meanings of any given text, thus enhancing the "restless kineticism" (Marcus 2007, p. 128) of the text Postmodernist theorists would advocate for.

This "hyper-mediated, windowed, fragmented, and increasingly interactive textual space" (Squeo 2019, p. 259) has become a metamorphic virtual space. In the passage from page to screen and from *the* screen to screens, the huge potential of the hypertextual, multimedia environment can "enhance our reading experience of Shakespeare's texts" (Best 2007, p. 145) by gradually turning the reader into a user. Moreover, this potential has radically changed the ways scholars do and share research, urging them to rethink research questions and goals. As far as textual editing is concerned, for instance, "both the way in which editors envisage the editorial task and the way in which readers approach the materials the editor provides" (Massai 2004, p. 103) has been affected.

As scholars in the past decades have made clear, from the beginning of the 2000s onward, online editing of Renaissance texts has been considerably transformed within the fluid cyberspace. Whereas early projects were primarily meant either to create digital libraries with as many records available as possible or to emulate print-based editions (Carson 2006, p. 169), after two decades digital editing of early modern texts – and especially of Shakespearean ones – has mostly reached the same quality standards in terms of philological accuracy, in-depth analyses, and informed critical paratexts as printed scholarly editions. The rapid spread of computing facilities, moreover, has made it possible to overcome a number of practical limits posed by the codex form. As underscored in the course of a lively critical

debate over the past few years, digital editions, in addition to being more accessible and more interactive, have also offered scholars and readers the chance to rediscover aspects of early modern textuality traditionally dismissed by textual scholars under "the imperatives of cultural heritage, which privilege authenticity, wholeness, and transmissibility" (Galey 2014, p. 160; see also Massai 2006; Squeo 2019). As Sonia Massai puts it,

> A growing awareness of different types of textual instability and variation both *within* and *between* early modern printed editions of Renaissance play-texts has led to a crisis in editing for the medium of print. (Massai 2004, p. 94)

The very idea of a definitive, authoritative version of the text, which has been at the core of paper editions for decades, has been called into question by presenting Renaissance texts as intrinsically unstable and often existing in significantly different variants. New technological tools have thus contributed to "historicising print-based notions of textual uniqueness and stability" (Squeo 2019, p. 259) and to "distrust[ing] many of the author-centred narratives by which earlier editions have traditionally determined textual authority" (Marcus 2007, p. 129).

The diversified approaches to editing Renaissance texts empowered by the digital turn have often been channelled to meet the needs of students and younger scholars. Besides, high school and university teachers have been endowed with tools and methodologies to better use and take advantage of online resources in increasingly intercultural, interdisciplinary and intermedial educational contexts. In particular, teaching Shakespeare and exploring his textuality with new technologies – an ongoing process – has prompted questions on how digital practices can be applied in pedagogical environments. This has been the crucial concern of a continuing critical debate, even more so when Shakespeare is being read and taught in predominantly non-English speaking countries, where the cultural exchange at stake often brings issues of diversity, multiplicity, and contamination to the fore.

In this sense, not only can "digital platforms […] help to challenge students' understanding of Shakespeare as one single canonical text" (Bell, Borsuk 2020, p. 5), but – by doing so – they can also help debunk inherited, long-standing assumptions about 'high' vs 'low' culture and literature, and about supposed cultural gaps between nations, insofar as understanding the digital world also means to understand its power structures and struggles. Digital tools can also help raise awareness in students about cultural formation processes and accordingly "serve as a vector for provoking student introspection about their position in their specific culture and socio-political context that can challenge authoritative readings and meaning-making processes within educational systems" (Bell, Borsuk 2020, p. 6).

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Digital editing of Shakespeare's texts has, therefore, also paved the way for a number of initiatives designed to support teaching. Of course, it is not only a matter of making the reading of Shakespeare's 'original' version(s) of a play-text more accessible, especially to second-language learners (Evain, De Marco 2016, p. 163). It is also a question of devising new ways to make digital natives of the 'Generation Z' – "who participate, since birth, in a digital media circuit where different semiotic systems and codes are constantly remediated" (Pennacchia 2017, online) – approach Shakespeare's textuality. The aim is to make students profit from a digital tool created with a view to address their interests, as well as their "specific cognitive abilities" (Pennacchia 2017, online).

2. Learning with digital editions of *Cymbeline* and of its Italian sources

The template here under consideration is built on newly-created digital editions with critical apparatuses of selected scenes from Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* and from some of the Italian sources scholars have commonly identified for this Shakespearean late play (namely, Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*). Introductory comments on their Renaissance European translations and/or rewritings are also included, in line with the growing research interest in the European circulation and transmission of Shakespeare's sources. As we will see, the template consists of digital editions of Renaissance texts with specific activities devised for target groups of students, as well as related worksheets and lesson plans for their teachers.

This teaching device, entirely written in English, will be created for and uploaded on the official website of the Silvano Toti Globe Theatre Archive, a digital archive devoted to the theatrical productions held at this replica of an Elizabethan theatre in the heart of Villa Borghese in Rome. Both the archive and its website are hosted by Roma Tre University, thanks to a formal agreement with the Silvano Toti Globe Theatre dating back to 2018 and to an enduring collaboration, purposely established "to broaden [this theatre's] educational mission beyond acting training" (Calvi, Pennacchia in press). The template will be made available in the section of the website dedicated to online resources for Italian high school teachers and students (which will be open-access for registered users) and has been devised mainly for Italian secondary school students attending their fourth year, that is, those students who are expected to achieve – by the end of the school year – English language proficiency equal to the level B1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Fourth-year students are the

ideal target group of this template because it is during this year that in Italian *licei* Shakespeare and the Elizabethan and Jacobean Ages are usually taught as part of the English classes' ministerial syllabus, as well as the history, literature, philosophy, and art of the sixteenth and seventeenth century mostly in Italy but also in a European perspective. The template could, however, be of use also to students at the end of their third year – provided they have been introduced to Shakespeare's theatre and the English Renaissance – or in their fifth year, with activities recalibrated so as to meet the standards of linguistic proficiency at the A2 (third year) or B2 (fifth year) level.

From the structural point of view, the template presents an initial user-friendly interface showing parallel texts of a facsimile reproduction of Shakespeare's First Folio (1623) on the left and a digital edition with modernised spelling and punctuation of the same scenes on the right, with English glosses on complex or obsolete words or syntagmas to facilitate reading comprehension. In spite of not being an experienced textual editor myself, modernisation of the text has not been an excessively demanding task, in light of the specific purpose of this digital edition of a Shakespeare play: there only exists a single authoritative text of the play – i.e., the one published in the 1623 First Folio, where *Cymbeline* is included as the last of the tragedies, to which a second version published in the 1632 Second Folio with only minor revisions is added. As for punctuation, lineation and stage directions, as editors of this play have often acknowledged, the text of *Cymbeline* is mostly clear and requires little intervention by the editor, displaying only a few misprints and minor errors.[4]

The critical apparatus of this students' digital edition of *Cymbeline* will include a number of linkable resources: a short overall introduction to the play (dating, settings, genre(s), characters, main plot, in-depth analyses of major themes, etc.); brief summaries of the action taking place in between the scenes that have been selected for editing; explanatory notes addressing core historical and cultural issues, as well as intertextual connections with the play's sources included in the template; short textual histories of the main transmission and circulation of both the quoted sources and of their translations and/or adaptations at the top of each edition. Starting from the comparison between Shakespeare and (part of) his estimated Italian sources, the following scenes from *Cymbeline* have been selected:

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[4] For an accurate review of all the textual issues connected to *Cymbeline*'s early print version(s), their restoration, and emendations, see Appendix 1 to the Arden Third Series Edition of the play, edited by Valerie Wayne (Shakespeare 2017, pp. 378-401). In particular, refer to the section devoted to the name of the female heroine, "Innogen or Imogen?" (pp. 391-398), for a detailed overview of perhaps the most contentious editing issue since the editors of the Oxford *Complete Works* first changed the spelling in 1986.

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Act 1, Scene 4[5]	wager scene
Act 2, Scene 2	bedchamber scene
Act 2, Scene 4	Iachimo's report to Posthumus
Act 2, Scene 5	Posthumus' anger
Act 3, Scene 3	Innogen in Belarius' cave
Act 3, Scene 4	Innogen's disguise as Fidele
Act 4, Scene 2	Cloten's death and Innogen's fury

Table 1
Scenes from Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* selected for the template.

The modernised edition of these scenes will be TEI-based with XML-encoded hyperlinks[6] connecting the text of *Cymbeline* with those of its main Italian sources, Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* (*GL*).[7] Hyperlinks, enabling to visualise editions in overlapping windows on the screen and allowing to skip from one document to the other in no pre-established order, are displayed through small windowed menus each time offering the possibility to choose the source one wants to browse. Hyperlinks are both to complete sources (or specific passages from them, if intertextual connection only partly concerns a given work) and to specific sentences that are mostly reminiscent of the 'target' text.

Just as in the case of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* split-screen interface, facsimiles of early print versions of the Italian sources are placed side by side

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[5] All references to *Cymbeline* are to the Arden Third Series Edition of the play, edited by Valerie Wayne (Shakespeare 2017).

[6] The fifth revision of the Guidelines for Electronic Text Encoding and Interchange (TEI Guidelines P5, 2020): https://tei-c.org/release/doc/tei-p5-doc/en/html/index.html.

[7] In this essay, I mostly to refer to Geoffrey Bullough's still unchallenged, eight-volume classification of Shakespeare's dramatic and narrative sources, in which he includes – alongside other sources like Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1587 edition) and *The Description and Historie of Scotland* (1587 edition), and the anonymous *Frederyke of Jennen* (1560 edition) – three Italian sources: Boccaccio (source), Tasso (analogue), and Bandello (analogue) (Bullough 1975, pp. 38-111). Bandello has not been edited for this template because, as we will see, this author does not usually belong with the Italian high school curriculum. He distinguishes between "source", "probable source", and "analogue", "which may suggest how Shakespeare's contemporaries and predecessors approached similar topics, and also how individual or traditional his treatment was" (Bullough 1975, p. 346). An alternative terminology to distinguish between sources with different degrees of contamination is given by Robert Miola, within his classification of seven types of intertextuality (Revision, Translation, Quotations, Sources, Conventions and Configurations, Genres, Paralogues). According to him, sources can be divided into "the source coincident" ("the earlier text exists as a whole in dynamic tension with the later one, a part of its identity"), "the source proximate" (which "functions as the book-on-the-desk; the author honors, reshapes, steals, ransacks, and plunders". This is the case of Boccaccio's *Decameron*), and "source remote" ("all sources and influences that are not clearly marked, or that do not coincide with the book-on-the-desk model", as Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*). See Miola 2004, pp. 19-20.

with modernised digital editions,[8] preceded by short introductions and with English glosses and footnotes that are mainly functional to comment on the junctures between that specific source text and *Cymbeline*. Given that this is not a scholarly critical edition meant for academics, no collation of different early witnesses of the source texts has been done, but single witnesses have been selected according to previous philological scholarly research.

In the first case, most critics now agree – on the basis of clear textual evidence – that the wager subplot of *Cymbeline* was greatly inspired by Boccaccio's *Decameron*, namely by the tale "Bernabò da Genova" ("Bernabò from Genoa", *Decameron*, II.9), in which a Genoese merchant called Bernabò is deceived by Ambruogiuolo into believing that his virtuous and faithful wife, Zinevra, has betrayed him and thus orders her to be killed; Zinevra manages to escape by disguising herself as a man and serving the sultan for the following six years, until she meets both Bernabò and Ambruogiuolo in Alessandria, unveils her true identity, and goes back to Genoa with her husband. The Italian edition selected for being encoded in the hypertextual space of this template has been pointed to by many scholars as the one that might have been circulating in England by the time Shakespeare wrote *Cymbeline* (1609-1610): Lionardo Salviati's first edition, published in Florence in 1582, which was probably the version that was used for the first English translation of the *Decameron* (Wright 1936, p. 500; Wyatt 2005, p. 221).[9]

As regards Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*, which is a different kind of source – being an analogue or a source remote – due to the fact that there is less textual correspondence with Shakespeare, there are some stanzas presenting "influences that are not clearly marked" (Miola 2004, p. 20) but that are, especially according to Bullough, particularly reminiscent of some passages in *Cymbeline*. A digital edition of some of these stanzas – namely VII.5-19, VIII.52-5, and XIX.102-9 – will be offered using the edition of the poem by Francesco Osanna (Mantua, 1584). As argued by some scholars (Dodge 1929, p. 688; Kirkpatrick 1995, p. 173), this is the Italian version that is most credited as being the one employed for the first English translation of Tasso by Edward Fairfax (1600).

As previously anticipated, the crucial feature of interpretive digital editions of scenes from *Cymbeline* and Italian sources, encoded following the latest TEI criteria, is that they will be complemented by activities for students and worksheets for teachers freely available on the website of the Silvano

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[8] All the early-print versions of the texts are available in PDF format on online research databases: *Early English Books Online* (*EEBO-TCP*) and *The Internet Archive*.

[9] Salviati made multiple following re-editions of Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1597, 1602, 1614). The first English translation of the novellas (1620, *The Decameron containing An hundred pleasant novels*) is anonymous, but it has often been attributed to John Florio (Wright 1953; *et al.*).

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Toti Globe Theatre Digital Archive. Possible learning activities are divided into four categories, the former of which includes:

1. linguistic exercises starting from the modernised texts of *Cymbeline* and sources, or from other resources made available in the template to develop language skills at B1 level in English: standard reading comprehension exercises (multiple-choice or open questions, 'fill-in-the-gaps' exercises, etc.), lexical exercises also supported by suitable online tools such as the Open Shakespeare glossary[10] or free online dictionaries, production tasks such as writing a summary of the scene(s), listening comprehension exercises.

2. The most linguistically skilled students will also have the possibility to test themselves with brief translations into Italian of passages from the English text, as well as with rewritings in contemporary English of selected passages in early modern English and with editing sample-tasks on the spelling modernisation of very short, accessible passages from the different facsimile reproductions.

3. There will also be activities to guide students into making written or oral comparisons between *Cymbeline* and Boccaccio or Tasso: for instance, analogies and differences between Shakespeare's and Boccaccio's tale in terms of plot developments and main events (e.g. the wager and bedchamber scenes in the texts), settings, time schemes, and characters; comparisons between the bucolic representations of space in Tasso (*GL*, VII.5-19) and in *Cymbeline* (3.3), between Innogen's fierce fury for the presumed death of Posthumus (4.2.306-32) and Erminia's for the one of Tancredi (*GL*, XIX.102-9). This category of activities will also include guided thematic analyses of given topics, such as the different gender constructions of Innogen, Erminia, and Zinevra; the respective features of literary genres (romance, novella, epic-chivalric poem); the divergent functions and uses of cross-dressing for female characters; the contrasting stereotypes on women in a European Renaissance perspective.

4. Finally, students will be asked to do some extra individual online research, using provided links, on topics such as the history of Roman Britain, Shakespeare's late plays, specific aspects of the life and works of one of the three authors, or core differences between Italian and British Renaissance.

In order for teachers to fully explore the possibilities offered by the template, worksheets and lesson plans will also be available, providing not only tips for class debates but also interdisciplinary learning units to be used in

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[10] See the glossary section on the *Open Shakespeare* website: http://www.shakespeare-online.com/glossary/.

*L*ingue e *L*inguaggi

collaboration with teachers of other disciplines: prompts and suggestions for more in-depth analyses of – for instance – the culture, literature, history, and art of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe within the syllabus of the English, Italian, History, Philosophy, and Art History classes; modules on the Roman colonial Empire within English and Latin classes; on the broad relationship between Shakespeare and Italian culture; or on *Cymbeline* in the arts (visual arts, music, intermedial transits into film and TV adaptations).

3. The rationale of the template

That this interdisciplinary and interactive digital template should be made available as an online tool for students on the website of this theatre's archive is in line with the Silvano Toti Globe Theatre's passionate and enduring concern with younger generations: since its foundation in 2003, late Artistic Director Gigi Proietti[11] has conceived this theatre as a place for the theatrical education of new audiences, of the growing number of young people who have crowded the pit of this Globe year after year, in a place where Shakespeare has always been staged for a horizontal – cross-generational and inter-classist – audience as a product of both 'high' and popular culture, i.e. in its authentic early modern dimension (Calvi, Pennacchia in press). Such interest is displayed and has mainly resulted into the long-standing and ongoing collaboration with Roma Tre University on the research and didactic projects documented on the archive's website.

The fact that the template will be hosted on the archive's open-access website is even more relevant now that the Covid-related global health crisis has forced us to face the fact that digital technologies will long be a pivotal element of our social, relational, working and studying lives. Hence the increasing urge to train teenagers in the use of technologies, by making them aware of the different issues at stake whenever they choose what to consult, what to read, and where to write.

Besides including the catalogue of all the materials collected in the archive, the website has also been specifically conceived of by the Project Team directed by Pennacchia as a hub of online content and resources related to Shakespeare aimed at different kinds of users, in order to make the work of the Silvano Toti Globe Theatre known to as wide an audience as possible (theatre and Shakespeare scholars and lovers, practitioners and school teachers/students), as well as to share outputs of academic research and offer

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[11] Gigi Proietti (1940-2020), Roman actor, writer and director, passed away just before this essay was submitted for publication. Proietti, who first conceived the idea and made it possible for the Silvano Toti Globe Theatre to be built in 2003, has since been its Artistic Director (with his production company, Politeama S.r.l.).

more widely accessible multi-media resources connected to the productions of the Villa Borghese Globe and to Shakespeare's plays in general.

Most importantly, the website of the Silvano Toti Globe Theatre Archive is the 'window' of a place deputed to store and crystallize the memory of all the work of this theatre and of the research activities connected to it for generations to come. However truistic this statement may be – archives have long been "the dominant metaphor for cultural memory" (Galey 2014, p. 1) –, when students and teachers browse the website, they are bound to perceive the highly symbolic value of the virtual Shakespearean place on which the website relies. At the same time, the website of the archive is meant to create a transgenerational and diverse community of users, who may also want to come and visit the archive at Roma Tre University. They might thus paradoxically contribute to making the materials that the archive is bound to preserve live anew "in the transfer to a new [im]material context" (Galey 2014, p. 56) where they become part of a common cultural heritage.

In order to fully understand the rationale of the template described above, it is also worth explaining why *Cymbeline* is a particularly apt play in this case, despite not having been put on stage at the Silvano Toti Globe. Unlike the other Roman plays, *Cymbeline* does have alleged Italian sources – Boccaccio and Tasso – that students may have studied or will study at school. On the contrary, Bandello – whose XXVII novella (Bandello 1554; Fenton 1567), also mentioned by Bullough as an analogue for this play (1975, vol. 8, pp. 87-90) – is not included for he is not part of the Italian Literature syllabus. Equally unknown to Italian students are the possible Italian antecedents of *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, respectively *Il Cesare* by Orlando Pescetti (1594, possible source) and *Cleopatra* by Giambattista Giraldi Cinthio (1583 edition, analogue), mentioned in Bullough's classification of Shakespearean sources and analogues (Bullough 1964, vol. 5, pp. 174-194, 343-357).

A final remark is here due on how providing digital editions not only of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* but also of its presumed main Italian sources may indeed benefit students. Presenting modernised texts of sources is relevant, in this case, insomuch as it allows students and teachers to explore Shakespeare's textuality not as part of a self-contained dramatic phenomenon (i.e., early modern English theatre) but with a view to cultural exchanges and diversity: Italian students approaching Shakespearean plays will crucially benefit from discovering how much Shakespeare owes to their own culture. The field of Source Studies with regard to Shakespeare is by now no longer conceived only as "an overtly positivistic and bardolatrous pursuit" (Walter, Klann 2018, p. 1), for in the last two decades attention has been paid not only to Shakespeare's sources as such, but also to their "circulation, transmission,

transformation and function" (Bigliazzi 2018, p. 13).[12] Studying sources as part of a wide, more nuanced and less hierarchical range of intertextual interactions (Miola 2004, p. 13) will, therefore, prompt reflections on "the intersections of early modern political, gendered, sexual, and racial subjectivities, conditions of theatrical practice, and the materials from which Shakespeare produced his plays" (Britton, Walter 2018, p. 1), thus fostering class discussion on such topical issues as politics, power, gender, race, and intercultural transactions.

It is also extremely important that activities designed for Post-Millennial, European students who are only now beginning to study literature in general, and Shakespeare and the English Renaissance in particular, should raise awareness about how narrations circulated all over the Continent and how the digital medium can afford us deeper insights into the complex dynamics underpinning such circulation.

The set of edited texts of this digital template, along with the introductory references to their broader circulation within a complex network of intertextual connections, will thus achieve greater relevance in the light of what is emerging in the scholarly debate as a profound rethinking of the 'linear transmission' paradigm in Source Studies, as Silvia Bigliazzi has pointed out,

> in terms of a dynamic and complex process embedded in the larger cultural context in which translation is grounded. Each stage [is] viewed as a palimpsest of readings, stratified with successive processes of selection and inclusion of material derived from each immediate source, but also from other contemporary cultural models and influences, as well as interdiscursive material. (Bigliazzi 2018, p. 15)

4. Teaching objectives and beyond

The template is dual in scope, insofar as its core function is to develop both enduring understanding *and* specific linguistic, cultural, and digital skills in high school students. On one side, besides making the reading of Shakespeare more accessible to L2 learners, the teaching goals of this technological tool include providing teachers with a methodology and creating curriculum materials for multiple uses, as well as for different targets and pedagogical objectives. In terms of content, the first purpose of the template is, of course, to improve knowledge about Shakespeare, *Cymbeline* and its sources in a broad perspective. A related and no less relevant aim is to promote a more inclusive,

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[12] For an updated review of the qualification of the word 'source' in the large body of scholarly literature in the field of Source Study, refer to Maguire, Smith 2015, pp. 16-18.

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intercultural and interdisciplinary – i.e., a more democratic – view of Shakespeare and literature in general, in contrast with common assumptions still widely spread in high school teaching on the literary text and its ontology, and on such issues as the 'Author', originality, uniqueness, local vs global culture, 'high' vs 'low' cultural products.

As far as the level of competences to be achieved is concerned, one of the main aims is to train linguistic skills in English as a foreign language (EFL) through activities on the four linguistic abilities (written and oral comprehension, written and oral production), preparing fourth year students to meet the international standard of language proficiency at the B1 level (or another corresponding level for students attending a different year). Special focus will be placed on training students to read and understand the complex texts they are confronted with (be it Shakespeare's or a source text or part of the critical apparatuses), so as to help them learn how to read any form of written textuality closely, and how to become aware of the meaning(s) that text is expected to convey, as well as of its nuances and gaps.

A more interdisciplinary approach to the humanities will also be fostered through the digital editions and activities in this template, devised to be used in thematic multidisciplinary modules taught in English with the CLIL approach by teachers of other disciplines (e.g., Italian, History, Philosophy, Art History, Social Sciences). In the words of one of its 1994 inventors, the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is "a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language" (Coyle *et al.* 2010, p. 1). CLIL modules in English, which are being increasingly adopted in Italian high schools, are particularly appropriate for the '*Cymbeline* and its Italian sources' template. The CLIL methodology was in fact specifically crafted as a three-dimensional approach – stimulating linguistic, disciplinary, and metacognitive competences – to turn students into active learners by developing "Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency" (CALP) competences (such as writing argumentative texts and summaries) instead of "Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills" (BICS). Students are thus trained to use "High Order Thinking Skills" (HOTS) rather than "Low Order Thinking Skills" (LOTS). Urging students to reflect, in a multidisciplinary environment where English works as a sort of lingua franca, on such issues as translation as an intercultural practice, the circulation of Italian cultural heritage in the Renaissance, European pre-print culture, cultural (and, therefore, political) relations between England and Italy in the sixteenth and seventeenth century will help students broaden the scope of their knowledge. It will also prompt them to perceive the international, interdisciplinary and intermedial nature of Renaissance culture as a backdrop to our twenty-first-century global, interconnected culture.

As a matter of fact, the template also aims to develop some of the new digital skills required by a less text-based and more virtual and blended learning environment (Ehrlich 2008, p. 271), as well as by a growingly digital society. Now that the digital classroom has become, during frequent Covid-related lockdowns, a daily experience for millions of students all over world, it is all the more mandatory to train students to use digital technologies with greater awareness and critical thinking: digital natives born in the rhizomatic culture, where every information is available along multiple, simultaneous, horizontal paths, should be taught how to draw hierarchies among contents, data, and information sources, as well as how to choose among the endless resources available online.

Most of these objectives, of course, could not be achieved (at least not in the same way) with print-based critical editions of the same texts, which – unlike the composite, multimedia, interactive template here described – do not encompass the pivotal logics of transparent immediacy and hypermediacy Bolter and Grusin (1999) identified as the core principles of virtual reality.[13] At the same time, the template also responds to the increasingly imperative social function of the humanities, by putting scholarly research at the service of young people in ways that meet their needs and interact with their language(s).

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[13] On the one hand, Bolter and Grusin refer to "promise[s of] transparent, perceptual immediacy, experience without mediation, for […] virtual reality to diminish and ultimately deny the mediating presence of the computer and its interface". On the other, they define "hypermediacy" as being "most evident in the heterogeneous 'windowed style' of World Wide Web pages, […] a medium that offers 'random access'; it has no physical beginning, middle, or end" (Bolter, Grusin 1999, pp. 22-32).

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PART II | Intermediality and performance

A KING OF INFINITE (CYBER)SPACE?
The digital remapping of Shakespeare in light of The Globe's Emma Rice Controversy

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Abstract – Marjorie Garber has succinctly claimed that: "Every age creates its own Shakespeare" (2004, p.3). Garber counters the popular contention that Shakespeare's plays are "timeless" and moves toward an understanding of the works' enduring *timeliness*, in that they can be adapted in ways that already seem modern. More recently, Courtney Lehmann and Geoffrey Way have mapped how theatrical institutions have sought – and struggled – to negotiate the new digital environment. Their proposition is especially prescient in light of the recent controversy at the London Globe, when Emma Rice was formally asked to step down as artistic director because her practice of Shakespeare was deemed incongruous with Sam Wanamaker's founding vision in 1949. The Globe concluded that Rice's use of contemporary sound and lighting technology was not conducive to the unique theatre space they had created, and by implication positioned themselves as custodians of the essential Shakespeare. This paper situates the Rice controversy in the context of the Globe's negotiation of digital environments, and in particular the institution's construction of its online profile. Through a brief analysis of the Globe's online footprint, and reactions in the Shakespeare online community to Rice's departure, this paper identifies an apparent contradiction between, on the one hand, the Globe's online commitment to broadening access, generating and sustaining audiences for Shakespeare and, on the other, the Globe's reactive treatment of Rice. Contemporary adaptations and popularised Shakespeares are ghosted by a more traditional interpretation of the Bard. This paper argues that this controversy is indicative of both a creeping conservatism within the Shakespeare multiverse and also an implicit gender bias within some productions. Furthermore, it considers to what extent the Globe's reaction to Rice signaled, despite Garber's argument, an *untimely* Shakespeare, one that risks being out of touch with its age.

Keywords: Shakespeare; adaptation; Twitter; performance; the Globe.

> *When I started working at the Globe, I came on too strong. I met the space with artistic frenzy, it was so exciting – the lights, the sounds. I don't think they imagined I'd leave. They thought I'd accept new guidelines, that I'd want the job more than my practice. My guess is they were shocked when I said: 'Absolutely not'… You've one path in life, which is your integrity, your vision, your soul.*
> *It was never an option to stay.*
> (K. Kellaway, "I don't know how I got to be so controversial", Emma Rice Interview, *The Observer* 1 July 2018).

1. Introduction

Though the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the arts is yet to be assessed, nationwide lockdowns have forced theatres and arts venues to close indefinitely, and those without public subsidy are now facing insolvency. The Globe theatre on London's Southbank is one such venue that has recently found itself in precarious financial circumstances. In a letter to the Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden, Conservative MP Julian Knight stressed the theatre's urgent need for emergency funding:[1]

> Shakespeare's Globe is a world-renowned institution and not only part of our national identity, but a leading example of the major contribution the arts make to our economy. For this national treasure to succumb to Covid-19 would be a tragedy. (BBC News, 2020)

Without a doubt, the closure of the Globe, that functions as a popular theatre venue as well as an educational hub and tourist attraction would be a considerable loss. However, in post-Brexit Britain, the positioning of the theatre as intrinsic to national identity lends credence to Tom Cornford's assertion that the Globe "has always tended towards the superficially demotic while remaining usually fundamentally conservative" (Cornford 2016).[2]

The notion of claiming ownership over Shakespeare has been problematised in recent years, most prominently by the public controversy involving then Artistic Director, Emma Rice. Following her brief two-season term, Rice was asked to step down because her practice of Shakespeare was deemed incongruous with Sam Wanamaker's founding vision in 1949. Rice utilized artificial light and sound in productions, which – to an extent – could be deemed inappropriate by the board for a space designed to emulate early-modern performance practise. Rice's dismissal ignited immediate backlash online that simultaneously showcased the new and expanding landscape of the Shakespeare community and revived the difficult question that has echoed in the discipline for decades: Who is Shakespeare for?

In order to (re)produce Shakespeare, contemporary directors engage with the complex politics of adaptation. Performance tends to be viewed as the

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[1] The Globe is a registered charity and while this may provide a certain creative freedom, Susan Bennett argues that the theatre has "developed in response to patterns of tourism rather than patterns of theatregoing" which alters the dynamic between audience and performer (2017, p. 499).

[2] In response to the Emma Rice announcement, Sohrab Ahmari's article for *Prospect Magazine* articulates a quasi-religious devotion to Shakespeare, describing the Globe as the "temple" where one "commune[s] with the Bard" (2016).

most 'authentic' form of interpretation in the realm of Shakespearean scholarship. However, Margaret Jane Kidnie interrogates the distinction between text and performance to succinctly argue that adaptation is not a static concept, but rather an evolving one, "closely tied to how the work modifies over time and from one reception space to another" (2009, p. 5). Kidnie's work is particularly pertinent when one considers the range of new reception spaces enabled by the internet, that invite active users to contribute to and shape an expanding Shakespeare multiverse.[3] The traditional tendency to denigrate adaptation within the moralist framework of fidelity studies has been challenged by the ubiquity of new-media interpretations and in the realm of performance, by the phenomenon of post-modern theatre, characterized by a disregard for formality, utilization of pastiche and centralizing the audience.[4] The colourful assortment of politically engaged experimental performances in recent years paired with the expanding landscape of new-media adaptation has given rise to new theoretical approaches that counter the traditional source-oriented focus of the discipline and instead employ a goal-oriented theory that evaluates impact over textual reverence.[5]

Contemporary Shakespearean scholarship is a thriving, diverse field that promotes materialist, feminist, eco-critical, and biopolitical approaches to the texts. Despite the wave of new media Shakespeares and the new theoretical frameworks they have invited, criticism tends to veer back to the same questions. In other words, to borrow from Richard Burt, despite a range of "Shakespeare-eccentric" productions, criticism still tends to search for the elusive Shakespearean "centre" (2007, p.1-9). Case in point, in response to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival's commitment to translate the plays into modern English, James Shapiro argued that "Shakespeare is about the intoxicating

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[3] In its engagement with contemporary fan-generated technologies, this paper builds on Louise Geddes and Valerie M. Fazel's conception of the "multiverse" that understands Shakespeare "not as a singular body of work, but as a space where a process of inquiry and cultural memory – memories in the making, and those already made – is influenced and shaped by the technologies available to the reader" (2021).

[4] For an analysis of recent social media Shakespeare(s), see Erin Sullivan (2018) "Shakespeare, Social Media, and the Digital Public Sphere: *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *A Midsummer Night's Dreaming*".

[5] See for example *Ensaio. Hamlet.* (2004) directed by Enrique Diaz, a largely improvised performance that uses the central themes of Hamlet to explore the fallout of the election of Luiz Inácio Lula de Silva in Brazil; *Coriolan/us* (2012) directed by Mike Pearson for National Theatre Wales, blends Shakespeare and Brecht in a disused WWII hangar and globalizes the plot for the current '24-hour news' generation. In 1998, Barbara Hodgdon pointed out the critical desire or "penchant for judging performed Shakespeare in terms of textual fidelity" (1998, p. 1). More recently, what Julie Sanders terms "creative infidelity" serves as a more productive approach to adaptation: "It is usually at the very point of infidelity that the most creative acts of adaptation and appropriation take place", and signals that 'fidelity' theory is a thing of the past (2005, p. 24).

richness of the language" (Pollack-Pelzner 2015). Locating the value of Shakespeare exclusively in the vernacular positions adaptations as necessitating an irrevocable loss. The myopic perspective that bases a given performance's success solely upon its contribution to Shakespeare's cultural currency serves to negate other, more nuanced considerations. When Shakespeare is viewed as a site of negotiation for contemporary global conflict for example, the plays serve to highlight enduring tensions between high and low culture, conservatism and liberalism, and dominant and marginal voices.[6]

2. The Prelude to the Controversy

2.1. Contextualising the Globe

Shakespeare's Globe Theatre opened in 1997 with a commitment to "celebrate[ing] Shakespeare's transformative impact on the world by conducting a radical theatrical experiment" ("Policies and Terms" Shakespeare's Globe). While the word 'experiment' in theatre is most comfortably associated with avant-garde and a rejection of dominant production values, Douglas Lanier has questioned the elasticity of the term as it relates to the Globe's mission. Lanier maintains that the term "is designed to push the scholarly, educational mission of the Globe to the fore while keeping a safe distance from the suspect notion of actually recreating the past" (Lanier 2002, p. 162). Moreover, Susan Bennet identifies a paradox in the theatre's use of the word 'experimental', that on the one had "continues to provide a refresh for the Shakespeare brand; on the other, the productions we continue to identify under this well-worn rubric affirm assumptions and practises that are by now as familiar as the creative and critical Shakespeare of liberal humanism" (Bennett 2017, p. 25). Intended to replicate the early modern Shakespearean playhouse, the Globe has expressed a commitment to architectural and performance fidelity that implies their position as custodians of the *essential* Shakespeare.[7] Thus, the employment of the term 'experimental' might be read as an attempt to deflect critique.

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[6] More recently, 'presentist' approaches to the plays have served to demonstrate how Shakespeare presses us to explore themes that characterise and inform contemporary notions of power, politics, sexuality and race. Hugh Grady and Terence Hawkes' anthology *Presentist Shakespeares* (2007) maintains "[W]e need urgently to recognise the permanence of the present's role in all our dealings with the past. We cannot make contact with a past unshaped by our own concerns" (Grady, Hawkes 2007, p. 3).

[7] Countering the traditional faith in the timeless, universal, transcendent meanings of the plays, Alan Sinfield urged critics to reclaim Shakespeare from the limitations of conservative anglophone ideology: "It may be that we must see the continuous centring of Shakespeare as the cultural token which must be appropriated as itself tending to

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Drawing on claims of historical accuracy to bolster its proximity to Shakespeare implies that he is somehow "theirs to give, that they hold the key with which to 'unlock' his works" (Olive 2015, p. 116). Striving for historical authenticity, whether it is explicitly acknowledged or not, is a dubious and deeply performative enterprise.[8] While the notion of reviving 'authentic' Shakespearean meaning via early modern performance practises has been read as inherently suspect, the architectural layout of the theatre draws out the dialogic aspects of each performance.[9] Audience engagement is a central tenet of the unique conditions the theatre has created. The Globe is a powerhouse in modern theatrical ecology and this paper does not attempt to de-legitimize it as a unique theatrical space and research facility, but rather to highlight how social media has magnified the contradiction between past and present at the heart of the Globe's ethos. The institution's recent attempts to negotiate the digital environment to expand their brand has led to the development of a progressive multi-platform profile that seeks to entice young, tech-savvy audience members but seems at odds with the Board's reactionary treatment of Rice.

2.2. Rice's Appointment as Artistic Director

In her previous position as artistic director of Kneehigh, a Cornwall based theatre company known for its experimental style, Rice was known to blend the classical with the contemporary. Her 2008 production of *Don John,* for example, recast the infamous libertine to late 1970s Britain and offered a sharp critique of Thatcherism. Rice carried this flair for mingling past and present into her role as Artistic Director at the Globe, most notably in her successful Bollywood-inspired production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, featuring an array of visual vocabularies inspired by pop culture, including Beyoncé's hit 'Single Ladies' on the soundtrack.

The heresy that resulted in Rice stepping down was the use of temporary lighting rigs and microphones, so-called 'modern technology' that has been utilized in performance spaces for centuries. In keeping with the dialogic potential of the space, Rice's introduction of amplified sound and lighting rigs might be read as an attempt to introduce "a more familiar commercial aesthetic to the Globe as means of framing an anti-elitist interaction with audiences" (Worthen 2020, p. 136). Kelly Jones has critiqued the notion that the playing

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reproduce the existing order… in practise conservative institutions are bound to dominate the production of such a national symbol, and that for one cultural phenomenon to have so much authority must be a hindrance to radical innovation" (1994, p. 133)

[8] Shakespeare's Globe website maintains that the theatre is "inspired and informed by the unique historic playing conditions" ("Policies and Terms" Shakespeare's Globe).

[9] Paul Mezner has argued that the language associated with the Globe's "experiment" is "tantalizingly empirical" (2006, p. 225).

conditions of the Globe liberate modern audiences from the behavioural restrictions of darkened theatre spaces. Jones contends that "the idea of such 'liberation' is tangled up in fraudulent ideals, and… the audience of the Globe, herded like sheep, simply exchanges one set of rules, one kind of display, for another" (Jones, 2007 pp. 90-1). The offending production was a feminist version of *Cymbeline* reclaimed as *Imogen* set on a London council estate and blasting Skepta's 'Shutdown' track.[10] The high box office returns suggest that audiences did not feel alienated by Rice's lighting and sound experiment. Moreover, Pascale Aebischer has critiqued the tradition-oriented tendency to dismiss the use of technology in performance:

> Present-day performance technologies enable the re-activation, for twenty-first century audiences and in the context of their increasing everyday enmeshment in digital information technologies, of dynamic and fluid performer-spectator relationships that characterise the performance and spatial technologies of the early modern playhouse. (Aebischer 2020, p. 2)

Aebischer contends that for tech-savvy audiences, performance technologies might be used productively to adapt the fluid performer-spectator dynamic of the early modern stage that is so central to the Globe's "experiment".

In the paradoxical statement released by the Globe's CEO, Neil Constable, the Board claimed that Rice's choice actually inhibited the ongoing "experiment" of the theatre.[11] The statement suggested that Rice's approach to stage production was inconsistent with the Globe's broader commitment to consolidate *their* version of Shakespeare. Constable acknowledged Rice's "mould-breaking work" that "brought [the] theatre new and diverse audiences, won huge creative and critical acclaim, and achieved exceptionally strong box office returns". However, Constable maintained that a commitment to exploring Shakespeare's working conditions should continue to be the "central tenet" of the Globe's mission, heavily implying that their institutional "experiment" is not artist driven. The Board's claim that the "sound and lighting technology" Rice introduced somehow diminishes the faithful reconstructive enterprise of a space already equipped with sprinklers, a gift shop and illuminated fire exit signage, inadvertently implies a purist desire to dictate practise.

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[10] Rice's commitment to diversity includes both audiences and actors. For example, Matthew Dunster's *Imogen* brought together a wonderfully diverse ensemble which was served to address a segment of the population traditionally underrepresented in theatre audiences based on age, gender, race, ability, socio-economics etc. as well as extending representation and outreach.

[11] Excerpts from 'Press Release: Statement Regarding the Artistic Direction of *Shakespeare's Globe*' (2016) qtd. in Mark Shenton's "Emma Rice to Step Down from London's Shakespeare's Globe". *Playbill* (2016)

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2.3. Measuring the Globe's online footprint

Yong Li Lan has astutely questioned the viability of conceptualising
performance as an exclusively lived experience when online content ranging
from promotional material to backstage rehearsal footage disperses the
performance well beyond the theatre walls:

> [The] audience community (that defines it as a performance) is not "naturally"
> confined to its theatre audience, but artificially extended to everywhere else (and
> no specific place) as well, "globalized," as we call it? (Li Lan 2003, p. 48)

Central to the inconsistency of the Globe's status on modernizing Shakespeare
is their negotiation of social media to create a professional, unified brand
identity and to generate new audiences. Their utilization of a variety of social
media platforms contradicts the Globe's seeming commitment to historical
accuracy. Their celebration of multimedia outside the theatre and
condemnation of multimedia inside the theatre has led Diana Henderson to
reflect that the theatre represents "a clash of agendas" (2002, p. 119). The
Globe's diverse online identity includes the Globe Playground: a colourful,
interactive space with games and videos to encourage children to learn about
Shakespeare. In a post-textbook era, embracing digital education is a viable,
progressive form of encouraging young people to become theatre goers.
However, the pull of neoliberal monetization has caused Geoffrey Way and
Courtney Lehmann to aptly question whether young users are attracted to
Shakespeare "because of new forms of agency posed by the democratization
of knowledge or because of the more insidious seductions of cognitive
capitalism" (2017, p. 64).

The Globe's website is interactive, stylish and appealing, with a user-
friendly interface, drop-down menus and high-resolution video clips.
However, the basket tab and playful Elizabethan encouragement to 'treat
thyself' are stark reminders of the powerful corporate enterprise of the Globe
that the early-modern architecture does little to disguise. The Globe's
Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts contribute to their active online
aesthetic, promote their current program and function as repositories of witty
theatrical commentary and *Game of Thrones* GIFs. Their dynamic presence on
social media reveals a desire to stay relevant and appeal to tech-savvy theatre
goers but it is incongruous with the theatre's rigid historicist agenda.

3. All the Web's a Stage: Reactions to the Controversy

Social media has utterly transformed the dynamic between performers and spectators.[12] Platforms like Twitter enable new kinds of performativity, wherein "members enact a type of social performance, where special practises established and reinforced by the user, and members of the network, signal their membership within the community" (Way 2011, p. 402). Crucially, Twitter disseminates performances into a new, networked collective populated by journalists, academics, audiences and fans. Erin Sullivan contends that the chief advantage of Twitter lies in its ability to "reframe our understanding of critical appraisal and audience authority" which encourages us to consider "theatre's relationship to society and the audience's role in such matters, especially as the fictional looks more like real" (2018, p. 65). While individual Tweets do not require reciprocity, the majority of commentators chose to 'tag' the Globe's Twitter page directly to notify them of their complaints. The Globe's Twitter page functions as a method of personalizing the brand, and thus maintains the illusion of accessibility, so it is perhaps unsurprising that commentators would attempt to indulge the dialogic impulse and create a conversation on the issue.

Social media affords the Globe the opportunity to curate and maintain an alternative self-generated narrative that promotes their cultural status, beyond that traditionally established by critics. Stephen O'Neill has articulated the beneficial interaction between theatrical institutions like the Globe and social media as means to promote institutional status: "Social media has become a way for these cultural institutions not only to engage with audiences… but also to construct and disseminate their own cultural value, and indeed Shakespeare's too" (2014, p. 37). It would be remiss to ignore the benefits of the global reach of social media in democratizing Shakespeare and the establishment of virtual Shakespeare community that counters traditional notion of theatre going as an exclusively upper or upper middle-class activity.

While the Board's decision to dismiss Emma Rice garnered some support, the overwhelming response to the controversy on Twitter was one of support for Rice. Many commentators expressed that sound and light alteration made for a feeble excuse to dismiss Rice and her creative vision entirely. Tweets like: "Shakespeare's 11th tragedy. Emma Rice victim of The Globe's dedication to shouting at tourists in the rain. I'm proud to be #TeamEmma" call attention to the Globe's position as custodians of Shakespeare (@harryblakemusic). Other users satirised the seeming hypocrisy of the Board's dual commitment to historically accurate theatre conditions and heritage tourism: "The Globe may be getting rid of 'light and sound' but thank

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[12] Gordon McMullan has explored the ways in which the Globe audience perform their role as spectators as much as the players on the stage (McMullan 2008 p.232).

GOD they're keeping the authentic and historically accurate Shakespeare giftshop" (@josklos). These responses highlight the unattainability of the Globe's mission for re-created authenticity, particularly in the centre of contemporary, urbanized, multi-cultural London. The Globe's championing of historical accuracy over artistic innovation seems, to borrow from Lyn Gardner, more akin to a museum than a theatre (Gardner 2016).

3.1. "#NotYourGlobe": Gender and Class Criticism

Shakespeare tends to operate as a meta-language for socio-political issues that transcend the plays themselves.[13] Some commentators dismissed the Board's rather fragile justification for Rice's departure and pointed to a more harmful issue at the heart of the controversy: "The insulting thing is that @The_Globe is blaming Emma Rice's departure on 'lighting & sound' use. She was too much of a visionary for them" (@westendproducer). Some speculated that the actual reason behind the Board's decision was Rice's commitment to gender parity at the Globe.[14] Beyond Twitter, costume designer Joan O'Clery's lengthy post entitled, "The Globe – it's a feminist issue" garnered support on the *Waking the Feminists* Facebook page. The movement utilized social media to showcase the need for more women in theatre positions to promote inclusive gender politics. The parallel between Rice's premature departure and the Irish *Waking the Feminists* initiative underscores the prevalence of gender disparity in theatre outside the UK and highlights the power of social media and written testimony to generate change. The gender gap in UK theatre has attracted considerable attention in recent years because despite the high number of female theatre goers, writers and directors remain predominantly male.[15]

[13] As an interesting case in point, Stephen O'Neill has recently argued that *King Lear* "is Shakespeare's Brexit play" maintaining that Shakespeare can be understood "as itself a discourse through which cultural ideas, both real and imaginary, about Brexit and the EU are negotiated" (2019, p. 120). More recently, James Shapiro has argued that *Coriolanus* – "a tragedy steeped in allusions to "contagion", "plague," and "the dead carcasses of unburied men… presaged the Trump administration's response to the Coronavirus pandemic" (Shapiro 2020)

[14] Gender-blind casting continues to generate criticism and speaks to an enduring desire to preserve Shakespeare's status as a powerful cultural artefact. Playwright Ronald Harwood was recently quoted saying that casting women in traditionally male roles is "astonishingly stupid" and "an insult to the playwright" (Snow 2016a). See also Dominic Cavendish's article for *The Telegraph* entitled "The Thought Police's rush for gender equality on stage risks the death of the great male actor" (2017). More recent developments strongly suggest that the issue cannot be ignored. Namely, Rice was replaced by another female artistic director; Michelle Terry and the Royal Shakespeare Company announced its 50/50 equality aim in 2018: https://www.rsc.org.uk/news/diversity-data-report

[15] From: Purple Seven *Gender in Theatre* pamphlet, 2015. See also "Women in theatre: how the '2:1 problem' breaks down" ("The Guardian DataBlog") and Lanre Bakare's article "Sexism and gender divide ingrained in UK Theatre, study claims" (2020).

The Globe's commitment to historical accuracy transcends the architecture and impacts the performance culture, evidenced by Mark Rylance's pioneering of 'original practice' performances during his tenure from 1995-2005. Rylance's well documented anti-Stratfordian position seems at odds with his championing of the Globe and highlights a double standard in the acceptability of Rylance and Rice questioning the eminence of Shakespeare's authorship. Rylance's recreation of Elizabethan performance practice that necessitates period costumes and all-male casts, perhaps unsurprisingly, incited criticism. Jeremy Lopez argued that Rylance's desire to establish "a theatrical practice that is based on highly dubious, manifestly problematic notions of authenticity and the uses of history" had less to do with historical preservation and more to do with the marketing value of tourism and student audiences (2008, p. 302). Despite this, however, Rylance was praised for his all-male productions of *Twelfth Night* and *Richard III* in 2012; his successor Dominic Dromgoole extended the Globe's stage during his tenure in an attempt to overcome some of the architectural limitations of the space, leading Tom Cornford to argue that, "rather than directing the actors, he… directed the building" (2010, p. 322).[16] The Rice controversy powerfully underscores the enduring conflict between individuals working on the craft and the institutional powers that govern them. The double standard in acceptability for 'alternative' productions was highlighted by several commentators on Twitter: "Men seen as 'innovative' to be encouraged, women seen as 'risky' to be closely watched #EmmaRice #WakingTheFeminists @lianbell @The_Globe" (@SarahDurcan). Indeed, the adaptive drive was already in motion at the Globe long before Rice took up the role of Artistic Director.

The enduring gender gap in theatre serves to maintain Shakespeare's patriarchal lineage. Writing on the gendered politics of ownership in the realm of theatrical performance, Kim Solga considers the reasoning behind Katie Mitchell's reluctance to direct Shakespeare:

> Shakespeare's 'owners' have long been, and remain today, primarily the powerful male actors, artistic directors, and mainstream theatre reviewers who function as arbiters of 'good' acting, directing, and interpretation of Shakespeare in Britain's public sphere. (2017, p. 106)

The Rice controversy certainly lends credence to this claim, as it demonstrates the harsh consequences for women who assert artistic authority or challenge the invisible but entrenched set of rules that dictate interpretations of

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[16] See Michael Billington's piece in *The Guardian* that explores the tension between populist and traditional performances. Billington praises Dromgoole's tenure and expresses trepidation about Rice's influence: "Now that Dromgoole and his co-directors have largely got the balance between active engagement and silent appreciation right, it would be a pity if it were to be upset" (2015).

Shakespeare. Shortly prior to the Board's announcement, Rice spoke out against loaded criticisms she received during her tenure at the Globe. In an article for *The Stage,* Rice said that frequent references to her as "naughty" by men in the industry made her "blood boil" (Hutchenson 2016). Critics have since pointed out the disproportionate criticism Rice received as a woman director and the subsequent outpouring of diversity criticism would suggest that Virginia Woolf's foreboding metaphor about Shakespeare's silenced sister, was more prescient than expected. [17]

As well as emphasizing an enduring gender disparity, the Rice controversy accented an uncomfortable class issue in British theatre: "#EmmaRice is an inspiration for many and championed change, diversity and accessibility. @The_Globe board decision flies in the face of this" (@okorie_chukwu). Despite their contemporary, sleek online aesthetic, the Globe was frequently positioned by Twitter users as directly oppositional to Rice's progressive agenda. The specific issue of ownership was addressed by hashtags such as: "The exit of #EmmaRice from @The_Globe is indicative of why so many ppl feel Theatre isn't accessible for them #NotYourGlobe #EveryonesGlobe" (@NotTooTame). This particular Tweet was posted with an accompanying image from Kenneth Loach's 1969 film *Kes*, depicting protagonist Billy Casper holding two fingers up to the camera as a cinematic icon of working-class British culture. Every director of the Globe, including Rice, has attempted to combat the classism of theatre by committing to keep £5 tickets in circulation, but her dismissal underscores the fact that inaccessibility is not only a financial issue.[18]

Reflecting on her successful production of *Imogen,* Rice explained: "Diverse to its bones, this production was all about access; access to Shakespeare, access for women, access for disabled actors and access for the audience" (Rice 2018). Following her admission that she struggled to understand some aspects of Shakespeare, Rice was criticized by Richard Morrison in *The Times* for the "perversity, incongruity and disrespect" of her artistic approach, and castigated for not knowing – and, moreover, not *enjoying* – Shakespeare enough (Morrison 2016). It appears that the wealth of contemporary adaptations has not entirely destabilized the notion of Shakespeare as emblematic of certain upper-class, academic British values.

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[17] See Paul Gallagher's article entitled "Shakespearean Black and Ethnic minority actors 'still only getting minor roles" (2016) and Barbara Vitello's article entitled "Oak Brook theatre defends same-sex couple, interracial casting in Shakespeare play" (2017).

[18] Speaking to Gordon Cox for *Variety,* Rice said "You can go in for £5. But there are still barriers, because many people find Shakespeare hard to understand, and think that it's not for them. So I do want to extend a hand even more. I want people to understand that it's accessible, that they will see a diverse company of actors onstage like you would on a London bus, and a variety of different styles of work" (2016)

Rice responded to Morrison's criticism by pointing out that: "There are gatekeepers of theatre in this country. I have never fitted in, so I see them clearly. Most of the gatekeepers went to Oxbridge and read classics and have similar taste in theatre." (Kellaway 2018). Her comments hint at how the controversy fits rather (un)comfortably within the broader global narrative of conservative politics trumping progressive politics.[19]

3.2. "The Brexit of Theatre"

The Globe's desire to revert to an idealized prior condition creates an uncomfortable connection between their decision on Rice and Britain's decision to leave the European Union. Both signal a return to a nostalgic version of Great Britannia, with Shakespeare as its most famous representative.[20] The dismissal of Emma Rice is indicative of a creeping conservatism within the Shakespeare multiverse and inspired many commentators to call out the political charge at the center of the controversy: "The Globe not supporting Emma Rice is the Brexit of theatre. Regressive, backwards-looking, and profoundly sad" (@derekbond). Gideon Lester astutely highlights this in his argument that the theatre, "like post-Brexit Britain, has vaulted backwards into an uncertain future" and argues that the mingling of personal and public narratives highlighted by the Board's announcement "seem[s] Shakespearean" (Lester 2016).

Immediately following the Globe's announcement about Rice, a parody account with the handle "AuthenticGlobe2018" appeared on Twitter and promoted the hashtag #MakeShakespeareGreatAgain, evoking the antagonistic political slogan of then presidential candidate, Donald Trump. The page posted a series of sarcastic quips about the theatre's paradoxical attitude to technological innovation: "#Globe2018 we will be closing our Twitter accounts and promoting our shows by carrier pigeon #MakeShakespeareGreatAgain" (@RealGlobe2018). @RealGlobe2018 provided a satirical critique of the ways in which Shakespeare's cultural authority is deployed to support conservative politics. Graham Holderness and Carol Banks have pointed out that the problem with the Globe is that the theatre is committed to "sustaining and promoting 'British Culture' as if it were an unchallenged, unified authority, clinging to the outmoded values of faded

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[19] This could be linked to another British institution, the National Theatre, and how the critics denounced Rufus Norris's production of *Macbeth* (2018). Similar to the criticism Rice received, many critics focused on Norris' apparent lack of understanding of the play and corresponding disregard for Shakespeare's language. Their discourse says little about what the production aimed to do and a lot about what it *should* do as a subsidised theatre.

[20] Indicative of this, contentious political figure Boris Johnson, the current British Prime Minister, was set to publish a biography on Shakespeare entitled *Shakespeare: The Riddle of Genius* in 2020.

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British imperialism" (1997, p. 24). It is precisely because Shakespeare has for so long operated as a meta-language for historical processes, for ideologies and politics that new and fresh perspectives on Shakespeare are not only useful but crucial to a society with a thriving artistic core.

Detractors of the institution such as Matt Trueman have suggested that the Board's objection masks something deeper, namely "a battle over taste, and who Shakespeare is for" and signals, despite Garber's argument, an *untimely* Shakespeare, one that risks being out of touch with its age (Trueman 2016). The Rice controversy created tension between the Globe and the RSC, whose statement on the matter maintained that the premature dismissal of Rice's "energetic and thrilling new approach" was "a great shame" (Snow 2016b). In 2017, the RSC produced an Intel-enhanced version of *The Tempest* that utilized digital innovation and more firmly positioned themselves against the Globe's dubious 'authentic' ethos. Widespread theatre closures as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic have encouraged new and creative ways to engage with digital and hybrid productions that renegotiate notions of interactivity and access. The virtual subgenre that has emerged from the darkness of the pandemic has raised important questions about the impact of the "digital turn" on the relocation and democratization of theatre *and* Shakespeare.

The Globe's significant online presence, including its playful utilization of social media, strongly suggest that the theatre does not want to be viewed as "the ultimate expression of… establishment-friendly bardolatory" (Pettitt 2001, p. 37). The question of Shakespeare's universality has been challenged within the discipline for decades, particularly by various "offshoots" in contemporary scholarship that have complicated the traditional notion of Shakespeare as harbinger of universal truths about the human condition (Cohn 1976). Platforms like Twitter have the potential to "lay… the groundwork for a new theatrical avant-garde that is less centralized, less elite, and less invested than their predecessors" (Muse 2012, p. 53). The proliferation of social media has destabilized traditional hierarchies of knowledge by affording virtually anyone with Internet access the ability to voice (or Tweet) an opinion.

4. Conclusion: Shifting Shakespeare's Cultural Legacy

The Emma Rice controversy highlights the problem of determining the value of Shakespeare, or indeed, defining the kind of Shakespeare that is valued. The Globe espouses a certain kind of rigid authority on Shakespeare that the Rice controversy exposed. Perhaps the Globe is not the place to radicalize productions of Shakespeare but the theatre's carefully curated online identity should reflect its historicist ethos. As it stands, Gordon McMullan has pointed out, the institution "draws on both early modern and postmodern practice in uneven, serendipitous and frequently uncomfortable ways" (2008, p. 233). If

the fidelity rhetoric that underpins the Globe's architecture is extended into performances, the institution risks becoming a silo of Shakespeare elitism.

Social media has created new modes of spectatorship and constitutes a productive space to challenge and contest claims of custodianship. Twitter endows agency by enabling passive spectators to become active contributors and fosters a sense of community via 'hash-tag' and 'retweet' features. Social media, for all its flaws, has the power to decentre institutional authority, or indeed, Shakespearean authority. Consequentially, as Yong Li Lan rightly points out, platforms like Twitter "can be seen to expand the territory of a production, rather than de-territorialize it" (2003, p. 52).

Expanding on Rice's comments quoted in the epigraph of this paper regarding her 'choice' to step down, Kim Solga observes:

> For Rice… walking away from Shakespeare was perhaps the only choice, when that so-called choice was either to walk away or to 'respect' his work and legacy on stage – with no respect for a difference in perspective or approach forthcoming, in return, from those ultimately in charge. (Solga 2017, p. 118)

Crucially, the social media landscape afforded Rice the opportunity to stand by her artistic vision and practice, in doing so, underscore the power of written testimony in a climate of speaking out. In a statement addressed to her successor, Rice acknowledged the class and gender issues accentuated by the Globe's decision. Rice admitted that she learned "not to say that [she] sometimes finds Shakespeare hard to understand" and that she would never again "allow [herself] to be excluded from the rooms where decisions are made" (Rice 2017). The appointment of Olivier-award winning actor Michelle Terry as Rice's successor suggests a more prudent approach to the Globe's mission, one in which, McMullan succinctly reminds us, "perception matters as much as practice" (2008, p. 230). Significantly, Terry's appointment countered some of the gendered criticism brought to the fore by Rice's dismissal. Speaking at the new season announcement, Terry stated: "Emma Rice was the best thing that ever happened to the Globe because it has forced an organisation to go through a most healthy form of protest" (Snow 2018). A form of protest, I might add, that has been enabled and enhanced by social media.

The 2018 "Women & Power" festival at the Globe sought to address – and perhaps redress – some questions raised during the controversy including: "Is there a place for feminism in classical theatre?" and "What challenges does a director's gender present?" On the potential future of Shakespeare in performance, Kathryn Schwartz offers a productive direction. Highlighting the value of unintelligibility in the aggregate we call "Shakespeare", Schwartz argues that it should be recognized less as an institution and more as "a constellation of scepticisms, improvisations, ambiguities, and fugitive propositions" (2016, p. 18). Evaluating the dynamic ways in which

Shakespeare can be expanded by and through technology dismantles the traditional idea of Shakespeare as the synecdoche for academic privilege or Britishness. One might argue that Schwartz' "fugitive inquiry" was the approach Emma Rice attempted to put into action at the Globe. To borrow from Horatio, while Rice's "wonderous strange" productions that sought to increase access and unsettle certain purist assumptions about Shakespeare in performance were not ultimately "give[n] welcome" by the institution, the significant support she garnered online encouraged a period of self-reflection within the Shakespeare community (1.5.163-4). While the controversy does suggest a negative turn in the direction of Shakespearean adaptation, the backlash reveals an anti-purist desire to see more "fugitive" productions that utilize contemporary technologies to "expand the territory" of Shakespeare (Li Lan 2003, p. 52).

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THE "NETWORKING" OF THE SHREW
Katherina Minola on Facebook

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Abstract – This paper examines the 'staging' of Shakespeare's 'shrew,' Katherina, on Facebook. The different individual responses to the character present in the social network are analysed and categorised to determine specific reception modes and highlight the role of the new medium in the popular reception of Shakespeare's plays. This paper aims not to describe the consequences of the use of Shakespeare for the Net (the 'ennobling' of Web 2.0, thanks to the authority of the 'Bard') but to interpret this new kind of literary afterlife online by explaining the features of these unorthodox reworkings of Shakespeare's 'shrew' and by studying them in view of critical literature and in relation to other forms of popular adaptation. The conclusions show that the contemporary networking of Katherina Minola by ordinary people on Facebook mostly follows the same predominantly conservative line as the reception by the cultural élite of meaning makers.

Keywords: Shakespeare's afterlife; reception theory; Katherina Minola; *The Taming of the Shrew*; Web 2.0.

> *'Tis true: there's magic in the web of it*
> (W. Shakespeare, "Othello", 3.4.81)

1. Introduction

This paper presents an analysis of Shakespeare's 'shrew,' Katherina, as "staged" on Facebook. The different individual responses to the character present in the social network are examined and categorised to determine specific reception modes and highlight the role of the new medium in the reception of Shakespeare's plays. This paper aims not to describe the consequences of the use of Shakespeare for the Net (the 'ennobling' of Web 2.0, thanks to the authority of the 'Bard') but to interpret this new kind of literary afterlife online, which is better described by Sujata Iyengar and Christy Desmet as a posthuman set of "many parallel lives" that stem from a text (2012, p. 62). The aim is to explain the features of these unorthodox

reworkings of Shakespeare's 'shrew,' studying them in view of critical literature and in relation to other forms of popular adaptation.

As a social network wherein people can create their own profile, post pictures, inform friends regarding their 'status,' share content, and show their likes and dislikes, Facebook shares similarities with theatre. It is one of the most effective examples of Shakespeare's idea of the world as a stage and men and women as players, in that the practice of online self-presentation works as a public identity-making process or, in other words, as a social playacting – research states that this is particularly true for women, who are more concerned about creating a positive public image of themselves.[1] Today, Facebook is a stage for real people who project through it the idea of themselves that they want others to see and also an unconventional stage for fictional characters, such as the Shakespearean ones, that are turned into profile owners and adapted for this new 'locus' of performance, not situated in the real world but on the World Wide Web.

1.1 Shakespeare and the Web: Theoretical and Methodological Issues

When Shakespeare used the word 'web' in his plays, he obviously thought of either cobwebs or fabrics and accordingly used it as a metaphor for traps, human relationships, intrigues, and the intertwining plot of a life's experiences. The web mentioned in the epigraph to this paper refers to Desdemona's handkerchief. The love token Othello gives his wife, as Shakespeare has it, possesses a magic web that confers power to the woman who holds it and allows her to keep the eyes and the heart of her beloved exclusively to herself. This power lasts as long as the woman owns the handkerchief; once lost, the supernatural ability to create reciprocated love is over.

A similar kind of magic has been recognised by reception theorists in the web of texts, which survives as long as there are readers who read and interpret them. Hans Robert Jauss, one of the fathers of *Rezeptionsästhetik*, contends that

> a literary work is not an object which stands by itself and which offers the same face to each reader in each period. It is not a monument which reveals its timeless essence in a monologue. It is much more like an orchestration which strikes ever new chords among its readers and frees the text from the substance of words and makes it meaningful for the time. (Jauss 1970, p. 10)

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[1] There are many sociological studies on this point, see for example Haferkamp *et al.* 2012.

What may be well named the magic of a text's web, through its reception, is now increased by another kind of web: the Internet.

The Web can multiply the number of citations, allusions, offshoots, and adaptations of a given text,[2] as well as the number of its readers and interpreters. Through hyperlinks and comments, it boosts the dialogue between readers and between texts (intertextuality) and makes this multi-level communication virtually never ending and graphically visible (and thus easily traceable), and all this inevitably affects the interpretation of the text itself. If the meaning of a work is the result of a dynamic process, which comprises both the questions that the text was originally meant to answer and those that readers have raised and can raise over time, according to their own specific horizon of expectations, and if the present is an inescapable part of the readers' understanding of literature, then the Web is a hermeneutic catalyst, which cannot but influence our perception of literature and drama as well.

The Web, according to its creator, Tim Berners-Lee, is "the universe of network-accessible information, an embodiment of human knowledge" and the realisation of the idea of "anything being potentially connected with anything" (quoted in Crystal 2001, p. 13, p. 195). Since the second-generation network, particularly, the Internet has been not only a place that everyone can access from virtually everywhere but also an inexhaustible space where everyone can be consumers and producers of any content at the same time. Hence, it is a space where academic and mass culture coexist,[3] where past interpretations of a given text, as well as the text itself, can be archived and enjoyed while the "here and now" of readers is triggered, as they are invited, more or less explicitly, to provide contemporary, and often personal, interpretations connected to the real world. A case in point is given by the preformatted prompts of social media and Web services, such as "broadcast yourself" (YouTube), "what's on your mind?" (Facebook), or "what's happening?" (Twitter). The perlocutionary force of these sentences is apparent also in the field of literary reception: they elicit from the network's user an individual response, contextually anchored to present society.

Scholars have examined the extent to which these features of the Web have been producing a new form of communication and information network. Outlining the role of the Internet in the development of the English language, David Crystal alluded to the description of good acting in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and contended that "the Web […] holds a mirror up to […] our

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[2] The words used to describe different kinds of intertextuality have been thoroughly discussed and investigated. In the field of Shakespeare studies see, for example, Desmet and Sawyer (1999); Fischlin and Fortier (2000); chapter 3 in Sanders (2006), Kidnie (2009).

[3] Studies on popular Shakespeare (see Lanier 2002) are not discussed in this section, but are taken into account in the analysis offered by this paper.

linguistic nature" (2001, p. 195). Possibly, the Web also holds a mirror up to our nature as readers/audience of drama and creates a new form of adaptation network, which certainly calls attention to the role of reception in the literary communication system, to the dialectical relationship between past and present interpretations, and to the sociopolitical effectiveness of drama. As W.B. Worthen puts it, "drama, dramatic performance, and the ways we understand them are constantly changing under the pressure of new technologies;" now, it is the turn of "digital media," and Shakespeare necessarily becomes "Cyber-Shakespeare" as well (2003, p. 2, p. 26).

Adaptation studies have since long questioned the alleged fixity of texts and valued the interaction of dramatic literature and society, which becomes ever more evident in the Web. Notably, John Bryant argued for a fluid text approach according to which "a *work* is the sum of its versions; *creativity* extends beyond the solitary writer, and *writing* is a cultural event transcending media" (2013, p. 47). Borrowing a key word from Web 2.0, one can conclude that he supported an idea of reception and "geneticism" that may be well-defined as "social."[4] Similar approaches have been devised in Shakespeare studies to examine the reception and appropriation of the playwright's work in different cultures and media. M.J. Kidnie (2009) defines Shakespeare's work as a mutable concept, shaped by its reception through time, and presentists focus on the importance of readers' outlook in the interpretation process:

> we encounter [...] historical works outside of their moment of origin, and they have meaning for us because their very otherness is a challenge to our own thinking, feeling, and values—which, however, constitute the only ground from which we can contemplate them. Any reading of works of the past has to work within this dialectic. There is never a moment of "timelessness"; there is instead a complex negotiation between then and now, and one that has to be continually renegotiated as our "now" changes in the wake of developing history. (DiPietro, Grady 2013, p. 10)

Living in the 21st century, our now contemplates the Web, the characteristics of which emphasise presentness, which is the reason why the aforementioned reception theories are particularly in tune with the investigations into Shakespeare and the Web. Examining contemporary media adaptations of Shakespeare, including online ones, Maurizio Calbi uses Jacques Derrida's conception of the "Thing 'Shakespeare,'" described as "an indeterminate ensemble of spectral and iterable marks" (Derrida in Calbi 2013, p. 1), and

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[4] John Bryant (2002) has shown the role of adaptation as evidence of the social function of literature and as moulder of the meaning of a work. Similarly, Linda Hutcheon (2006) has illustrated the critical importance of adaptation, while Julie Sanders (2006) has underlined the fruitfulness of 'infidelity' in Shakespearean adaptations.

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elaborates the idea of "Shakespearean 'spectro-textuality,'" making clear that adaptations of Shakespeare do not leave "'Shakespeare'—its ontological status or its functioning as a cultural icon—unaffected" (Calbi 2013, p. 2).[5] Similarly, in his pivotal research into the topic, Stephen O'Neill affirms that "the 'Shakespeare' within YouTube Shakespeare is an open, dynamic process, in which the authority of the Shakespearean work is simultaneously invoked and constructed, renewed and dispersed" (2014, p. 6). The Web offers readers the opportunity to engage creatively with Shakespeare's plays and also to become "cultural producers," as Sujata Iyengar and Christy Desmet put it, "through their identification with and critique of" their characters (2012, p. 59).

2. Facebook 'Shrews'

One can determine 185[6] fictional profiles named Katherina Minola on Facebook,[7] plus 54 profiles with blank picture and timeline. The criterion chosen to assume that these Facebook identities are fictional is the joint occurrence of at least two of the following characteristics: a profile picture taken from a filmic or pictorial version of Shakespeare's Katherina Minola, personal information in line with this character[8] or containing elements alluding to Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*,[9] the presence of Shakespearean characters from the play in the "Friends" section, and timeline posts referring to the events that make its plot.

To have a more precise idea of the kind of reception suggested in these "Facebook adaptations," attempts have been made, although in vain, to reconstruct the exact reason why these profiles have been opened. A friendship request was sent to the profile owners, but only one of them accepted and answered my questions. Anyway, it may be presumed that most of these profiles were opened by students, probably as assessment for a

[5] On the critical value of inter-medial adaptations of Shakespeare see Pennacchia Punzi 2012, which also highlights the intermediality of Shakespeare's plays themselves.

[6] The figures given above must be considered as transient and likely to change in the short term, because profiles can be easily opened and closed on Facebook. The last search was made on August the 27th, 2020.

[7] Not so many with respect to the 620 Facebook Ophelias spotted by Sujata Iyengar and Christy Desmet in 2009, which anyway included "persons whose given name simply happened to be Ophelia" (see Iyengar, Desmet 2012, p. 63). The spelling of the name varies (Katherine, Katharina, Katerina, Caterina). On the variations of the name in the play see Hodgdon (2010, p. 5).

[8] E.g. from Padua; engagement and marriage mentioned in the life events section; "Boss at making everyone's life miserable" listed as Katherina's job title.

[9] E.g. *The Taming of the Shrew* mentioned in the list of books liked.

course, in that the comments to the posts are almost always from profiles bearing the names of other characters of the Shakespearean play and not from common Facebook users; their activity is often limited to a span of 1 or 2 days, and no information is given about a theatre company or promotional ad for a production. Some of the profiles have probably been opened by Shakespeare fans who use Facebook to play a short role game or who love the character of Katherina Minola so much as to assume her identity on Facebook, as if to say they feel somewhat like her in real life—in fact in some cases Katherina's "friends" include profiles that are not Shakespeare-related.

2.1 Katherina Minola's Networked Face

The pictures most frequently used for the profile, listed below from the most to the least common, allow a first classification of Facebook 'Katherinas' into four groups:

1. "Screen Katherinas" (132 items): these profiles portray a snapshot of a filmic adaptation of the character. Most of them depict Elizabeth Taylor as playing the title role in Zeffirelli's box office success *The Taming of the Shrew* (1967), either in black and white or in colours; others show a picture of the "shrew," Kat Stratford, interpreted by Julia Stiles in Gil Junger's *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999), a loose filmic adaptation of Shakespeare's play targeted to a teenage audience; just a few profiles feature the Kate interpreted by Shirley Henderson in David Richards's BBC *The Taming of the Shrew* (*ShakespeaRe-told*, 2005).

2. "Alluring Katherinas" (22 items): these profiles show a picture of a very attractive, contemporary woman. There are also a few pictures of beautiful girls in period costumes or wedding gowns. Although all the other Facebook Katherinas are white, this section includes black women as well.

3. "Farcical Katherinas" (18 items): these profiles have funny pictures featuring grotesque representations of or metaphors for the character. The list of things used as profile pictures comprises a rat, a hopping mad woman, a stylised drawing of a woman, a woman devil, a weird Goth punk girl, and a theatrical representation of a squabble between Kate and Petruchio.

4. "Victorian and Edwardian Katherinas" (12 items): these profiles are identified by a representation of the "shrew" in 19th- and early-20th-century visual arts. The list includes the pensive Kate starving at Petruchio's table, from Edward Robert Hughes's pre-Raphaelite *The Shrew Katherina* (1898); the worried Kate painted in the same situation by Augustus Leopold Egg (from *The Dinner Scene from 'The Taming of the Shrew,'* 1860); the angry Kate engraved by W. Joseph Edwards

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(*Katherine Taming of the Shrew*, act 2, sc.1, 1847); and the pictures of two actresses in the role of the "shrew:" Ada Rehan (1887) and Lily Brayton (1904).

These elements are indicative of today's reception of Shakespeare's Katherina Minola, at least visually: it appears that there is little room for an unmediated reception as people perceive the character as retold by other artists in different media, with a preference for films.

"Screen Katherinas" are highly favoured over an individual picture or avatar created using Shakespeare's words as starters and over more time-honoured versions of the character in painting and photography. Zeffirelli's Kate and a few contemporary filmed ones far outnumber the others. To some extent, also "alluring Katherinas" can be described as inspired by Zeffirelli: with their audacious attractiveness, they have the look and attitude given to the character by Elizabeth Taylor, parading her décolleté with her iconic, nearly topless dresses and tempting glance. It can be implied that for the average Facebook user interested in Shakespeare, the character corresponds to its "visual adaptation,"[10] with a preference for the cult, auteur style version.

A major reason for the face attributed to Katherina Minola in this social media platform is that *The Taming of the Shrew* is, in Elizabeth Schafer's words, "a much-filmed" play, counting more than 18 filmic adaptations (2002, p. 65), with Zeffirelli's version on top, having "probably been seen by more people than any other production of the play ever" (Schafer 2002, p. 75).[11] Shakespeare's Kate has a "filmic" face in the readers' mind, usually before they read the play. People are more acquainted with, and probably attached to, the reception of the work, than they are with the work itself, and this may prevent readers from catching the controversial features of its characters—particularly of the title role. Indeed, it is very likely that this pictorial hallmark of "Facebook Katherinas" corresponds to a predetermined interpretation of the character altogether. To verify this conjecture, one can read and analyse the kind of posts published in the timeline of the profile pages and compare them with filmic and critical interpretations of Shakespeare's Katherina.

The extent to which screen versions of the play influence the reception of the character on Facebook is an issue to be discussed in what follows, as is the query as to whether the peculiar virtual milieu of Facebook influences readers' response to the character.

2.2 Katherina Minola's Intimate Posts: The Influence of the New Medium

[10] The adjective *visual* is borrowed from Holderness (2002).
[11] When I asked one of the profile owners (a college teacher) why s/he used the picture of Zeffirelli's Kate, the answer was it is her/his favourite version.

From an overview of the posts published on the profiles named Katherina Minola, it emerges that the answer to the last issue raised above is straightforward: the channel is part of the linguistic and literary communication systems, and as such, it must influence them. Facebook as a new medium shapes the kind of information shared as well as its format and language. These features function as implicit strategies for relocating Shakespeare's characters in cultural and temporal terms as it happens with films. Just as Zeffirelli's "naturalistic aesthetic (owing more to the 'neo-realist' *ciné-verité* of Italian movies than to the traditional fictional or theatrical realisms of Zola and Giovanni Verga) is directed firmly towards a rendering of the classical heritage into forms immediate and comprehensible to modern experience" (Holderness 1989, p. 130) with an "emphasis on the young" (Holderness 1989, p. 130), Facebook profiles named Katherina Minola adopt the typical linguistic and visual style of the social network, resulting in a product that is true to life and palatable to young audiences. Since the identity and the experiences of Katherina Minola are presented through the tools of the social network platform, such as a profile picture and the typical pieces of information usually displayed with it, the character and her story obtain a topical relevance to the reader. The medium and its features function as "movement[s] of proximation" ([1982] 1997, p. 304) in Gérard Genette's terms, that is, strategies that bring Shakespeare's character culturally and chronologically closer to the horizon of expectations of a new audience.

As one would expect, Facebook "staging" through posts allows for what Deborah Cartmell would call a commentary "or adaptations that comment on the politics of the source text" (in Sanders 2006, p. 21), showing what is originally invisible. The profiles contain an average of eight posts on the core events of the story as seen from Katherina's perspective: Baptista's decision to have Katherina married before her sister Bianca, Katherina's wedding and Petruchio's "instructive" attitude toward her, and the final taming of Katherina. However, what emerges from the timelines of the profiles is not the story itself but rather an insight into Katherina's thoughts. The prompt provided by Facebook ("what's on your mind?") generates an "intimistic" approach to the play, more focused on the character's psyche than it is on plot events and leads "webnauts" to give words to the woman's feelings, using contemporary English, including the so-called net-speak, characterised by hashtags, abbreviations, and emoticons. Only in very few exceptions do we find direct quotations from Shakespeare or the use of a mock (and definitely broken) early modern English, which inevitably has a farcical effect.

The main issue of Facebook Katherinas' reflections is the woman's jealousy toward Bianca, who is popular with and praised by men, and the

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suffering because her father prefers her younger sister. Here are some examples:

> My sister Bianca is so pretty, that's why she gets all the attention from guys and even my dad loves her mor. #katerinaistheforgottenchild (May 11, 2017)

> My sister is just a spoiled brat and no one cares about me! (February 4, 2013)

> Hates it when people talk about me as if I am not there at all. 😡 (April 5, 2011)

> I Hate MY SISTER I HAAAAATE HER! (March 20, 2013)

> Why do people like Bianca so much? I'm like 328473298032× better in every aspect! (March 13, 2013)

In this resentment lies Shakespeare's modern justification of Katherina's behaviour. The sense of inferiority as a sister and the feeling of being rejected as a daughter experienced by Katherina is a Shakespearean issue and can find wide validation in the work of critics such as Aurélie Griffin, who reads the play through the theory of the four humours and notices that the unfeminine choleric attitude[12] of Shakespeare's "shrew" is emotionally justified, as there are motivations for her shrewishness, both moral and psychological (see Newman 1986, pp. 93–94; Kahn 1975, p. 89). This makes her a much more complex character than her stereotypical predecessors, being the first to be provided with a father (Bradbrook 1958, p. 139) and thus a complete (patriarchal) social context, emotional profundity (Kahn 1975, p. 89), and from the perspective of Renaissance medicine, a reason to hope that she can be healed (Griffin 2018).

The same critics read into this emotional condition to detect gender issues and define Katherina as a social victim, highlighting how the "shrew" type was a patriarchal defensive strategy to contain the threat generated by free women, independent of men and willing to speak their mind. As Coppélia Kahn puts it, the play portrays "masculine behavior and attitudes which stereotype women as either submissive and desirable or rebellious and shrewish" (1975, p. 92). Moreover, Aurélie Griffin focuses her attention on the early modern construction of gender supported, and according to some, simultaneously challenged by the play, stating that Katherina "resists" the gender definition imposed on her by male characters "through metadramatic awareness and role-play" (2018). Embracing a contemporary perspective on the play, she asserts that "one of the disturbing features of this play is its oscillation between types (the shrew, the gentlewoman) and characterisation,

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[12]   On the early modern notion of femininity see Maclean 1980.

interrogating the very possibility of freeing oneself from socially constructed gender roles" (2018). Conversely, one of the disturbing and unexpected features of the posts published by Facebook Katherinas is exactly the frequent absence or scarce presence of the aforementioned considerations about gender.

2.3 Katherina Minola's Posts and Gender Issues: The Influence of Film Adaptations

Although Facebook posts underline Katherina's personal affliction, they do not often face the cognate and most important issue of the patriarchal order of society, which imposes gender roles on men and women, classifying the latter into angels or whores, or gentle ladies or terrible "shrews". The right to independence and self-determination for women is not often an issue in the networking of the "shrew." This point is clearly proved by Facebook posts linked with Katherina's final speech, whose implications about gender roles are usually erased or only apparently tackled.

Seminal feminist scholar Lynda Boose contends that sexual politics has been perceived as a crucial theme in the play since the beginning of its reception, having led to John Fletcher's *The Woman's Prize, or The Tamer Tam'd* (1611), which contemplates a second marriage for Petruchio because his tyranny was literally lethal for his first wife Kate (Boose 1991, p. 179). This reworking has the man humiliated by his new spouse—until she voluntarily turns into a virtuous wife— and this is probably the reason why it was more appreciated than Shakespeare's play at Charles I's court in 1633, when they were both staged within a few days from each other (Marcus 1992, pp. 199-200). According to Boose, and more generally, to the play's critics, the final speech provides readers with key elements for highlighting possible feminist stances in the text. Because the protagonist addresses it to a "presumptive Everywoman […] women viewers suddenly find themselves universal conscripts, trapped within the rhetorical co-options of a discourse that dissolves all difference between the 'I' and 'you' of Kate and her reluctant sisters" (Boose 1991, p. 180). That is to say, this speech has been crucial in productions and adaptations to provide a discernible reading of *The Taming of the Shrew* (Hodgdon 2010, p. 118): either conservative or gender-sensitive, considering Katherina's words either as the result of an honest conversion or instead as clever and revengeful playacting.

The potentialities of "Facebook adaptations" from the female protagonist's perspective have been well exploited only in a few profiles. This is the case in one of them, where we first read Katherina's ideas about her disappointment on being called a shrew just for her nonalignment and self-determination and then a sardonic explanation of what it means to be a good wife. The first post reads:

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> Petruchio, Hortensio, and Lucentio were making a bet to see which one of their wives was the most obedient. I didn't like how everybody thought that I had no chance of winning because they thought that I was a shrew. Just because I speak out and I'm not a suck up like most of the other woman [sic] in this society doesn't make me a shrew. (June 6, 2010)

The following post reports the result of the bet and Katherina's description of a good wife, which consequently sounds ironic, as a recipe for easy money:

> I just won the bet of one hundred crowns for being the most obedient woman. To be an obedient woman you have to pay respect, be kind and be nice to your husband. You have to treat them [sic] with kindness and respect because he is the one who cares about you and he is the one who comforts you. A wife should owe their [sic] husband the same loyalty as a subject owes his king. (June 6, 2010)

Another profile interestingly shows a post expressing a gender-conscious assumption on marriage—the main topic of the play according to Coppélia Kahn (1975)—rebalancing the sexual politics of Shakespeare's text:

> Why is it that marriage and love do not embrace each other? Surly [sic] spending the rest of your life with one chosen person must mean something of value. If you do not love, cherish and respect your other half, then they are no other half of you, nor a human being. They are an object, and, if you are marrying an object, then why not a chair or a table? (March 6, 2010)

Some posts highlight other gender issues. One underlines the marketability of women in a post that reads "my dad thinks I am for sale" (November 30, 2012), and another one shows Katherina's awareness of the fact that her bad reputation is due to the threat she poses as an independent woman: "Apparently I am a 'shrew' and a 'wretch' well at least I speak my mind unlike those filthy cowards" (December 10, 2013). Some other profiles display posts on gender equality not directly stemming from the Shakespearean source text but inspired by it, for example, a meme of Matrix Morpheus reading "What if I told you that men and women are equal in 2013."

In many other Facebook accounts examined for this paper, one finds a rather conservative rendition of Katherina's story and of her final speech, often associated with the typical pre-formatted Facebook post on the new relationship status (engagement or marriage). Here are some examples worth a long quotation section:

> I would like to mention that I strongly believe that every women [sic] should respect and do what their husbands tells [sic] them do to. A women [sic] owes her husband the same loyalty a subject owes his king. I am ashamed of my past actions and even more ashamed that women are so foolish as to declare

was [sic] when they should plead on their knees for peace. they [sic] should love ad [sic] obey their husbands.
I love you Petruchio Antonio ❤️ (February 21, 2013)
1 comment by Petruchio Antonio: That hath been the perfect lecture my dear ❤️ Now come on and kiss me Kate and off to bed we go! (February 21, 2013)

I love my husband, every wife should show respect to their spouse. I am now not the shrew that i [sic] used to be, but a nice polite women [sic].
1 Comment by Petruchio Antonio: My work here is done (January 3, 2011)

Today I saw the sun, which was the moon at first, and a man named Vincentio, who was a young maiden at first, all according to my dear wonderful husband Petruchio Esposito!! Whatever he says, goes, from now on.. […] ❤️ == act 4 scene 5 (June 11, 2010)

It honestly bewilders me how Bianca Minola and the widow can be so disrespectful to their husbands. Their husbands do so much for them, he works all the time for their betterment and comfort. He works out in the freezing cold while they stay tucked at home in warm comfortable beds and he keeps them safe and yet all he asks for in return is love, obedience, kinds [sic] looks, listening, and respect. He does so much and asks for so little yet they can't even comply to that. Well, I'll teach them a lesson or two in how to keep their man happy. But as long as I can keep mine happy I'm perfectly ok. (April 14, 2014)

love   you   Petruchio,   thanks   for   taming   me ❤️
forever and always, your kate [sic]❤️ ❤️ ❤️ (June 6, 2011)

In these posts, one can find not only Shakespeare's lines rewritten and adapted for the new medium but also Katherina's thoughts amplified, showing that she is genuinely adopting Petruchio's viewpoint and thus a patriarchal perspective. Gender inequality is totally justified and naturalised through the discourse of romance and romantic love.

There are also posts of a third kind that assume a patriarchal view on society and a conservative conception of gender, although implicitly. They include many sentences in which Katherina aggressively defines herself using denigrating and stigmatizing words, such as "I am a hood rat bitch" (March 11, 2014), or "Boss at Making everyone's life miserable" (May 2, 2014). Other networked Katherinas represent the woman's transformation as a calculated performance of female virtues in an ideal war against men. One Katherina openly speaks about her playacting technique, but she does it in a way that depicts her as shrewish and coincides with the negative stereotype of the aggressive and threatening conquering woman.

I will follow my husbands [sic] orders! Everyone can believe he tamed me, but I tamed him in many ways! #Whotamedwho? (March 25, 2014)

The attitude implied in the posts quoted above reminds one of the girl power culture, typical of the glamorous and popular feminist movement brought to the fore in the second half of the 1990s. As argued by Angela McRobbie, it is a right-wing feminist discourse, which has no political agenda and is rather focused on "the seductions of individual success, the lure of female empowerment and the love of money" (2000, p. 212), losing track of the struggle against sexism.

The best way to describe the content published by Facebook Katherinas, considering their treatment of sexual politics and gender issues, is probably by borrowing the words used by Holderness to describe Zeffirelli's *The Taming of the Shrew*: they are "not so much anti-feminist as a-feminist" (1989, p. 150). The borders between the two categories, however, are dangerously porous. This gender unconscious reading of the play is shared by most of the other screen versions of *The Taming of the Shrew*, which usually eschew gender politics or assume a conformist view of them (Schafer 2002, p. 65). Julie Sanders notices "an uncomfortable propensity to make comic capital out of domestic abuse" in *Kiss Me Kate*, Samuel and Bella Spewack's musical (1948), turned into film by George Sidney in 1953 (Sanders 2007, p. 73). Zeffirelli's film, the most "quoted" on Facebook, emphasises the physical desirability of the "shrew" and adds romance to the plot by presenting a love-at-first-sight story between two people who are mutually attracted and complicit in playing a hilarious love chase. In Holderness' mind, in so doing, "Zeffirelli has altered the rules of the game to such an extent that the film has little to say about the sexual politics of *The Taming of the Shrew*," (Holderness 2002, p. 150) although one may object that the attractiveness of the woman is patriarchally central to the consideration of the character of the "shrew" as an acceptable woman. Even in *10 Things I Hate About You*, Julia Stiles's Kat Stratford is a very pretty teenager, only apparently anti-conformist as she ultimately gives up her individuality for social acceptance (see Pittman 2011). This is typical of films addressing a female teenage audience, including the Shakespearean ones, in which the cultural authority of the "Bard" is used "to legitimate a rather repressive notion of female intelligence" (Burt in Pittman 2011, p. 100). Something very similar happens in the 2005 BBC version of *The Taming of the Shrew*: Katherine Minola is a politician marrying for propaganda purposes — thus to be socially more appreciated — but marriage turns out to be a challenge that may even ruin her career. In the end, Katherine, whose submission speech seems justified by her sexual attraction to Petruchio, manages "to reconcile the two most decisive factors in a modern woman's life, career and the family, and she has proved to be outstandingly successful in both" (Földváry 2013, p. 58). The images of "Katherine and Petruchio, together with their triplets, standing in front of 10 Downing Street" (*ibid.*) that

accompany the closing credits are emblematic of the "have-it-all" credo of the girl-power culture.

According to Diana Henderson, *Shrew* films are a mirror of the patriarchal need to contain the ideology of women's emancipation, which has always been perceived as threatening. She argues that

> the clustering of filmed Shrews correlates with those decades when […] the media are actively encouraging women to find their pleasures in the home; moreover, Shrew occurs at moments of new viewing technologies and is promptly reproduced in the new media before most if not all other Shakespeare plays. The agents of culture seem anxious to make sure that *The Taming of the Shrew* is preserved, even as our science progresses. (2003, p. 122)

To the list she makes, which includes silent films, television, and home videos, the Web must be mentioned to date. Indeed, *The Taming of the Shrew* is the first of Shakespeare's plays to be adapted — under the title *The Twitter of the Shrew* — for Twitter, and[13] as has been shown, several Katherinas populate Facebook. These new additions do not challenge Henderson's point: the networked "shrew" of contemporary readers, who become "cultural producers" (Iyengar and Desmet 2012, p. 59) in the Web, remains, predominantly, a tamed woman promoting imbalanced gender roles and naturalising them in the name of romantic love.

3. Conclusion

Facebook "stagings" of Katherina Minola mostly comprise individual and emotional responses to Shakespeare's character and her story, transposed to the present time. The networked "shrews" relocate Shakespeare's play to our contemporary context through the very use of the new medium and its cognate language and aesthetic; however, they surprisingly do not often challenge the sexual politics of the play, leaving the authority of canonical Shakespeare untouched. Only rarely is the play really made meaningful for the present time through a feminist reading, which was instead expected, given the fact that the profiles would suggest a (re)telling of the story from the perspective of its female protagonist. The response to the work is far more intimate than it is social or political. On one hand, this can be explained by considering Facebook to be a social platform that prompts the expression of a person's thoughts and feelings and implicitly promotes "orthodox" behaviour to achieve social acceptance; on the other hand, it can be also explained given the influence of screen adaptations of the "shrew," which commonly adopt a

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[13]   See Cornfeld *et al.* 2018.

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conservative, patriarchal gaze that prioritises women's beauty and tend to disregard social problems related to gender. The profile pictures of Facebook Katherinas, dominated by Zeffirelli's version, together with the mostly apolitical reading of the play implied by their posts, can *hold a mirror up to the nature* of the contemporary popular reception of the character and demonstrate the enormous role of film versions in the never-ending dynamic process that constitutes a work.

Discussing the role of editors, together with theatre and film directors, in the reception of *The Taming of the Shrew*, particularly concerning feminist issues, Leah Marcus identifies "a process of naturalization by which the patriarchal ideology of *The Shrew* gradually became 'reality' in terms of public expectations in the theatre and readers' expectations of Shakespeare. […] But that process was not without its glitches, temporary reversals, and ambivalences" (1992, p. 199). The contemporary networking of the "shrew" by grassroots participants in the cultural debate, presently a very powerful "medium" by way of which people may come to know Shakespeare, mostly follows the same predominantly conservative line as the reception by the cultural élite of meaning makers: it shows only some attempts to interrogate patriarchal constraints of gender roles but mostly it confirms and thus reinforces such expectations on readers and audiences of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*.

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"MY KINGDOM FOR AN IPHONE"
Shakespeare and Mobile Phones

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Abstract – The essay examines how Shakespeare and his works have been appropriated and exploited for promotional purposes in the field of mobile phone communication in the 21st century. On the one hand, I will investigate the strategies used to advertise merchandising related to mobile phones. Capitalising on Shakespeare's iconic status, crafters have created covers and phone cases featuring pictures of the Bard, which range from the traditional well-known Chandos Portrait to more creative depictions of the dramatist, as he wears earphones or sunglasses. His visage, as Susan Bennett argues, has become "the signifier beyond all others in an international marketing economy" (1996, p. 36). On the other hand, I will discuss the reasons why advertising creative teams have turned most often to *Romeo and Juliet*, a tragedy which dramatises lack of communication on different levels, than to any other Shakespearean play to promote mobile communication providers. I will explore three American ads (Nextel Communications 2003, T-Mobile 2008, and Apple 2016), a French one (Orange 2009) and an Italian one (Vodafone Italy 2013), all reinterpreting the balcony scene from a diverse angle.

Keywords: advertising; Shakespeare; mobile phones; intermediality.

1. Introduction

In 2012 a study evaluating the monetary worth of the brand of historical figures estimated that if a Shakespeare brand existed, it would be worth $ 600,000,000, double the combined brand values of Elvis Presley ($ 108,000,000), Marilyn Monroe ($ 43,000,000) and George Foreman ($ 149,000,000).[1] It comes as no surprise that Shakespeare's marketing power has been recognized and exploited for the purpose of advertising and promotion for centuries. In very recent times, just to make a few examples, the Bard's words have been appropriated to promote the values of Shift Communications. In 2016 quotations from his works were selected to illustrate some adjectives that well describe the company's vision, such as 'positive', 'creative' and 'honourable'. As the Vice President of

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[1] See: https://campaignbrief.com/version10-starthtml0000000149-176 (25.8.2020).

Shift Communications clarifies in the company blog, "Hopefully these quotes will provide some inspiration for readers of this blog in their day-to-day work".[2] On the other hand, only in the UK, USA and Australia, more than 65 registered trademarks contain the word 'Shakespeare'. His name evokes tradition, quality, cultural and intellectual sophistication, and this may enhance the appeal of a product. In 2020, an emerging British company named Shakespeare Marketing Services, fittingly located in Shakespeare Road in Bedford, launched its website to attract potential clients by offering "Holistic digital marketing strategies to help your brand reach and create synergies with your target market".[3] The presence of Shakespeare's name undoubtedly suggests the unique, non standardised and unconventional quality of a product or a service offered.

There is a long and rich critical history of how Shakespeare has been appropriated as a cultural icon and incorporated in popular culture. The pioneering work of Graham Holderness paved the way for a new approach that contributed to deconstructing the binary opposition between the Shakespeare of the popular culture and the Shakespeare of the academy, so that definitions of "Shakespeare" and "'Shakespearean' far beyond the reach of the academy" proliferated (Fazel, Geddes 2017, p. 4): music, film adaptations, TV series but also Bard-related tourism, fan fiction and advertising are only some of the most intriguing fields of investigation.[4] The starting point for any discussion of Shakespeare in advertising is Holderness's *The Shakespeare Myth* (1988), the first book which provided a comprehensive and critical investigation of this topic, while demonstrating the aesthetic value of Shakespeare-related ads.[5] As he remarked, "Capitalism can now produce Shakespearean materials that display a textual richness and diversity that do justice to the dramatic works from which the material originally derives" (Holderness, Loughrey 2016, p. 120). Following in his footsteps, Douglas M. Lanier[6] explored the mechanisms and the variety of transformative practices employed to exploit Shakespeare's cultural power and his marketability in the field of advertising, showing that Shakespeare-

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[2] Vice President of Shift Communications: https://www.shiftcomm.com/blog/marketing-inspiration-from-shakespeare. (25.8.2020).

[3] Shakespeare Marketing Services: https://www.shakespearemarketingservices.com. (25.8.2020).

[4] An important contribution to the investigation of the appropriation of Shakespeare in popular media was also given by Richard Burt, who edited an encyclopedia of the Bard in mass media and popular culture (2007), and by the Italian scholar Mariangela Tempera, whose work shed light on this unexplored field in Italian culture.

[5] For Shakespeare and advertising, see also Cavecchi, Soncini (2002) and Shellard, Keenan (2016).

[6] See Holderness (1988, 2011, 2018); Holderness, Loughrey (1991, 2016); Lanier (2002 and 2012).

inspired advertising may have an incisive role as vehicle of critical ideas. Lanier sees advertising as

> an important force for reproducing perceptions of Shakespeare from generation to generation and for disseminating them throughout a society, in forms at least as powerful as the tomes and performances of the 'official' guardians of 'proper' Shakespeare. (2012, p. 514)

At the same time, Shakespeare has to be analysed within the broader and bourgeoning intermedial research context.[7] The digital turn had a strong impact on the way we relate to Shakespeare and on the way his works are appropriated: "what is collectively represented or defined as Shakespeare is continuously being reimagined and reconstructed in accordance with the affordances of the medium in which he appears and the purposes to which he is put to task" (Fazel, Geddes 2017, p. 2). In what follows I examine how Shakespeare and his works have been used for promotional purposes in the field of mobile phone communication in the 21st century. As Sujata Iyengar points out, what Shakespeare offers is actually "a liminal, intermedial space between branded, profit-generating, mass-market industry and independent financially threatened idiosyncratic cultural production" (2014, p. 347). On the one hand, I will investigate how Shakespeare occupies that intermedial space by taking into account e-commerce websites which sell Shakespeare-themed merchandising related to mobile phones. Capitalising on Shakespeare's iconic status, crafters have created covers and phone cases featuring pictures of the Bard, which range from the traditional well-known Chandos Portrait to more creative portrayals of the playwright, as he takes a selfie or wears sunglasses. His visage, as Susan Bennett claims, has literally become "the signifier beyond all others in an international marketing economy" (1996, p. 36). Shakespeare inspired phone cases and covers are an example of what Iyengar calls "Shakescraft" objects, "which use Shakespearean texts, stories, and quotes to produce intermediated versions of the brand in ways that travel between the high and low culture divide" (2014, p. 348). These objects are actually designed to appeal to a variegated group of people in terms of age, gender, social, economic and cultural background, and whose fandom often does not emerge from an academic context. Recent studies on Shakespeare and fandom, like Mark Duffett's *Understanding Fandom* (2013) and Johnathan Pope's *Shakespeare's Fans* (2020), decisively contribute to investigating the Bard as a fan object thus shedding light on his cultural power, his marketability, and the numerous forms of engagement of his fans.

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[7] See, for example, Pennacchia (2012); Mancewicz (2014); Fischlin (2014); Fazel, Geddes (2017); O'Neill (2018); Cartelli (2019).

On the other hand, it is worth discussing the reasons why advertising creative teams have turned most often to *Romeo and Juliet,* which dramatises lack of communication on different levels, than to any other Shakespearean play to promote mobile communication providers. I have selected three American ads (Nextel Communications 2003, T-Mobile 2008, and Apple 2016), a French one (Orange 2009) and an Italian one (Vodafone Italy 2013), all reinterpreting the balcony scene from a diverse angle. These commercials deploy different strategies, using Shakespeare's characters as vehicles for their message or spokespersons of their slogans. In all the examples analysed, the marketing specialists downplayed the play's tragic and erotic qualities in a bid to attract potential buyers with a more amusing or romantic rendition of the story. I will focus in particular on Vodafone's Italian campaign, which has received no critical attention so far, even though it offers the most contemporary and insightful rendition. The analysis of these ads can contribute to mapping out the evolution of Shakespeare's cultural power, and to investigating what it means to adapt Shakespeare in the 21st century, the age of the digital turn and of media fandom.

2. Shakespeare and merchandising

The marketing power of Shakespeare has been exploited to sell almost every kind of item and souvenir, from candles and mugs to clothes and jewellery. There are countless websites advertising Shakecraft objects and gifts, from the e-commerce giant Amazon to Etsy and Redbubble, to mention just a few of the most significant examples. E-commerce offers a number of advantages and may turn buying online into a personalised and satisfying experience. Being able to expand the customer base exponentially, it manages to reach customers all over the world, and provide a quick response to market demand. Unlike a physical shop, potentially there is no limit to the number of different types of items available; this may suit the taste of the most demanding shopper and respond to the different "thinking patterns," to use Marc Prensky's words (2001, p. 1), of "digital natives" but also "digital immigrants" who have got used to buying online.

The analysis of Shakespeare inspired phone cases and covers may illuminate some captivating aspects of marketing strategies, what is collectively identified as 'Shakespeare', and his cultural importance and influence. Cases and covers are peculiar objects, functionally more similar to accessories we wear to personalise our style and distinguish ourselves from the masses. Their primary aim is protecting and embellishing mobile phones, one of the most widespread items in modern society, social objects that may even generate some degree of dependence. Moreover, a mobile phone is "an exclusive product strongly attached to one's identity" (Aguado, Martinez

2008, p. 6). Like a branded piece of clothes or an accessory, a phone cover is displayed and exhibited.

The quantity and variety of Shakespeare-related covers are astonishing. An entry search on Google images of the words 'Shakespeare' and 'phone cases' retrieves an incredible number of different phone cases featuring quotations from plays, referencing characters or trading on the Bard's name or his image. Different types of covers imply the use of multiple strategies to attract potential buyers who have a different level of engagement with Shakespeare and his works. The marketing approach seems to be diversified according to age, gender, income and expertise in the field of Shakespeare's theatre: therefore the target is represented not only by fans and aficionados of the Bard, who have an unquenchable appetite "for affiliation through merchandise" (Blackwell 2018, p. 26), but also by those who may desire to participate in the aura of grandeur associated with the playwright and his works.

On the one hand, advertisers and crafters draw on the power of Shakespeare's words. While some lines may be accompanied by specific textual references to the play they are from, most of them are merely attributed to Shakespeare. Words are exploited as motivational slogans such as "There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so" from *Hamlet* (2.2.251-52) and "Let me be that I am, and seek not to alter me" from *Much Ado About Nothing* (1.3.33-34). They may also be modified to make up funny jokes or "creative misquotations", namely the reworking of quoted excerpts in the form of pastiche and parody (Maxwell 2018, p. 220), such as "Booty or not booty" or "To tea or not to tea".[8] The following examples emphasize how Shakespeare is always current and "for all seasons". There are covers featuring Shakespeare as Santa Claus saying "Merry Willmas", portraying Boris Johnson and Donald Trump with the phrase "The Two Gentlemen of Corona",[9] in which Verona is replaced by Corona (virus) to remind of the two leaders' questionable political actions during the Covid 19 pandemic, or celebrating S. Valentine's day through a reworking of *Coriolanus*, "O, me alone! Make you a valentine of me" ("O, me alone, make you a sword of me?" 1.7.76). Finally, quotations may be exploited for propaganda; the phrase pronounced by the heinous moor Aaron in *Titus Andronicus*, "Is black so base a hue?" (4.2.71), has been appropriated so that it powerfully resonates as a form of support to the Black Lives Matter

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[8] See: https://www.lookhuman.com/design/91612-booty-or-not-booty/phone-case. (25.8.2020).

[9] https://www.redbubble.com/i/iphone-case/Two-Gentlemen-of-Corona-by-DJVYEATES/45848125.PM7U2. (25.8.2020).

movement,[10] while the following line from *Hamlet* has been slightly reworked to fit in the LGBD vision of gender issues: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your gender binary".[11] These quotes seem to wipe out the highbrow/lowbrow divide, at least temporarily, since they are meaningful for those who are not familiar with the original text and, at the same time, are even more enjoyable for those who understand the intertextual game and can experience the pleasure of recognition.

Marketing strategies are not gender blind even when they are used to promote gender neutral products like mobile phone covers. According to marketing researches, most of female buyers seem to respond more favourably to white and pastel colours like pink and peach rather than black and brown. At the same time they may be more attracted by specific quotations that are "repurposed for feminist use" (Blackwell 2018, p. 29). One of the most reproduced quote is "Though she be but little, she is fierce" (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 3.2.324) which, taken out of context, may stand out as a declaration of women's power, while in the original scene it is a cruel denigration of Hermia's physical appearance. Rather recurrent are also inspirational sentences targeting female consumers, such as "Go, girl; seek happy nights to happy days" (*Romeo and Juliet*, 1.3.107), or allegedly romantic like "I will wear my heart upon my sleeve / For daws to peck" (*Othello*, 1.1.64-65). Out of its original context, it may sound as a supposedly loving quote but those who are familiar with the play will recognise these famous lines which culminate in the tragically iconic "I am not what I am" pronounced by the villainous Jago.

These quotations do not have any connection with mobile phones or their features but are meant to attract the attention of as many potential buyers as possible. Shakespeare's works offer a vast array of catchy and apt phrases which have transcended different cultures and historical periods owing to their universal fascination. They succeed in making phone cases (but this may be valid also for other kinds of object) more appealing to potential buyers, who have different degrees of expertise in the field of performative arts and in the mechanisms of adaptation, appropriation and reworking of a Shakespearean text.

Numerous covers, instead, feature portraits of Shakespeare or images related to his works: stylised pictures of the Bard wearing sunglasses or texting a message, posing as Michael Jackson or as a hipster. The main aim is

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[10] https://www.redbubble.com/i/samsung-case/Black-Lives-Matter-Shakespeare-Quote-Is-black-so-Base-a-Hue-by-Shakespeare1616/52605629.B10ML. (25.8.2020).

[11] https://www.redbubble.com/i/samsung-case/Horatio-s-Gender-Binary-by-lovegood516/25276391.Q464T. (25.8.2020).

to fashion a more contemporary and up-to-date, even humorous image of the playwright in an attempt to draw the younger generations. Other phone cases present props widely associated with a specific play, such as a skull for *Hamlet* or a dagger for *Macbeth*, art works or paintings portraying iconic moments, such as the balcony scene (Ford Madox Brown, 1870) and Ophelia's death (John Everett Millais, 1851-2). Still frames from well-known film adaptations are also popular, especially Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* (1996), featuring Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes as title characters, and John Madden's *Shakespeare in Love* (1998). These items may appeal to people who are more familiar with Shakespeare through the adaptations of his plays in different forms and media more than with the playwright himself. More sophisticated buyers, culturally speaking, may be intrigued by covers depicting in quarto frontispieces of the plays or original pages. [12]

A very high amount of covers portray Shakespeare's face, "one of the most insistently reproduced icons in the world" (Holderness 2011, p. 181). Yet the apparently naive attempt to advertise a product by relying on the visage of a globally famous playwright contributes to fuelling the controversial debate about Shakespeare's identity, on the authorship of the works attributed to him and on his physical appearance. The first three images I will discuss are the most popular and used on phone covers. "The use of Shakespeare in advertising can be traced back to the adoption of an image based on the Chandos Portrait as the publisher Jacob Tonson's trademark in 1710" (Charity 2001, p. 3). The portrait, (dated 1600-10) now at the National Portrait Gallery, takes its name from the first Duke of Chandos, and it is most likely a contemporary representation of Shakespeare. Due to its popularity, the image may attract even buyers with little or no expertise in English theatre but willing to link themselves to an image of a cultural celebrity. One of the most replicated on any object, and phone cases are no exception, is Martin Droeshout's commemorative portrait of Shakespeare for the First Folio (1623), one of the most accurate representations of the playwright. Interestingly, on the website Shakespeareshoppe.com, the item is advertised as "Shakespeare First Folio Iphone 6 cover":

> Shakespeare First Folio iPhone 6 Cover featuring a full print of the front piece of the *First Folio* by William Shakespeare published in 1623, sports a stylish antique design incorporating the original front piece image from the 1623 printing by Issac Iaggard and Ed Blount. Just the thing for any fan of Shakespeare, this iPhone Cover also makes the perfect gift for an actor, writer

[12] https://www.tostadora.it/web/shakespeare_otello_1622_telefoni/971738. (25.8.2020).

or any other creative type in the Performing Arts who wants something a little different for their day-to-day accessory choices.[13]

In this case, the item description targets a specific type of buyers, such as an actor or a writer or somebody who may be expert in the field, and aware of the pivotal role of the First Folio. As Mark Duffett remarks, fans "are always *more than* consumers. They are more than buyers and their transactions are purchased with a cultural interest that goes beyond merely practicing the process of buying" (2013, p. 21). Yet the marketing strategies do not seem to consider the intrinsic features of the image reproduced, its popularity and its circulation. Despite being promoted as something "a little different", a cover featuring Droeshout's portrait is far from being an elitist object.

Also the so-called "Flower Portrait", probably based on Droeshout's engraving, is quite widespread. It depicts Shakespeare dressed in an elaborately embroidered costume. It belonged to the Flower Family and was given to Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at the end of the 19th century. In the 20th century it was identified as a 19th century art forgery rather than an Elizabethan oil on canvas. It still enjoys some popularity and adorns many covers and other objects. Like the Chandos Portrait, this may appeal to a more general audience who has little or no interest in the origin of the image and in its authenticity.

The next two images of the Bard bring us to the core of the critical debate about Shakespeare's identity, while demonstrating, at the same time, that Shakespeare's name is used as a bait to attract buyers despite the image displayed. One of the most controversial images, which features on a limited number of phone cases, is the Cobbe Portrait. While eminent critic Stanley Wells made the bold claim that this is an authentic representation of Shakespeare, for many Shakespearean scholars and the 16th century art historian Tarnya Cooper, it is more likely the portrait of an English poet and essayist, Sir Thomas Overbury, dated around 1610. Yet, despite the controversial identity of the sitter of the portrait, the image is marketed as "Shakespeare", which may suggest an endorsement of Wells' view or, rather, a complete unawareness concerning this subject and the cultural burning debate around it.

The Ashbourne Portrait, instead, included in the collection of the Folger Shakespeare Library, was at first falsely identified as Shakespeare. It was only in 1979, following its restoration, that it was said to depict Hugh Hamersley, Lord Mayor of London in 1627.[14] Nevertheless, the image

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[13] http://www.shakespeareshoppe.com/product/shakespeare-first-folio-iphone-6-cover. (25.8.2020).
[14] See Pressly (1993).

reproduced on covers and phone cases is advertised as Shakespeare.[15] We may presume that the marketing strategy aims to offer something unusual, a non-mass produced, and less conventional image of the Bard.

The presence of several pictures associated with Shakespeare even on phone covers contributes to exploring the controversies over Shakespeare's identity, to nourish the fiery debate which is perpetuated, more or less consciously, by cover buyers. As Julianna Bark remarked, "If there is one thing that Shakespeare's portraits can teach us, it is that they reflect our need to construct the author in our own image" (2011, p. 227). The extreme variety of Shakespeare-inspired covers allows each customer to choose the image of the Bard that best represents them and reflects their engagement with him and his works.

3. If Romeo and Juliet had had mobile phones

Besides marketing strategies to sell Shakespeare-themed accessories for mobile phones, there are also carefully elaborated campaigns to promote phone carriers and mobile phone models mainly based on Shakespeare and his characters. "Almost all global Shakespearean advertising", Lanier remarks, "dwells on one of three topoi – Shakespeare himself, Hamlet, and Romeo and Juliet – the last of which offers by far the most fruitful territory for marketers" (2012, p. 514). Around 30% of all Shakespeare-themed ads that are to be found on television or in the web actually allude to *Romeo and Juliet*.

The story of the two young lovers from Verona has been continuously adapted in a wide range of forms and media, from music and films to comics and web series. I will discuss some ads which explicitly refer to *Romeo and Juliet*, considering how Shakespeare's play impacts on the advertising message. Advertising creative teams who make reference to a play such as *Romeo and Juliet* have a clear marketing strategy and aim at taking advantage of the tragedy's "almost mythical status" (Minutella 2013, p. 16). These commercials deploy strategies which incorporate Shakespeare on different levels and differ in "how explicitly they state their intertextual purpose" (Sanders 2006, p. 2). The advertising genre has its own rules: the message has to be communicated swiftly, clearly and efficiently. Michael S. Mulvey and Carmen Medina list the elements that contribute to producing "a persuasive communication designed to elicit a particular response from an audience" (2003, p. 224) and that have to be taken into account when analysing the strategies used to market a product: the actors of the ad (often local or global

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[15] https://fineartamerica.com/shop/iphone+cases/folger+shakespeare+library. (25.8.2020).

celebrities), the setting of the action in time and space, the system of visual and sound cues, and the slogan or tagline.

My first example shows how the marketing specialists have softened the play's tragic tones to engage with potential buyers through a funny reworking of the story which is deprived of any tragic connotation. It is for Nextel Communications,[16] which was the fifth largest wireless company in 2003 when the campaign was launched to promote their "push-to-talk" mobile phones. One of the 9 spots broadcast on TV was about Romeo and Juliet. The commercial is a parody of the play, or rather, a "Nextel-styled" rendition of the tragedy based on speed and efficiency. It features characters dressed in Renaissance costumes, who are performing a supposedly traditional version of the play in a theatre. Relying on the audience's familiarity with the story and its characters, the spot offers a 30-second version of the play in an extremely short and modernised dialogue composed by a few words: "Romeo, Juliet, I love you, ditto, die, marry him, never, no, better now, no, kids". Marjorie Garber sees the dialogue as a "modern-age version of the classical (and Shakespearean) device of stichomythia" (2008, p. 60). Moreover, the spot seems to be influenced by cinematic adaptations of the tragedy and reifies "what the play has become post-Baz Luhrmann" (Hodgdon 2009, p. 109). The commercial closes with Nextel's tagline: "Nextel. Done". The campaign aimed to communicate the idea of speed and efficiency in a bid to "capture Nextel's startup, accelerated attitude" (Teague 2007, p. 1551). According to sales figures, profits increased by 23.5% during the campaign (2003-2004). This humorous spot, which features two extremely popular Shakespearean characters, seems to target mass viewers. But does it really convince them to use Nextel products?

The commercial aims to persuade the audience that the company may allow "communication without interference" even between Romeo and Juliet but this does not have a significant impact on the fate of the two lovers from Verona, since they both die at the end of the commercial, as happens in the play. The title of an oft-cited article by Barry Wellman and Lee Rainie is suggestive: "If Romeo and Juliet had mobile phones". Their conclusion states that "the course of their true love would have been more connected – and perhaps would have run more smoothly. If only Romeo and Juliet had had mobile phones, they might have lived happily ever after" (2013, p. 170). It is no coincidence that in the commercials about mobile phones and providers aired after Nextel's campaign the play is given a happy ending; this may thus suggest that telecommunication companies have managed to put an end to the old strife between Capulets and Montagues and, consequently, their products are worth buying.

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[16] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-cZtWefN8s. (25.8.2020).

The French provider Orange (2004)[17] offers a completely different depiction of the lovers in a modern setting. The spot opens with a close up on a red rose, suggestive of the Shakespearean protagonists. A young man and a young woman live in different buildings but manage to meet in mid air. The story embodies the tagline of the campaign "*Orange intense: communiquons sans limites*". As Holderness convincingly argues, "Here Shakespeare is quoted as a familiar source for images of beauty, love, transgression of barriers and a transcendent emotional liberty" (2018, p. 265). An effective strategy that was used to enhance the communication of the message was the inclusion of a renowned tune to catch the viewers' attention, "set the appropriate mood and act as a memory jogger" (Sutherland 2008, p. 121).

The spot greatly relies on the power of music: there are no dialogues and the only sound audible is the unmistakable "Love theme" from Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet*, which contributes to identifying the two protagonists of the spot as contemporary versions of Romeo and Juliet. The target buyers of this product seem to be older people or viewers who have more familiarity with the adaptations of Shakespeare's tragedy rather than with the actual text. In this case the audience may be inebriated by the enchanting music or their memory may go back to the film so that they do not focus on the information provided and the message, and do not question the intrinsic value of what they are buying. Instead, they are driven by the emotions associated with their cinematic experience as film-goers and, through a possible identification with the characters, they may be inclined to see Orange as the key to solving Romeo and Juliet's problems and, hopefully, their own.

In 2008 a spot for T-Mobile[18] crafts a contemporary and entertaining rendition of the play in 30 seconds. In her room, with her mobile phone in her hand, Juliet wonders: "Wherefore are thou Romeo?" Juliet is wearing Renaissance clothes while Romeo, in a present-day outfit, is riding a motorbike. The situation is no longer a family feud but it is a problem related to phone plans. When Juliet finally receives a text message from Romeo, her father intervenes and exclaims: "thou betrayest thy family's cell plan". These lines retain early modern English words but mix it up with contemporary concepts. The solution is to be found swopping a limited phone plan to an unlimited one, as the father explains: "I never really hated Romeo's family; he was just too expensive to call". The alleged message seems to be that the new T-Mobile phone plan can even solve the problem of the inveterate hatred between Capulets and Montagues. The spot recalls the mixture between early modern and contemporary that characterises Nextel commercial. Here Shakespeare's language has been partially preserved in the context of a

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[17] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fgh6tOSm9hk. (25.8.2020).
[18] https://adland.tv/adnews/t-mobile-romeo-and-juliet-2008-30-usa. (25.8.2020).

modern day setting. Unlike Nextel, though, the message emerges clearly. Humorous ads like this and the following may be risky. Amusing and witty commercials usually find more appreciation than straight ones and, consequently, may be more effective since they arouse the interest and the attention of the audience. Nevertheless, "there is less counter-arguing with humorous ads because viewers process them as entertainment rather than engage in a true/false evaluation of the product" (Sutherland 2008, p. 202). Humour and irony may also distract potential buyers from fully understanding the message. In this case the ad seems to be effective because it stresses the quality and the characteristics of the product, and the viewers can clearly understand the offer since it is part and parcel of the story of Romeo and Juliet.[19]

A similar approach was taken by Vodafone Italy for its commercial campaign in 2013.[20] Quite surprisingly this ad has not received any critical attention. The protagonist of the whole campaign is an impertinent seal dubbed by a well-known comic Italian actress, Luciana Littizzetto, while Romeo, who adheres to the canonical idea of lover, is played by Kyle James, an attractive American actor and model. The spot is set in Juliet's garden at night, in a location reminiscent of the traditional setting for the play, such as Zeffirelli's screen adaptation. Romeo throws a stone at the balcony in an effort to arouse Juliet's attention but he actually hits her. The dialogue between the two characters is surreal:

> Juliet: Ahia, scimunito! Finalmente! Me ne stavo andando in paranoia.
> Romeo: Mio amore, sai che non possiamo parlarci; apparteniamo a due famiglie diverse.
> Juliet: Ma hai la polenta nelle orecchie? Non hai sentito che oggi puoi parlare con chi vuoi?
> (Juliet: Ouch! Fool! At Last! I was starting to get really paranoid!
> Romeo: My love, you know we can't talk to each other. We belong to two different families.
> Juliet: Have you got polenta (cornmeal mush) in your ears? Haven't you heard that now you can talk to whoever you want? (The translation is mine)

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[19] Interestingly, Ogilvy & Mather produced a very similar commercial to promote a Romanian mobile phone network operator, Cosmote.[19] Even though the commercial is named after the two Shakespearean protagonists, "Romeo şi Julieta", there are not specific textual references and the similarity is based on the presence of two young lovers and a father who opposes their relationship. Yet, as Gabriela Iuliana Colipcă-Ciobanu argues, "the Shakespearean hypotext is at least in the back of the advertisers' mind" (2016, p. 35) but it is not explored. The commercial is available at https://www.iqads.ro/creatie/4559/cosmote-romeo-julieta. (25.8.2020).

[20] See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2BrRyOvc15U. (25.8.2020).

In the final part we see the actors after the shooting of the commercial. The seal, no longer playing Juliet, is talking on a mobile phone and says: "Ettore, mi passi a prendere o esco con questa piaga?" ("Ettore, will you come and pick me up or I have to go out with this plague?" The translation is mine). In the meantime her set partner sends her some kisses as if he were really in love with her.

Besides the balcony and the song "True Love" sang by Pink and Lily Allen, a hit in 2013, what identifies the characters as Romeo and Juliet is Romeo's voice. Actually the actor was dubbed by Francesco Pezzulli, the Italian voice of Leonardo DiCaprio in celebrated films such as Titanic and *Romeo + Juliet*. The spot is obviously humorous since Juliet is a seal who complains about Romeo being late, and addresses him using colloquial and rude words. The campaign tagline is "you choose" and offers unlimited calls to a chosen number. The ad certainly seems to foster the importance of female agency, since it suggests that Juliet can choose whether she wants to start a relationship with Romeo or not, as she can also decide about her phone plan. The spot is about making decisions. No-one here is "fortune's fool" but everyone is responsible for their own choices, women in particular. Here the story of Romeo and Juliet is appropriated more radically since it suggests the possibility of a happy ending only for Juliet, excluding both her death and a long lasting relationship with Romeo. The future seems to lie wide open in front of the young female protagonist.

The most recent Romeo and Juliet related ad for mobile phones is by Apple.[21] The commercial promotes the Iphone7 camera which is shown while recording a school performance of two children acting out Romeo and Juliet in a fairy-tale-like atmosphere. The campaign tagline is "your movies look like movies. Practically magic". In the ad the school performance looks like a real film, thanks to the outstanding camera work. Nothing in the execution points to the brand itself. It could be used as a commercial for many other brands of mobile phones. Where a brand is not inherently integrated, as in this case, commercials "have to make doubly sure the correct brand gets successfully registered in people's minds" (Sutherland 2008, p. 220). Otherwise the ad may be effective for mobile phones in general but not for the specific one being advertised. Moreover, more than any other spot, this one shows that Shakespeare actually works as a myth. There is no connection between the play and the product advertised; the advertisers could have used any other play by Shakespeare, an opera, a musical or another form of performance. We may question what the journalist Angela Natividad argues about the spot: "And while it's neither noble nor true to life, it sure is pretty – a Shakespearean rendition of how we'd actually like these moments to look

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[21] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GxCKSSXu3aU. (25.8.2020).

and feel"[22] The adjective Shakespearean here hints at high quality, sophistication, prestige, the powerful impact of emotions, modernity, qualities that are somehow supposed to be transferred to the product and thereby to increase its sales. On the other hand, the ad supposedly represents a realistic situation in which children perform a school play. This reveals Shakespeare's pervading presence: the Bard is part of our daily life and our schooling. The father recording the school performance is proud of his daughter but also of the idea that she is playing a Shakespearean character.

The analysis of these ads can hopefully contribute to delineating the evolution of Shakespeare's cultural power and also to investigating how much we actually understand of the playwright and his work. Ads are like mirrors, which reflect how our understanding and approach towards this tragedy (but also towards Shakespeare more in general) varies through time. We move from a cinematic and concise version of the play in a commercial which relies on the viewers' familiarity with the story to one that brings Shakespeare back to the stage, his natural place, but also suggests the incredible success and influence of his plays adapted for the screen.

4. Conclusions

Among the countless Shakespearean quotations reproduced on phone covers, one of the most recurrent is from *Hamlet*: "To quote Hamlet Act III, Scene III line 87 'no'".[23] This funny example is extremely fitting since it illuminates some aspects related to Shakespeare's cultural power. What makes it meaningful is not its content but the effect it may have on the people who show it on their mobile phone and on those who see it. Only the most expert would be able to identify the character who says 'no' as the Prince of Denmark, and remember why he says so. Therefore, only few can experience the pleasure of recognition, realizing that the quote refers to the scene when Hamlet finds Claudius in prayer, apparently seeking forgiveness, and decides not to murder him but wait and kill him "At game a-swearing, or about some act/ That has no relish of salvation in't" (3.3.91-92).

On the other hand, this quote also shows the extremes of the use of Shakespeare's for marketing ends. Shakespeare stands as a cultural status symbol: his words lend prestige and authority to those who quote them, whatever they are. The quote does not have to be necessarily meaningful but

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[22]   https://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/ad-day-kids-act-out-romeo-juliet-apples-charming-new-iphone-7-spot-174969. (25.8.2020).

[23]   https://www.redbubble.com/i/iphone-case/To-quote-Hamlet-Act-III-Scene-III-Line-87-No-by-inspires/24696049.PM7U2. (25.8.2020).

it has to be from Shakespeare because it is the Bard's cultural authority which makes it significant. In this case not only is Shakespeare's authorship which dignifies the words but also the idea that the quote is pronounced by his most famous character.

The digital turn has fostered the popularization of the Bard, who has been appropriated in a variety of media and forms, becoming "a mobile, even disruptive, global cultural brand, the site of cultural as well as technological intermediation, and an unavoidable site where many of these intermedial energies are gathered" (Fischlin 2014, p. 7). Moreover, it has also exponentially increased the number and the type of Shakespeare users, who have different expertise in, interest in and level of engagement with the Bard. This emerges clearly from the analysis of phone cases, which reveals the multifarious variety of buyers of Shakespeare-themed covers. The Bard himself has been turned into a product, "one of the most marketable products" (Collins 2014, p. 134). His marketability led to a potentially limitless proliferation of covers with his image and his words, faithfully reproduced or refashioned to suit the taste of the variegated clientele.

On the other hand, while phone covers manage to satisfy both customers with no specific knowledge and more expert ones, TV ads seem to address a more mainstream audience. As a matter of fact, despite the "extraordinary linguistic semantic pliability" (Lanier 2002, p. 262) of Shakespeare's language, none of these spots retain his words in a meaningful way, and they all seem to be relying on other adaptations of the story and not on the text. In the hands of skilled advertising creative teams the tragedy of miscommunication becomes the symbol of the triumph of mobile phone providers, which manage to save the two lovers by allowing communication. Therefore, even though it is true that advertising heavily relies on the Bard's name and his cultural power, and "typically is not a source of new ideas about Shakespeare" (Lanier 2012, p. 499), the investigation of advertising strategies used in the field of mobile phones in the 21st century may offer an interesting angle to look at Shakespeare's centrality in the intellectual, aesthetic and political discourse of our cultural moment.

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SHAKESPEARE AND DIGITAL PATHWAYS
Shortening distances with *Romeo and Juliet*[1]

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Abstract – Two recent productions of *Romeo and Juliet* have turned to video or Skype technology to fragment and infract the dramatic text as well as to create "virtual spaces", which, I think, contribute to better understand Shakespeare's ethical relevance as well as the two directors' political agendas: Nawar Bulbul's 2015 *Romeo and Juliet* in Amman, Jordan; and Giuseppe Scutellà's 2018 *Romeo Montecchi: innocente o colpevole?* (*Romeo Montecchi: innocent or guilty?*) in Milan, Italy. In both cases the actors could not be onstage together because they were either entrapped in a bombed-out city in Syria or locked in a juvenile detention centre in Italy and were therefore replaced by their virtual avatars. I argue that while the diffuse connectivity of digital communication has been used as a tool to accomplish very practical purposes, it has also deeply conditioned the experience of the performances as well as of their reception in ways that this paper seeks to explore.

Keywords: digital Shakespeare; *Romeo and Juliet*; contemporary theatre; remediation; intermediality; Prison Shakespeare; juvenile detention centre; Syrian refugees; Nawar Bulbul; Giuseppe Scutellà.

1. Intermedial *Romeo and Juliet*

Against backgrounds of civil war and anger or detention and deprivation, Syrian director Nawar Bulbul and Italian director Giuseppe Scutellà both succeeded in taking Shakespeare where we rarely find him by means of high-tech digital technology. Both Bulbul's 2015 *Romeo and Juliet Separated by War* and Scutellà's 2018 *Romeo Montecchi: innocente o colpevole?* (*Romeo Montecchi: innocent or guilty?*) seem to have embraced that "intermedia aesthetics" which is constitutive of certain contemporary appropriations of Shakespeare (Giesekam 2007, p. 8). Such appropriations range from Simon McBurney's 2004 Complicite production of *Measure for Measure* at the Royal National Theatre to Ivo van Hove's *Roman Tragedies* Project at Toneelgroep Amsterdam (2008-10), even though Bulbul and Scutella were

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[1] This essay is a development of the paper "Faraway Shakespeares. Performing the absence" I gave at the 47th SAA (Washington D.C. 17-20 April 2019).

forced into intermediality by the particular conditions of their productions, which also made them unique events. In both productions, the actors could not be onstage together, as they were either trapped in a bombed-out city in Syria or locked in a juvenile detention centre in Italy and therefore some of them had to be replaced by virtual doubles.

While the diffused connectivity of digital communication has obviously been used as a tool to accomplish very practical purposes, it has also deeply conditioned the experience of the performances as well as of their reception. In fact, the conflation of "live theatre" and videotaped reproduction/Skype interaction has modelled two best-case instances of "how the stage and the varied media of electronic reproduction may move from a more or less static side-by-side relationship to a more actively integrated dialogic state" (Cartelli 2016, p. 1472). Notwithstanding the distance between some of the actors and the spectators, Bulbul's and Scutellà's productions exemplify, through digital remediation, a theatre that is more like an event to be experienced rather than watched, and where spectators are turned into witnesses and active participants, even if they remain in their seats. Thus, the interaction between live and digital created "virtual spaces" not only contributed to a new way of engaging with *Romeo and Juliet*, but, in my opinion, also offered the potential to better understand Shakespeare's ethical relevance as well as the two directors' political agendas. In fact, their digital remediations of the tragedy entailed a deep level of self-reflection so that, in the shadow of the Syrian civil war as well as in the cells of a prison in Italy, the tragedy acquired a new sense of urgency.

Romeo and Juliet was the obvious and also the right play to work with young actors for a number of reasons. First and foremost, even if many of the teenagers or young adults involved in the two productions, for very different reasons, had never read, seen, or even heard about any of Shakespeare's works, they found themselves particularly sympathetic to the traumas of juvenile violence, civil war, and enforced separation that *Romeo and Juliet* deals with. Undoubtedly, as many commentators have pointed out, this almost archetypal story of two young lovers "locked in conflict with parents and peers, cherishing the uniqueness of their passion, and trying unsuccessfully to integrate it with a hostile and authoritarian adult world" (Holderness 2002, p. 152) appeals directly to the young people participating in Bulbul's and Scutella's productions. Furthermore, in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, where the two star-crossed lovers experience physical, linguistic, social, and generational distance/separation, even the stage action signals distance, taking place on two different levels of performance: the main and the upper stage (Evans 2003, pp. 28-48). It is no surprise then, if a balcony, never mentioned in Shakespeare's text(s) but, yet, so much evoked and used for the "orchard scene" (2.1), has come to represent the tragedy, being particularly useful in figuring situations of liminality, *in-between-ness*. It is a

threshold between the individual and society, between love and conflict/war, and perhaps even between genres. In a way, the balcony can be regarded as a visual catalyst and an embodiment not only of the tragedy's unique potential in exploring the encounter between different worlds and languages, but also of the tragedy's long story of re-appropriation through different media and technologies (Cavecchi 2016). *Romeo and Juliet* appears, therefore, as particularly suitable for experimenting with conflations of live theatre and videotaped reproduction/Skype interaction as well as with discussing the nature and limits of such interaction.

2. Romeo and Juliet Separated by War but Connected through Skype

On March 29, 2015, playwright, actor, and director Nawar Bulbul, from the Syrian city of Homs, but self-exiled to Jordan in 2012 as a consequence of being blacklisted by the Bashar al-Assad regime, premiered his version of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in the attic of a hospice for war-affected children established in the university district of Amman by Souriyat Across Borders (SAB), a nonprofit organization founded by Syrian women to help Syrian refugees and war wounded to recover from trauma.[2] The all-teenage cast of *Romeo and Juliet Separated by War* was made up of two different groups of performers who had never met in person and were united via Skype for their performance:[3] on one side of the Syrian border, four war-affected children were from the SAB hospice in Amman, where Romeo was performed by Ibrahim, a twelve-year-old Syrian refugee who had lost his mother, three sisters, and almost lost his leg in the regime's bombing raid of Damascus in 2014; on the other side, other children were in a secret location in al-Waer, the suburban area of the besieged city of Homs, where drama teacher and pro-revolution activist Abu Ameen carried on with rehearsals even when an internet connection was impossible and worked with the children making masks to protect their identities from the watchful regime of Bashar al-Assad. Fourteen-year-old hijabbed Juliet was part of this latter group.

In his dissertation on the theatrical output by displaced Syrians, Gerald Barton Pitchford, who conducted research in Jordan for half a year and had the opportunity to discuss his work with Nawar Bulbul, describes Ameen and Bulbul's rehearsal process with great accuracy:

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[2] SAB - Souriyat Across Borders: http://souriyat.org/about-us/ (26.6.2020).

[3] Five images of the performance are included in the British Library Collection: https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/photographs-of-a-syrian-romeo-and-juliet-2015?mobile=off (26.6.2020).

> Over those four months, Ameen and Bulbul rehearsed *Romeo and Juliet* with both groups of children. In the mornings, Bulbul travelled to the Souriyat building and rehearsed with the Amman group for three hours. Working in a small activity room with speckled brown concrete floors and white walls lined with the children's artwork, the cast in Amman traded positions reading the lines played by the actors in al-Waer. Then between noon and three in the afternoon, Ameen brought the children to his temporary apartment for rehearsal. The timing varied daily in order to avoid creating a predictable pattern of movement that could make capturing them easier. Returning home from Souriyat, Bulbul waited for an email from Ameem to say that the children were ready. Then Bulbul would call Ameen on Skype for the group to begin rehearsal. While Bulbul directed, Ameen took notes and read the Amman casts' roles. After two months of meeting in this way, Bulbul and scenographer Jean Yves Bizien cleared the rooftop of Souriyat, and multimedia designer, Hassan Muhra, completed the Skype projection installment. This allowed the two casts to rehearse together for the first time. Until this point, the children in Amman and Homs had not met each other. (Pitchford 2019, p. 152)

As the American specialist in Middle Eastern and Arab world studies Miriam Cooke recounts, Bulbul was a well-known television actor at home who, after escaping to Jordan, committed himself to empowering and working with these devastated Syrian children, often keeping in mind the tragic story of thirteen-year-old Hamza Ali al-Khatib (Cooke 2016, p. 101), whose body, tortured and mutilated by the regime, turned him into a symbol of the Syrian uprising (Khosrokhavar 2016, p. 253). In fact, Bulbul's work with children was an attempt to fight the threat feared by parents and aid workers of "a lost generation of children who are scarred by violence and miss vital years of education" (Hubbard 2014). The director had already shown how theatre would "keep hope and love alive" (Cooke 2016, p. 101), by producing, in 2014, *Shakespeare in Za'atari,* a simplified Arabic-language version of *King Lear* with a few scenes from *Hamlet,* for which he cast about one hundred children in the vast UNHCR Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan, near the Syrian border, the world's largest camp for Syrians' refugees. Like many other Arab theatre artists (Hennessey, Litvin 2019, p. 3), Bulbul turned to Shakespeare "in quest of a vocabulary" his audience could understand. Significantly, in the documentary film *Shakespeare in Za'atari* (2016), directed by Maan Mouslli, Bulbul metaphorically described himself as "a clever fisherman" and Shakespeare as "irresistible bait" he tossed in to lure international attention into the performance.[4] No wonder Ben Hubbard from the *New York Times* regarded the performance as "a plan to show the world that the least fortunate Syrian refugees could produce the loftiest theater" (Pitchford 2019, p. 122).

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[4] M. Mousli's *Shakespeare in Zaatari* was the best international documentary film in the 67th Montecatini International Short Film Festival 2016.

In the case of his version of *Romeo and Juliet*, rewritten in the Shami dialect of Arabic, Bulbul claimed the performance was intended to address the world and was aimed at "drawing attention to the areas under siege by the regime in Syria after the failure of humanitarian organizations to send food, water and medicine there" (2015). He also "wanted to send a message to the world" that the besieged Syrians "were not terrorists, but children threatened by shelling, death, and destruction" (2015). Indeed, Bulbul's choice of the iconic tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*, "where civil blood makes civil hands unclean" (1.1.2), was obviously due to the need to awaken the international community to the tragedy of the Syrian civil war with its huge number of displaced children. The production did, in fact, manage to attract both Arab and Western international attention through major news networks: from Al Jazeera and BBC Arabia to CNN International; from Agence France-Presse to *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*.

In an interview, Bulbul declared that, as had happened on the occasion of his 2014 *Shakespeare in Za'atari,* he hoped to break "the ugly" siege imposed on areas inside Syria, "through the children of Syria, with love, theater, art, and hope for the future" (al-Yawm 2015). Undeniably, by being allowed to play, experiment, and create as actors, these children were invited to temporarily inhabit a different world, where they were guided to focus on their skills, dreams, and hopes rather than on despair and impairment. In his attempt to give his young actors relief from trauma and to infuse hope among them, Bulbul adapted the tragedy by expunging any violence and emphasizing instead the power of love, a feeling very much needed in Syria. As confessed by Mohammed Halima, a 24-year-old wheelchair-bound refugee who attended the performance while receiving treatment after being shot five times in Syria, "There is no more love in Syria like in this story. The war destroyed all that is beautiful in my country" (Agence France-Presse 2015). Appropriately, Bulbul kept only the scenes revolving around the love story between Romeo and Juliet (their first meeting, the secret marriage, Juliet's betrothal to Paris, and the friar's plot to help them run away) and cut most of the characters, even though he inserted two narrators, one in Amman and one in Homs, who were meant to lead the audience through the several changes of time, scene and location.

The director infused his desire to bring an end to the conflict by changing Shakespeare's tragic conclusion into a happy ending. Both Juliet and Romeo refused to commit suicide and dashed their poison to the ground in a finale that seemed to echo the general feeling among actors and spectators: "Enough killing! Enough blood! Why are you killing us? We want to live like the rest of the world!" These very simple yet compelling and urgent affirmations emotionally appealed to the audience and moved to tears most of the spectators, who were Syrians as well as Western diplomats who had been invited to the premiere. As Pritchford rightly notes, the tandem

performance "opened momentary pathways through borders and conflict zones allowing the children to make a unified plea for the violence and killing to stop" (Pitchford 2019, p. 150).

Bulbul's remediation of the story of Shakespeare's star-crossed lovers, performed by children separated by war and reunited in real-time via Skype, broke not only geopolitical borders but also aesthetic and dramaturgical ones, as Skype calls pushed the boundaries of live Shakespeare interactivity.

Indeed, Skype, the most accessible platform, "whose strength emanates from its ubiquitous availability" (Cavanagh, Quarmby 2017, p. 125), is fully integrated into the play.

First and foremost, while emphasizing the two lovers' separation, anxiety and pain, thus very obviously and directly connecting them to all the Syrian people and refugees who have been separated from their families and their country, Skype calls are nonetheless the main means of communication between them. Against all odds, Romeo and Juliet are allowed to speak to each other and express their love through cameras.

Furthermore, for the actors and spectators in Homs, the Skype connection with actors and spectators outside Syria was perceived as an opportunity to have their voices heard as well as to grant a moment of relief and hope to restore their past peaceful lives before war broke out. On the other side of the connection, actors and spectators in Amman had the opportunity to feel as if they were in their homeland once again, even if only digitally. Unsurprisingly, Pritchford describes the first meeting on Skype between those in Amman and Homs as "a moment of joy":

> As soon as the two groups saw each other, they both giggled coyly. Ameen noted that the children in Syria desperately wanted to make this connection with other Syrian children living outside of the war. At the same time, Bulbul explained that seeing the children in Syria for the first time reminded the children in Amman that they were still connected to the country. The giggling, Bulbul speculated, was a combination of the children processing these complex emotions bound up with the romantic connotations at play in *Romeo and Juliet*. After a few moments of feigned embarrassment, the children composed themselves and Bulbul introduced the actors from Amman. Ameen followed by introducing the actors in the apartment in al Waer. For two months following this initial introduction, the children forged a virtual bond necessary for the performance and psychological benefit of each. (Pitchford 2019, p. 153)

Even more crucially, since interaction did not always proceed as planned, Skype not only posed unexpected problems, but it also revealed unsuspected, though unintentional, aesthetic potentialities. Not only did the two settings of the performance carry their own suggestions and very different stories, but the real world often intruded, with Internet and power outages in Homs sometimes interrupting the show. In fact, defectiveness and glitchiness in

transmission were the predominant experiences of Bulbul's production of *Romeo and Juliet* and, indisputably, they are also at the centre of its ethical core, being the tangible and symbolic mark of a dangerous situation, where young actors' lives themselves were at stake.

On several occasions, online actors "froze" in awkward positions, lost audio contact, or encountered other technical issues, and every time the connection was lost, spectators feared the connection would not be restored, because of a bomb. As academic and novelist Preti Taneja wrote in her account of the performance, every moment of connection between the two places was really precious, and every time the connection was lost, those watching in Amman "stayed silent, tense with the fear it would not be restored":

> […] Then the connection is cut again. The children remain frozen in their makeshift theatre spaces. Minutes pass, and when it is restored, they carry on as if there had been no interruption. This happens again and again, each time a reminder of the terrible reality in Homs and the damage the conflict is doing to psyches and lives. When the connection returns, the young narrator in Homs – a part written into the text to meet the challenge posed by geographical distance – gets his own laugh and a round of applause. "I swear, if we are not caught by bombs or explosives, and if Juliet is not fired at by a sniper, we will still be here in the next scene," he says. (Taneja 2015)

The audiences experienced lost transmission with patience, far from regarding it in terms of aesthetic failure, as might happen for productions such as Gregory Doran's 2016 *The Tempest*, whose core was, on the contrary, the company's capacity "to master the alien other of digital technology" (Bloom 2019). In fact, at one of the five performances, spectators had to wait an hour before Juliet appeared at the balcony for Romeo to declare his love (Agence France-Press 2015).

The risk for the audience in Homs of being wiped out in just one blast loomed over the entire performance and turned the stage into a space equally shared by spectators and performers, both in Amman and Homs. Glitches and lost connections inevitably forced the audience to feel an active part in the play as spectators responded emotionally to the situation. But glitches and lost connections also functioned as spurs for the actors' acting and reacting every time they were back on screen and in character. It is not hard to imagine how the spectators' cries of joy and relief after a blackout impacted the acting and the energy circulating.

Ccommunal patience proved essential for the successful integration of this interactive performance but the staging posed the question of where exactly the movable border between theatre and everyday life ran. The play's vicissitudes became inextricably intertwined with the real-life risky destiny of the young actors, especially Juliet and the Capulets. Indeed, their condition of being trapped under siege fortified that sense of unity that deeply concerned

both the performers and "the two households" represented in the play as well as those struggling in the bloody Syrian civil war, who, whether Muslim or Christian,[5] all had similar experiences of separation, violence, and division. In addition, the strife between the Capulets and the Montague led them to re-examine their understanding of toleration and peaceful cohabitation. Appropriately, Pitchford, who attended the performance, describes it as "a moment of heightened affect that united the audience through a felicitous connection:"

> The Syrians attending the show, especially for the first performance, were from a variety of social and political backgrounds. Souriyat Across Borders was known for treating any Syrian who came to them injured. So, under the same roof there were civilians, members of the Free Syrian Army, members of different Islamic militias such as Jabat al Nusra and Ahrar al Sham, and it was even believed that there were a few former members of ISIS. Despite the gulf of differences between these individuals, hearing the children's determination sparked a spontaneous, joyful reaction. When Romeo threw his poison to the ground and shouted his commitment to live, the audience erupted in applause. This energy carried through the last few lines of the play and continued afterwards in the form of group chants. (Pitchford 2019, pp. 178-179)

Even though merely for a very short moment, the performance encouraged a shared feeling of community and togetherness, despite the many differences of age, social class, politics, and religion.

Last but not least, the Skype technology contributed to conveying those Western values with which this "liberation technology" is permeated (Diamond 2010; see also Carson, Kirwan 2014), including individual freedom and freedom of expression – values that were (and still are) at risk under Assad's regime. As Pitchford underlines in his dissertation, the Free Syrian Army, the primary insurgency force in this area, "recognized the political value in this theatrical project" and enabled anti-regime activist Ameen to use satellite internet to rehearse and broadcast the performance over Skype in defiance of the regime's attempt at controlling communication space (Pitchford 2019, p. 147). The multimedia performance of Shakespeare assumed therefore the shape of political resistance and resilience.

It is no surprise if French artist Jean Yves Bizien, who worked on the play's set design, described the performance in political terms as an of resistance to apporession and massacre..[6] While acknowledging the risk he

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[5] M. VanZandt Collins argues that Bulbul tried to "foster a commitment to Muslim-Christian solidarity" by renaming Friar Lawrence as father Frans in memory of Father Frans van der Lugt, the Dutch Jesuit priest who had worked for the most deprived people since his arrival in Syria in 1966 and was murdered in Homs by the Assad regime in 2014 (Collins 2020).

[6] See also Bizien and Bulbul's canvas project "From Amman to Homs, art as resistance" as the ideal continuation of the work started with *Romeo and Juliet*: "Nawar Bulbul /

and the children took by performing the play on the Internet, Ameen himself argued that,, for them, Shakespeare was the tool for denouncing the brutality and oppression of Assad's regime.

3. Romeo Montecchi: innocent or guilty?

On December 1, 2018, Giuseppe Scutellà, actor and director of Puntozero Teatro, the theatre company which has been working with young offenders at Milan's juvenile detention centre "Cesare Beccaria" since 1995, presented an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* where, contrary to what happens in Bulbul's performance in which any mention of Romeo killing Tybalt is appropriately expunged, the action started with the Shakespearean scene of the fight between the Capulets and the Montagues and the deaths of Mercutio and Tybalt (3.1).[7] With their exit from the scene, the action was then transferred not to Mantua, where Shakespeare exiled Romeo, but to Milan, where Romeo was re-imagined as a teenager of nowadays, who is put on trial for the murder of Tybalt simulating the procedure of a real life trial of a young man accused of murder in Italy in 2018.

Undoubtedly, Shakespeare seems to bring something special to prison environment, as confirmed by many scholars and practitioners of Prison Shakespeare theatre, a sub-genre of prison theatre or social theatre but also, at the same time, a phenomenon in itself with different roots and traditions (Pensalfini 2016, p. 3). As a matter of fact, Curt Tofteland, the founder of the well-known "Shakespeare Behind Bars" project at the Luther Luckett Correctional Complex in La Grange, Kentucky, argues that more than any other playwright, Shakespeare conceived plays that "invite self-examination, self-exploration and self-awareness" (Tofteland 2011, p. 430), often the first step in a process of transformation. As the academic Niels Herold argues, "using Shakespeare to set up the conditions where such personal transformation can occur may reveal as much about the play as about its players" (Herold 2016, p. 1201). Indeed, by re-reading *Romeo and Juliet* and Romeo's killing of Tybalt through the lenses of their own personal experiences of arrest and trial, inmates/actors developed a deep relationship with the characters they played and often experimented inevitable overlapping between their onstage and offstage lives.

The performance was the result of one of the workshops my colleague Margaret Rose and I have been organizing, once a year, since 2016, with the Puntozero theatre company, and which in the case of the 2018 workshop

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Jean Yves Bizien. Theater / life, 2015, Syria", *Imago Mundi*. Luciano Benetton Collection: http://www.imagomundiart.com/artworks/nawar-bulbul-jean-yves-bizien-theater-life (8.5.2021).

[7] The project is thoroughly explained in Cavecchi *et al.* 2020.

involved a mixed group of nineteen undergraduate students in the humanities from Milan State University (two males and seventeen females),[8] youths from the Puntozero Theatre company, including one actress and two actors who were out on parole, and five inmates from Beccaria (all males aged sixteen to twenty), which is one of seventeen Italian juvenile detention centres scattered over our peninsula.[9]

The criminologist Simone Pastorino, the prison educator Elvira Narducci, and a lawyer specialized in youth justice, Lucio Camaldo, collaborated with us and successfully guided the group to understand the Italian juvenile justice system, thus helping us to fullfill our first aim in the workshop before the actual performance: to shorten the distance and mediate between the participants: our students, for whom the law, justice, and revenge were just abstract concepts, and the young inmates who, on the contrary, had a firsthand experience of crime and trials.

After a preliminary introduction to the Italian "multi-agency" juvenile justice system, which involves different professional figures in the specific fields of psychology, sociology, education, and pedagogy, and aims to create the conditions for greater involvement of civil society,[10] we started to devise a trial for Romeo. We re-created a courtroom on stage and arranged a new cast of characters in addition to the Shakespearean characters of Romeo, Balhasar, Benvolio: four judges (three stipendiary magistrates and one honorary member, chosen among experts in the human sciences), a defense lawyer, a Public Prosecutor, a TV special correspondent, and some witnesses, among whom were the ghosts of Tybalt and Mercutio. Unanimously, we decided to cut out the character of Juliet since Romeo would never have involved her in a trial that would have destroyed her life in the patriarchal

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[8] In Italy, it is the first theatre workshop involving a mixed group of university students from humanities courses and young inmates, which is regulated by a formal agreement between Puntozero and the University. Indeed, the fact that the workshop is part of student curriculum and gives credits is uncommon in Italy, where workshops in juvenile detention centres are still usually on a voluntary basis.

[9] Currently, in Italy, there are seventeen juvenile detention centres (IPM), located in almost all regions: only one of them, based in Pontremoli, a small country town quite difficult to reach, hosts only girls and young women; other two (one based in Rome and the other in Naples) have a division for girls and women. The Italian juvenile justice system deals with boys and girls, from 14 to 18 years of age, who have committed infractions of the civil or penal code; their sentences are served at juvenile justice institutions until the age of 21, but the jurisdiction of Juvenile Courts remains until their 25th year.

[10] Dipartimento della Giustizia Minorile Direzione per l'attuazione dei provvedimenti giudiziari / Juvenile Justice Department General Directorate for the implementation of Judicial measures, Istituto Psicoanalitico per le Ricerce Sociali (IPRS), *La Giustizia minorile in Italia / Juvenile Justice in Italy*, https://www.giustizia.it/resources/cms/documents/giustizia_minorile_in_ItaliaItalian_juvenile_justice.pdf (1.5.2021).

society of Elizabethan times, as also would happen in our contemporary mediatized society, even if for different reasons.[11]

The function of Juvenile Detention Centres (IPM) is "to ensure the enforcement of the measures issued by the legal authority such as pre-trial detention or prison sentences for juvenile offenders. In this context, the young offender is granted the right not to interrupt his educational, physical, and psychological development. To encourage the young offender's attainment of maturity, educational, training, cultural, sport and recreational activities such as theatre are organized in the IPMs".[12] Despite the IPM's educational objectives, the head of the prison, Cosima Buccoliero insisted on rigid discipline due to a riot the previous summer, when a group of young inmates had rebelled against some penitentiary agents. This meant she would not allow the inmates to join the theatre group in the prison's fully equipped 200-seat theatre, which, being placed in a separate wing, is somehow perceived as "a free zone" inmates have to be worthy of. Furthermore, she did not give some of the young inmates who attended the drama workshop permission to take part in the première, which was also open to the general public. However, she agreed our group of students could work with the inmates in a room inside the cell area, the so-called "blue cell". She also permitted director Giuseppe Scutellà and his video assistant Yuri Bifarella to bring a camera in and to film the inmates. It was precisely these restrictions that made us decide to cast the confined inmates-actors in the role of witnesses of Tybald's death. They became, therefore, the actor-subjects of interrogation by the Public Prosecutor, later edited into monologues to be screened in the theatre for the première. Moving into video was a real challenge for them.

Under the director's guidance, rehearsals became the space where every individual creative contribution was highly valued. Working in small mixed groups, the inmates collaborated with the students and wrote their parts as Shakespearean characters who bore witness before the four judges of the Juvenile Court about the "brawl" (3.1.3) leading Romeo to murder Tybalt. Each actor faced the camera alone, in close-up, positioned in the role of witness, and read his part from wooden boards that had been previously written. Each of them gave their own version about what had caused the row and the dynamics of the fight: W. as Benvolio, Gesun as Mercutio, Y. as Tybalt, Francesco as Balthasar and K. as himself, a fifteen-year-old Albanian who escaped from his country by bus, and, at that time, had no knowledge of Italian.

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[11] The playtext *Romeo Montecchi: innocente o colpevole?* is published in Cavecchi *et al.* 2020, pp. 149-171.

[12] DCI Italy – Defence for Children International Italy, TWELVE. *Children's right to partecipation and the juvenile justice system.* National report. Italy, http://www.defenceforchildren.it/files/twelve_Italy_.pdf (1.5.2021).

Undoubtedly, the fact the inmates-actors shared with Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* their inability to express their emotions openly facilitated, in a way, the process of writing their testimonies. According to Scutellà, Shakespeare words somehow helped them to overcome both their "emotional aphasia" (Cavecchi *et al.* 2020, p. 121) and their violence, which often rises when "you do not have the words to communicate" (Magill in Fischlin *et al.* 2014, p. 192). Pointedly, Joshua Algery, a former inmate who discovered theatre and music in Beccaria thanks to Puntozero, confessed that he had had to work very hard to bring out the romantic and positive emotions and feelings he had suppressed in order not to suffer while he was in prison.[13]

As a matter of fact, despite their many difficulties, all of these young men, who lacked what Italian philosopher and psychoanalyst Umberto Galimberti defines as the "syntax of emotions" (Galimberti 2007), were guided by the whole group and, between the serious and the facetious, they discovered, experienced, and were able to express a wider spectrum of emotions and feelings. In the process, they also acquired awareness of their mental and physical freedom, not to say, their potential for change. In their accounts, the Shakespearean situation and language registers morphed into something different. Not only the actors' tones and gestures, but also their slang and stock phrases, such as "Mi devi mollare, cazzo" (that more or less translates as "Shit, ditch" or "Leave me alone") were very close to those they were used to in their own deviant and real-life criminal experiences of gang conflicts, bullying, and disregard of social rules. Indeed, *Romeo and Juliet*, by struggling with the theme of youth and urban degeneration, provided the material to describe the relationship between the young inmates' on and off-stage lives.

What seems especially intriguing is that Scutellà turned prison confinement into an artistic and ethical opportunity thanks to digital technology. First and foremost, by viewing the video of their acting (the first shot was not always the best!), the inmates-actors felt proud of the results of their efforts, even though as a first reaction, they tended to be very critical of their try-outs. Indeed, as scholar and practitioner Rob Pensalfini writes in his volume dedicated to Prison Shakespeare: "working with a group of peers and professional theatre-makers in mounting a production provides a non-violent source of self-esteem and pride" (2016, p. 216). At the same, viewing their acting in performance on the videocamera worked as a sort of Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt:* by playing the role of murderers, they seemed conscious of their guilt as murderers of the Shakespearean characters; they were brought to act out characteristics of their personalities they were ashamed of, and

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[13] J. Algery in "Joshua Algeru e il desiderio di amore e libertà con il film *Fiore*", *La Gazzetta dello Spettacolo*, https://www.lagazzettadellospettacolo.it/cinema/26040-josciua-algeri-intervista-film-fiore/ (8.5.2021).

thereby hopefully to take distance from such characteristics: could this constitute a first step towards a full understanding of the reasons and roots of their deviant behaviour? According to Tom Magill, director of *Mickey B*, the awarded feature-length film adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* developed and performed by maximum-security prisoners inside Maghaberry Prison in Northern Ireland, making theatre or shooting a film in prison is, "essentially, […] about creating the conditions for people to find the tools and the confidence to use them, in order to write their new ending and perform their new role in it" (Fischlin *et al.* 2014, p. 179).

But there are other reasons why Scutella's use of screening was crucial. First and foremost, during the live performance, by taking the spectators inside the "blue cell" of the juvenile detention centre and inside the inmates' minds, the screening contributed to unmasking what prison, a place of dominance and submission, institutionally condemns to obscurity. Thus, the video camera in a penitentiary context cannot but remind one of the Foucaultian surveillance practices, from Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon to the CCTV to which everyone everywhere is now subjected in our "superpanopticon" and "maximum security society" (Lyon 1994, pp. 4-5). However, the video camera is also turned into a means of exploration and self-scrutiny, both for the inmates-actors and the spectators.

The projection of the close-ups of the offenders works paradoxically by highlighting their physical and metaphorical distance, and yet, by also making them the subjects of a privileged and intimate relationship with the spectators. Indeed, in a way, the absence from the stage of the inmates-actors made them even more present. One after the other, the close-ups of the young offenders interpreting Mercutio, Balthasar, Benvolio, Tybalt, dressed with their usual contemporary clothes, appeared occupying a brightly lit space projected onto a large upstage screen while they testified what they knew about the fight between the Capulets and the Montagues that led to Mercutio's and Tybalt's deaths. With his decision to frame the actors' faces in close-ups, which highlighted facial expressions more than is possible in theatre, Scutellà contributed to creating a situation of intimacy with the audience, thus complicitly bringing to light new aspects of their personalities. Their faces were indeed dramatic revelations of what "was really happening under the surface of their appearances" (Balázs 1992, p. 261). Furthermore, the director worked to remove the distance between actor-as-person and actor-as-performer so that his performers were not playing actors but were just acting themselves. While they played their Shakespearean roles, we also witnessed their "autobiographically confessional 'epiphanies'" (2008, p. 160), to quote Herold Niels' words, so that Mercutio's nervous tossing and speech hesitations (mm's and er's) were also Gesun's. Balthasar's trembling eye and stuttering were also Francesco's.

The intimate atmosphere deeply impacted the spectators' reception of the performance. By watching the inmates-actors in shots that foregrounded their facial expression of frailty and insecurity, and by listening to their broken voices interrupting the penetrating silence in the auditorium, spectators seemed more capable of compassion for the Shakespearean characters' impulsive and careless behaviour and more willing to forgive them: Mercutio, Balthasar, Benvolio, but also Gesun, Francesco and W., the actors interpreting them. Indeed, if, in accordance with Judith Butler, confession should be regarded as a performative act where "the performative force of the spoken utterance" is able to create a different self (Butler 2008, pp. 170, 163), it is easy to understand how and why spectators were guided to reconsider their prejudices about those young offenders, their faults, and punishments. Confession is generally seen as the first step towards redemption, and thus by acknowledging their own frailties and guilt, Mercutio's or Romeo's testimony is understandably seen with great favour by spectators. Seated in the auditorium, one could perceive the pain of each one of the spectators for these young men on screen, their uneasiness as they faced the lack of freedom of inmates-actors.

At the same time, the projection of the close-ups of the offenders actively competed with the live actors on stage for the audience's attention, thus encouraging more active and critical spectatorship. "At the crossroad of various media looks" and therefore open to "a variety of subject positions," spectators were turned from "a passive, monolithic voyeur, who is controlled by the looking structures embedded in a show" to "a pluralistic, changing, interactive viewer" (Klaver in Giesekam 2007, p. 22). Indeed, I felt that in the process of engaging with the performance, thanks to this toing and froing between live theatre and videotape reproduction, onstage and offstage worlds, each one of the spectators was brought to think differently about juvenile prison.

Furthermore, the condition of being spectators in a theatre within a prison, where the audience had been admitted after the meticulous procedure of checking documents against an official list of visitors (McAvinchey 2011, pp. 1-2), also contributed to turn everyone into active participants at an event bigger than the performance itself: an event counting them as actors along with penitentiary agents, educators, and selected inmates of Beccaria who had been allowed to attend *Romeo Montecchi: innocente o colpevole?* This situation as well as the environment of the prison made them feel unsure as to how near to the truth they might be. Who were they forgiving? Who were they being indulgent with? The Shakespearean character or the inmate acting in the Shakespearean role? Romeo or the actor, the one who was on parole after a period of detention in Beccaria?

I had the impression the performance was succeeding in re-enforcing the idea that there was an urgent cultural and political need for re-engagement

with the ideas of prison and theatre – something Italy had (and continues to have) a desperate need of. The importance of the performance and the whole project in terms of its impact on society at large was clearly reaffirmed in many "diari di bordo", diaries we asked all the participants to write daily to record their impressions and feelings. Our university students seemed therefore eager to grasp the importance of culture as a deterrent against crime and thereby increasing their understanding of the thinness of the line that separates them on the outside from the teenagers inside prison actually is. Significantly, one of our students, Marta T., points out that, when you get to know them, inmates can be much appreciated:

> I have always been afraid of other people's judgment, but this time is different because I'm not alone on stage. I have by my side a group of people that I have come to know and appreciate for their amazing talent and kindness. […] People actually came on Saturday evening to see our work. I hope that at least one of them, after the show, will find him/herself thinking that people deserve a second chance, especially teenagers. […] Everyone deserves the chance to make amends for what they have done. It's true, we are not perfect, but we can always improve and learn from our mistakes. (Cavecchi *et al.* 2020, p. 178)

Crucially, she wishes the performance would lead at least one of the spectators to believe that everybody, especially teenagers, deserves a second chance.

4. Ethical Digital Shakespeares

Remarkably, despite difficult and disadvantaged situations (a besieged city, on the one hand, and a juvenile prison, on the other), Bulbul's *Romeo and Juliet* and Scutellà's *Romeo Montecchi: innocente o colpevole?*, and despite the absence of balconies, tested intersections between electronic and face-to-face experiences and endeavoured to capitalise on the different strengths of each approach in order to create a challenging and throbbing environment both for actors and spectators. The use of a video camera or Skype technology opened exciting new aesthetic and political possibilities and revealed how the contradictory nature of digital technologies both complicates (Fischlin 2014) and enriches the process of remediation of Shakespeare today. They have been "used simultaneously as tools to accomplish a locale purpose, and as technologies that value and conceive their purpose within a wider network of social, cultural economic, and even political conduct, as performance" (Worthen 2007, p. 236).

Thus, in the context of a theatrical workshop in a European prison, a video camera, one of the most common and widespread tools of surveillance and disciplinary power, becomes an opportunity to unmask stereotypes and reveal how much teenagers inside and outside prison have in common in

terms of enthusiasm, energy and shared teen-language; likewise, the use of Skype technology in Syria, even if is controlled by the regime (or precisely because it is controlled by the regime) becomes an action of resistance that inevitably sustains "an ideologically loaded set of cultural attitudes" (Worthen 2007, p. 235). Indeed, thanks to global technology like Skype, the multimedia performance of Shakespeare also assumes the shape of political resilience; as Bulbul argued on the occasion of his 2014 *King Lear* in the Zaatari Refugee camp, "children are the real revolutionaries" and "performing Shakespeare's play in the heart of Zaatari is a different kind of a revolution against politics and society" (Taha 2014). Indeed, Bulbul's and Scutellà's digital Shakespeares proved successful in mapping "the political, not simply in modes of governance, militarism, commerce or diplomacy, but rather, the political as it is suffused by desires, fantasies and the imagination" (Singh, Arvas 2015, p. 184), thus, once again, raising questions about what constitutes the essential or authentic Shakespeare.

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PART III | Adaptations and appropriations in digital contexts

IMAGE, MUSIC, TEXT
Notes on The Digital Video Disc edition of *William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet* by Baz Luhrmann

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Abstract – The DVD (or Digital Video Disc) has fundamentally changed "the way we interact with movies" (Barlow 2005, p. XI); the DVD is indeed a digital resource offering possibilities which analog equipments such as VCR and VHS – which had always remained a linear medium – could not offer in the 1970s and 1980s. The DVD can be considered not only a media resource but also, and most importantly, a space to investigate the fascinating dialogic relationship involving image, music and (verbal) text. In this sense, if, according to Brummett, "a text is a set of signs related to each other insofar as their meanings all contribute to the same set of effects or functions" (2006, p. 34), then the DVD stands as a "multimodal text" (Kress, van Leeuwen 2001), one where the visual, the musical and the literary are engaged in a fascinating dialogue which allows them to constantly redefine themselves. Interestingly, the DVD format was born in the very same year – namely 1996 – of one of the most fascinating and successful Shakespearean filmic adaptations, that is *William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet* by the Australian director Baz Luhrmann. In the film the poetic and canonic aura of the Shakespearean verses – which are pronounced in their integrity – is somehow transgressed by their contrapuntal juxtaposition to images and sounds belonging contemporary pop culture. In our view, the DVD edition of the film – which includes many extras (on which we will focus in the present essay) such as photo galleries, music videos, interviews, TV trailers, audio commentaries and an introductory essay by the director himself in which he makes reference to the strong relationship between Shakespeare and popular culture (Lanier 2002) – represents the format which seems to be more *in tune* with the film's hypertextual quality *staging* its very capacity to exceed the world of cinema to interrogate our own age through the double lens of Shakespeare and contemporary popular culture.

Keywords: intermediality; literature; film; song; pop.

1. The Digital Video Disc and its legacy

According to Aaron Barlow, the DVD has fundamentally changed "the way we interact with movies", throwing us "into a whole new cinematic possibility where the integrity of the film is of higher importance than ever

before and its life is immeasurable"; in this sense, thanks to the DVD, "classic movies are beginning to be treated as respectfully as classic books" (Barlow 2005, p. XI).

Of course, books and films can be described as belonging to the same category: *texts*, a complex and arguably problematic category which has been approached from very different angles. According to Roland Barthes,

> A text is […] a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations […] the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in a such a way as never to rest on any one of them. (1977a, p. 146)

This definition by Barthes importantly points to the text as an open and not a closed entity, a space in which different voices and discourse modes speak to each other. In 1977, Simon Heath edited a volume entitled *Image-Music-Text* which collects seminal essays by Barthes on the analysis of narrative processes, key semiotic issues in literature, cinema and photography, and instrumental and vocal practice in music. Heath's collection is defined by a fascinating shift from work to text: the volume is characterized by an attention to the very "grain" (Barthes 1977b, p. 179) of the semiotic process and by the intention to focus – in literature, photography, film and song – on all those aspects which, within the signifying dimension, seem to displace, shift, disperse.

In this perspective, the DVD can be considered not only a media resource but also a space to investigate the fascinating *dialogic* relationship involving image, music and (verbal) text. In this sense, if, according to Brummett, "a text is a set of signs related to each other insofar as their meanings all contribute to the same set of effects or functions" (2006, p. 34), then the DVD stands as a "multimodal text" (Kress, van Leeuwen 2001), one where the visual, the musical and the literary are engaged in a fascinating dialogue which allows them to constantly redefine themselves.
Paul McDonald – in his 2007 study entitled *Video and DVD Industries* – writes about the birth and the early impact of this optical disc in the media context*:*

> Digital Versatile Disc or Digital Video Disc (DVD) was introduced in the consumer market in 1996. […] DVD not only replaced the VCRs and videocassettes but also introduced a new media object. Videocassettes had always remained a linear medium, working along the single plane of record, play, rewind and fast-forward. DVD, however, provided access to many different sources of content via menus. DVDs increased the storage capacity of video software units, providing space for the inclusion of other types of content beyond the main programme. By multiplying textual content, DVD has raised questions over whether there is a core or essence to the video commodity. (2007, p. 1)

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In the last twenty years, and in particular in the Noughties, the DVD has also deeply affected media production strategies, marketing, distribution and consumption. If on the one hand producers have found in the DVD a means of retaining or expanding existing markets and an opportunity to develop new ones, consumers have also recognized a chance to exert some control over the media they consume, using their purchasing power in stores and online to assert forms of social and cultural identity.

The DVD has posed new challenges for scholars in the field, in particular for literary and, notably, for Shakespeare scholars (Ferguson 2019, Worthen 2003), forcing them to keep pace with the ongoing transformation of the landscape of media and culture industries.

A central issue of this process is represented by the very fact – as Sebok and Destemeyer (2013) note – that the DVD is a digital resource, offering possibilities which analog equipments such as VCR and VHS could not offer in the 1970s and 1980s:

> The fact that the DVD entered into and helped define a shift in technology and culture from "analog" to "digital" is of paramount importance to the processes involved in making DVD meaningful. "Digital" suggests a massive shift in culture and industry, away from a particular understanding of technology and technology-user interface into an age of instant, random access to information and entertainment. (Sebok 2007, p. 227)

Many commentators have pointed to the analogy between DVDs and the most innovative of the platforms of the mid-late 1990s, namely the internet. They resemble each other not only in the hypertextual structure of their interface – allowing each user to freely, creatively (and vertically) construct his/her reading of the text – but also in the encyclopaedic access to knowledge they both offer. We witness, in short, a shift from a critical discourse *on* the text, offering contents strictly related to the film or series (as we see in critical para-texts) to a larger public discourse *about* the text which expands its context (Franchi 2010).[1]

Of particular relevance is also the aura (in the Benjaminesque sense) of quality which is associated with the DVD (McDonald 2007), lent by its superior video and audio quality. On the one hand this has had a significant impact on both cinema and television productions, or better *re-productions*, with iconic TV series published in DVD format; on the other, it has contributed to a fetishization of the DVD by an increasingly hi-tech-obsessed

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[1] A very interesting format in this regard was the one offered in the Mid-Noughties by Italian publisher Feltrinelli with the *Real Cinema* series which expanded the film beyond the digital dimension, featuring a film on DVD and a film-related book in the same case; remarkable titles in the series were Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Michael Epstein's *LennonNYC* and Mark Achbar and Jeniffer Abbott's *The Corporation*.

society.[2] In Italy, for instance, in 2002 eight million discs were sold and the DVD rentals amounted to more than twenty million,[3] while almost 4 million players were sold in 2003.

The Great Recession of 2007-2009 affected the DVD market and the Hollywood industry more generally, which relied and still relies on home entertainment for most of its income. A further reason for the crisis was the advent of the Blue-Ray technology, which offered higher definition but scarcely had an impact on the media market. The 2010s were largely dominated by the success of streaming services such as Netflix; somewhat ironically, Netflix – which was founded in 1997 – started out in the late Nineties/early Noughties as a service for DVD sales and rental by mail, before introducing its streaming service in 2007. If the streaming offers some of the basic options included in DVDs – such as language/subtitles selection – it lacks others, particularly all the *extra,* meta-textual contents which have made the DVD a unique form of textuality, a whole which is more than the sum of its parts.

2. The DVD edition of *William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet* by Baz Luhrmann

The Digital Video Disc format was born in the very same year – namely 1996 – as one of the most fascinating and successful Shakespearean film adaptations of the past three decades, *William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet* by the Australian director Baz Luhrmann, featuring Leonardo di Caprio and Claire Danes in the title roles. In the film, the poetic and canonic aura of the Shakespearean lines – which are pronounced in their integrity – is transgressed by their contrapuntal juxtaposition to images and sounds belonging to contemporary pop culture. This basic idea goes some way to explain the unprecedented success of this film, particularly with younger viewers not commonly attracted to Shakespeare films. The film enunciates Shakespearean language in a post-modern space – an imaginary location, Verona Beach, which coincides with Mexico City – and sets Shakespeare's words into a dialogical relationship with other discourse modes such as music

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[2] Laura Mulvey notes how the possibilities offered by DVDs also allow the cinephile the fetishization of the object/star: "with electronic and digital viewing, the nature of cinematic repetition compulsion changes. As the film is delayed and thus fragmented from linear narrative into favourite moments or scenes, the spectator is able to hold on to, to possess the previously elusive image. In this delayed cinema the spectator finds a heightened relation to the human body, particularly that of a star" (2006, p. 161).

[3] *Anche in Italia boom dei DVD 8 milioni venduti nel 2002*, in "La Repubblica", 10 January 2013: https://www.repubblica.it/online/spettacoli_e_cultura/dvduno/scheda/scheda.html.

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and the visual arts, amplifying its beauty while preserving its qualities as "a lover's discourse" (Barthes 1978) capable of questioning the ideology of power and money. In the film, Juliet is an affluent girl who lives in an imposing villa, while Romeo is of a different social class, belonging to a community of Cuban exiles.

In the present analysis, I want to argue that the digital format of the DVD edition of the film – which includes a multitude of extras such as photo galleries, music videos, interviews, TV trailers, audio commentaries and an introductory essay by the director himself – amplifies the film's hypertextual qualities and its capacity to interrogate our own age through the double lens of Shakespeare and the multiple languages of contemporary popular culture.

Franchi points to the "multifunctionality" (2012, p. 20) of the DVD, highlighting the gradual increase in the number and typology of extras offered by specific editions over the years since the DVD's introduction to the market. The DVD edition of Luhrmann's film – with its very rich extras menu – offers a multiplicity of access points to the film not available to those who watched the film at the cinema.

It is worth noting that the DVD case is made of cardboard, not plastic, and therefore somewhat resembles a book. The case contains a booklet – quite similar to the ones featured in music CDs – which includes an *Introduction* by the director in which he refers to the close relationship between Shakespeare and popular culture, both Elizabethan and twentieth century. Luhrmann remarks how, in Shakespeare's day, everybody – from the Queen to the dustman – would attend Shakespeare's performances, so that in order to conquer his audience the Bard used every sort of subject available, and lays claim to continuing this Shakespearean tradition in his film. The subjects range from contemporary politics to classical histories, and all registers of language and music, including modern day pop songs, as contemporary equivalents of Elizabethan ballads and *ayres*, to comment and interact with scenes and specific characters. Luhrmann's argument is powerful and born out by the success of his film, which indeed stands as a remarkable achievement in translating Shakespeare's play into a pop-cultural idiom (pop music, fashion, media) while preserving his language, reaching a vast and inclusive audience.

Inserting the DVD into the player, we are introduced to the Main Menu where we see a still image coming from the film with the two lovers kissing on a screen (something which points to the meta-filmic dimension of the DVD itself), and we also see the Language Menu and the link to the Extras. Yet the most remarkable element is not what we see but what we hear: a loop

of an instrumental fragment of the Radiohead song "Talk Show Host"[4] mixed with a field recording of the sound of the sea. This aural loop refers to the film sequence in which we are first introduced to Romeo.

As Mark Sutherland observes, "significantly, Radiohead are first heard in the film just as the characters are discussing Romeo's *black portentous humour*" (2003, p. 84). Radiohead's music is often described as melancholic and introspective; in this sense, "Talk Show Host" perfectly responds to the dialogue between Montague and Benvolio. At the same time the song aurally introduces Romeo to the scene. Monica Popescu (2002) makes reference to the director's choice of presenting Romeo's character in multimodal terms, that is, through the lines: "Why then, o brawling love, O loving hate /O anything of nothing first create" (1.1.176-7), which he at once recites and writes in his diary. The lines are thus emphasized not only by this verbal and visual doubling but also by the music and words of Radiohead, which convey a sense of division and conflict in tune with the Bard's verses.

"I want to be someone else or, I'll explode" – the lines written and sung by the band's leader Thom Yorke – introduce a theme which is central to the entire play; that is, the lovers' desire to be someone else. Silvano Sabbadini notes how for the two Shakespearean heroes the first rite of passage implies the loss and not the acquisition of a name (1991, p. XL). Names, as symbols of social belonging, are the cause of the lovers' separation; a name is an arbitrary, conventional sign, which nevertheless mortifies human relationships. Love, as Roland Barthes has shown in *A Lover's Discourse,* needs motivated, intracorporeal, often unexpected signs and gestures, rather than the re-production of pre-scribed and codified behaviours and symbols.

At the musical level the song presents a riff in the minor key – the most "escaping" according to Deleuze and Guattari (1987) – which is repeated a consistent number of times, always presenting a pause when Shakespeare and Yorke's words come to the foreground. Music and words seem to speak to each other through a song which, even though not appositively written for the film, creates dynamic semantic contexts.

I will return to Radiohead's contribution to the film at the end of this essay, but – before analysing in detail the Extras featured in the DVD – I think it was important to stress the relevance and intelligence of the choice of a sample from this song for the main menu's soundtrack, as its use – consisting, as we have seen, of the reiteration of an instrumental fragment in the minor key written by one of the most experimental and fascinating bands of the 1990s – may influence, with its meditative, unsettling potential and

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[4] "Talk Show Host" is a b-side of the single "Street Spirit" and is included in the soundtrack of *William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet* published by Parlophone in 1996.

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through the association of the music with the words (words which we do not hear in the menu, but only in the film, yet with which, nevertheless, the band's fans are familiar) the user's experience of the menu and of the DVD as a whole.

The first of the extras accessible through the Extras Menu is the "Audio Commentary", spoken by the Director, script writer Catherine Martin, co-author Craig Pearce and director of Photography Donald McAlpine. As Bombes notes:

> In the same way that punk showed how it was possible to make music without the experts, so too DVD shows us how to learn about film without the expert professors. One obvious place where this happens is in the Director's Commentary, which is […] a standard feature on many DVDs. (2004, p. 344)[5]

The enunciation by the four members of the film staff – as often happens with the audio commentaries featured in DVDs – is characterised by an easy, direct tone expressing fun and inclusiveness, in which the viewer/listener has the impression of being personally involved in a conversation between the four members of the film crew. The four different perspectives also offer insight into the writing of the film, which is, as we have seen, nourished by many forms of writing, by many semiotic practices (music, literature, fashion etc.) simultaneously.

The second extra included is the "Director's Gallery" which itself includes six different subsections. The first entitled "Impact", features Oxford professor Jonathan Bate – author of *The Genius of Shakespeare* (1998) – and focuses on the relevance of Luhrmann's film in contemporary culture which Bate describes as "one of the greatest achievements of our time", since according to him "it keeps the authentic text but updates the setting and makes Shakespeare familiar to a whole new generation" (Luhrmann 2002); then two sections entitled "Why Shakespeare" and "Narrating Shakespeare", which are actually two segments of a single 1998 Luhrmann's interview; and finally three sections in which the director literally dissects three iconic sequences from the film: the gas station scene, the swimming pool sequence in which the two lovers kiss, and the dramatic scene featuring Tybalt's execution. Taken together, in this section of the extras menu we thus have a kaleidoscopic assemblage of different approaches and perspectives echoing the strands of artistic, popular and academic engagement intersecting in popular Shakespeare in general (see Lanier 2002) and Luhrmann's film in particular: an academic (Bate) talking about the director and his film, the director speaking in an interview, and then the director *as academic* analyzing the three key sequences of his film.

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[5] See also Distemeyer (2013).

The third extra is the "Director of Photography's Gallery", which features a number of shots from the film, with commentary, through which we are invited to appreciate the centrality of the photographic language in the movie; this section also invites us to investigate the iconic dimension of the semiotic processes at the core of the film. In Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics,

> the icon stands as a specific type of sign along with the index and the symbol; while the index is a sign that signifies its object by a relation of contiguity, causality or by some physical connection and the symbol is a sign which acquires its meaning in consequence of a habit (usually determined by a code), the icon is characterized by a relation of similarity between the sign and its object. The icon is the most independent sign from both convention and causality/contiguity: an icon stands for something or for some particular meaning in an unpredictable, often escaping way. (Martino 2012, p. 12)

In this sense, the film – in which the iconic dimension seems to be privileged – invites us to read the story of the two lovers through a vertical and not a linear approach, that is, through a reading – which the DVD edition, with its still function, also allows us to embrace (as we have seen with the still of the lovers' kissing featured in the main menu) – in which every single image and sound is pregnant with meaning in itself. And yet,

> in contemporary culture, the notions of icon and iconicity, even preserving their semiotic, Peircean connotation, can cover a vast and complex range of meanings; for instance, with the term 'cultural icon' we may refer, indeed, to a person regarded as a representative symbol or as worthy of veneration. (Martino 2012, pp. 12-13)

This perfectly defines the status of the young and successful Leonardo Di Caprio in 1996.

The fourth extra is the "Project Gallery", where set designer Catherine Martin focuses on different aspects of her work: Books, Verona Beach's Weapons, Cars and Maps. Each chapter is fascinatingly presented in a form which resembles a Power Point presentation with slides commented on in real time by Martin.

A type of extra which is included in almost all DVD editions is the Interview Gallery with actors and other members of the film team. In the *Romeo+Juliet* DVD it is the order in which the interviews[6] are presented

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[6] The success of the interview as textual document dates back to the nineteenth century: Oscar Wilde, for instance, became a global celebrity in 1882 during his American (reading) tour at least in part thanks to the (at least) ninety-eight interviews he sat for (Hofer, Scharnhorst, 2010). Interviewers, as Wilde himself recognized, "were a 'product' of American civilization. Celebrity

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which deserves close attention. In sequence, we get interviews with: the script co-writer, the film editor, the costume designer, the choreographer, John Leguizamo (who plays Tybalt), Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes. The order in which the interviews are presented – which however, the DVD user is of course free not to follow – stresses the centrality of the film as a process, as a choral, multidimensional, collaborative effort.

The last two extras are dedicated to "Music Videos" and to the "Marketing" of the film. The final extra includes the subsections TV spots, Trailers and Posters. In this section, the team who has designed the DVD edition, exhibits the different campaigns with which the film was promoted in different countries. In this sense it constitutes an example of what Torop (1995) defines as the "metatextual translation" of a filmic source text in a target culture.

The Music Videos section includes only two of the songs featured in the film's soundtrack, namely: Kym Mazelle's "Young Hearts Run Free" and "Kissing You" by Des'ree, and yet, in the film, pop plays a central role. It comments, explains, introduces characters, themes and actions in a way which besides Shakespeare himself also recalls Wagner, whose "Liebestod of Tristan und Isolde" in a version sung by Leonytine Price accompanies the last dramatic scenes of the film. It is not the only classical piece in the film: we also have fragments from Mozart's "Symphony No. 55", which are juxtaposed to pop songs in line with the postmodern aesthetic of the film, in which, according to Hodgdon, one can perceive "a sense of identification from dissonance and disjuncture" (1999, p. 90). The very idea of dissonance is at the core of the play itself and is perfectly translated by the sonic image of "straining harsh discords" voiced by Juliet (3.5.28) that captures the complex interplay of harmony and disharmony in Shakespeare's tragedy.

The film soundtrack includes contributions from key pop artists of the 1990s: Gavin Friday, Radiohead, Garbage, Cardigans, One Inch Punch, Wannadies, Des'ree. The last is also present in the film, performing her song "Kissing you" during the feast in the Capulet household. The song perfectly translates the experience of making music at the Elizabethan Court to a modern setting and, at the same time, comments and acts as an aural counterpoint to the lovers' kissing scene. A more complex and original function, however, is played within Baz Luhrmann's multimodal discourse

interviews began to appear in American newspapers in the early 1870s, and traveling lectures were a convenient source of copy for reporters. While Henry James and Mark Twain decried the new celebrity culture, Wilde, like Walt Whitman, embraced it, creating a paradigm to perform one's personality for generations up until the new millennium" (Martino 2015, p. 434). In this sense, a disciple of Wilde, namely Andy Warhol, famously founded a 1969 magazine entitled *Interview*, in which, among other things, the magazine's team sent a celebrated name to interview the month's cover star.

by Radiohead's music. The film features two songs written by the Oxford quintet: the already mentioned "Talk Show Host" and "Exit Music (for a film)" which was commissioned for *Romeo+Juliet* by the director himself.

In *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture*, Douglas Lanier, speaking about the relationship between *Romeo and Juliet* and pop, writes:

> Given pop music's abiding concern with courtship, it is unsurprising that its most important point of Shakespearian reference has been *Romeo and Juliet*, the very embodiments of adolescent passion and rebellion against parents. The last generation [...] has seen significant changes in how these figures are musically evoked. (2002, p. 72)

Lanier quotes Buhler, who notes how "Romeo at one time the embodiment of suave insincerity, was recast as passionate commitment personified, [while] Juliet, formerly presented as merely reactive to her lover's blandishments has shown signs of increased independence and agency" (2004, p. 244). In this case of "revisionism from below", the two lovers are, however, quite often just named but not quoted, because "their youthful rebellion is directed precisely against what Shakespeare's language represents: authority, age, propriety, respect and tradition" (Lanier 2002, p. 72).

This is also the case in "Exit Music (for a film)".[7] In the song there are no quotations from Shakespeare's text; Yorke decided to write original lyrics which evoke some key images of the film, as the scene in which Juliet aims a Colt 45 at her own head.

The song can be heard at the end of the film over the end credits – and directly accessed through the skip function of the DVD, which also allows us to read the lyrics – inviting the audience to rethink an important sequence of the play, the one about the morning following the night spent together by the two lovers, in which the last verbal exchange between the two lovers is inhabited by the very idea of death:

> JULIET
> O God, I have an ill-divining soul!
> Methinks I see thee, now thou art below,
> As one dead in the bottom of a tomb:
> Either my eyesight fails, or thou look'st pale.
> ROMEO
> And trust me, love, in my eye so do you:
> Dry sorrow drinks our blood. Adieu, adieu! (3.5.54-9)

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[7] The song is included in Radiohead's album *Ok Computer* (Parlophone, 1997) which is a very fascinating and powerful meditation on communication and alienation in the digital era.

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The song works at two different levels: it poetically responds to Juliet's death but it also stands as an alternative to death itself (but also to a death in life) – in short as a postmodern alternative – through the words of Romeo which invite Juliet to wake on the day of their escape: "Wake… from your dreams/The drying of your tears/Today we escape, we escape" (Radiohead 1997). In "Exit music" the escape turns into a way out not only of the Shakespearean tale, but also of the public, official space which – with its emphasis on identity and power – preserves no room for the lovers' discourse. Yorke's words come out of everyday language; it is a private, low key language apparently shared only by the two lovers which preserves the dialogic connotation of Shakespeare's words. The imperatives and vocatives of the song's protagonist are addressed at Juliet, inviting her to perform simple gestures: "Pack… and get dressed/Before your father hears us/Before all hell breaks loose". This imperative of love perfectly complements the first line of the song ("Wake from your sleep"), composing a discourse of the two lovers' gestures which Yorke opposes to the official discourse represented by such words as "father" and "hell".

In terms of the rich and fascinating musical articulation of the song – which the high quality audio of the DVD edition enhances – we can note how, while the first two verses present the same melody (a quite uniform and monotone one), the third verse introduces a descending scale which sounds particularly attractive due to the urgent and suffering vocal performance of Yorke, who gives voice to another imperative of love – "Breathe, keep breathing/I can't do this alone" – gives a body and a shape to the very act of breathing. The beauty of this moment is intensified by its enunciation in a space which is at once of life, love and death. "Breathe" becomes an invitation, made by Romeo to Juliet, to keep calm before their escape, but also a call for life in a context of death.

The last verse before the closing section directly refers to the contraposition "us" vs. them, that is love vs. social order, an order which is perceived as extremely cold and rational in comparison with the lovers' need for heat and passion: "Sing… us a song/A song to keep us warm/There's such a chill, such a chill". The very reference to a song within a song is quite Shakespearian and turns music into a space of resistance to the order of discourse. Sadly, the song closes with the awareness that the social order with its obsession for power and identity leaves no room for the two lovers; rules and wisdom make people literally laugh at passion and love as impulses which escape the logic of productiveness (which is at the core of capitalism); love produces nothing but relationships, dialogues, connections. "Exit music" celebrates the very idea of relationship, of dialogue, through a desperate speech addressed to a dead body, murdered by a collective strategy, which Yorke hopes can destroy itself, choking on its own laws: "You can laugh/A

spineless laugh/We hope your rules and wisdom choke you/Now we are one in everlasting peace".

As Jim Irvin observes: "when a distorted bass and mellotron start up, the track billows into a moving gothic chiller" (2003, p. 58); the love ballad, the prayer turns into a gothic tale to sonically translate Yorke's disturbing images. The singer's final verses are sung with an extraordinary intensity in order to articulate the idea of a big time (a time to come) in which love has finally recovered its own space – that of death, which no discourse of power can predict or contain, a death become myth through art – in which the "us" has become unity, metaphor, we might say, of a consciousness in love with the other, inhabited by the other, in its uniqueness and unrepeatability. Shakespeare's star-crossed lovers access a new life in that eternal and eternally escaping language which is music; the most erotic, unpredictable and de-centered of the arts. The innocuous myth Sabbadini speaks about (1991) directly addresses our body, making it vibrate beyond any intentional project, reminding us of the ineluctable presence of the other and of others in our life.

As Jacques Derrida has shown in *The Margins of Philosophy* (1982), philosophers have traditionally prioritized the focal over the marginal, and yet 'supplementary' margins very often shed a precious light on 'central' issues; we can use Derrida's 'philosophy' of the margin to assert the vital importance of what apparently seems a marginal element within the film's narrative and within the DVD edition itself. The very choice of presenting the Radiohead track over the end credits has a strongly subversive value which seems to question the imperatives of cinema. Here Radiohead's music does not comment on any scene, but stands as a musical accompaniment to the audience's final emotive response, to what they have watched and listened to, which often becomes compassion for the story of two young lovers, a story which is also the story of each of us and will probably never be listened to (or performed) in the society we live in. Yet since we can directly access the song/end-titles sequence through the chapter menu of the DVD edition, we can decide to subvert the film order, to play the song as a 'reading key' to the film itself and as a postmodern rewriting (*per se*) of Shakespeare's play.

3. Conclusion

It is possible to conclude suggesting how *playing* the DVD of the film becomes in this sense a way to perform the story, potentially an infinite number of times, *staging* each time, in our private/domestic spaces, an

*L*ingue e
*L*inguaggi

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interruption[8] and subversion of the ideology of power (and identity) and of its official, pre-established narratives. The many links included in the DVD become multiple *exits*, semiotic paths written and constructed in real time by us, through a semiotics of the unpredictable and the unexpected. The Digital Video Disc – and in particular the DVD edition of *William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet* – becomes in this way a critical commodity, a product but also a deconstructive resource and precious critique of capitalism itself.

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[8] On the idea of (critical) interruption see Chambers (2003).

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"TO MEME OR NOT TO MEME", AND TO DO SO DURING A PANDEMIC Shakespeare and the Memetic Transmission of a Classic

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Abstract – Shakespeare's protean quality is an intrinsic feature: his works and even his persona have always been adapted and have been capable of transmitting through time and space. Rather than merely being the latest form of remediations, this paper suggests that memes can be related to the very nature of a classic, which resides in its transmissibility. In this paper, informed by the idea that a classic is comparable to a viral content, I analyse a few Shakespeare-related internet memes created in the first half of 2020, during the initial phase of the Coronavirus pandemic emergency, that assimilate Shakespeare in a pandemic context. An English icon, Shakespeare seems to be able to speak to different audiences in their own language, even in the lyophilized form of the internet meme.

Keywords: meme; adaptation; virality; cultural transmission; intersemiotic translation.

1. O beware, my lord, of the words

One of the secondary effects of the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020 has been a mostly sterile debate about the significance and validity of metaphors: was it right to talk about a *war* against the disease? Were doctors and nurses *soldiers* fighting against an invisible enemy?[1] Apparently, most of the authors of articles and short essays about this topic forget what a metaphor actually is, and what its purpose is – using an image to refer to something else.[2] Another metaphor has fared better in recent years, and was in fact already spreading with levity in a pre-pandemic world – the metaphor of virality (see Wasik 2010). When the Western world still seemed far from the risk of being

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[1] See, for instance, Cassandro 2020, Testa 2020. Many of the articles on this topic refer to Susan Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor* (1978) and the following *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (1989).

[2] The power of metaphors is the subject of numerous studies, for example Lakoff and Johnson (2003).

torn apart by a disease, only pieces of information seemed capable of going viral and reaching – even *infecting* – our brains. This online virality has not been stopped by the pandemic; on the contrary, the forced free time available during the global lockdown has favoured the spread of information, misinformation and, of course, internet memes, the most viral of all contents.

If the internet has allowed the rapid global spread of pieces of information, words and thoughts have always been viral. Internet memes are only the last expression of a tendency which is inherent within ideas: they have always tried to infect as many brains as possible, even if that meant mutating in the process (see Dawkins 2016). A particular category of ideas, classics are literary works capable of being adapted in different contexts, geographically and temporarily far from the ones in which they were conceived, and to persist in a culture, to the point where the work's titles become proverbial (think of "all's well that ends well"), and their characters become personifications of features or attitudes (think of the adjective "hamletic", or of an "Othello" as the jealous husband par excellence).

In this paper, informed by the idea that a classic is comparable to a viral content, I will analyse a few Shakespeare-related internet memes created in the first half of 2020 during the pandemic emergency, in order to show how William Shakespeare has always proved capable of transmitting himself through time and space. An English icon, Shakespeare seems to be able to speak to different audiences in their own language, a protean quality which might just be what makes him a classic, even when it means to be used as a textbook for washing hands in order to avoid being infected by the plague of the twenty-first century. The Shakespeare-related memes analysed in this paper use in various ways a Shakespearean content, either as a variation in a fixed frame (such as in the Lady Macbeth washing hands meme), or as the fixed text that triggers internet users' fantasies about creating textual or visual variations (as in the "Shakespeare wrote King Lear in quarantine. I…" meme).

By using Limor Shifman's proposal of dissecting an internet meme into its content, form and stance (Shifman 2013), this paper will analyse different types of Shakespeare-related internet memes. A comparative approach is at the basis of this paper, which is in debt to information theory (see Eco 1972 and Gleick 2011), according to which any content rests on a balance between repetition and innovation. As to the analysis of the internet memes, notions developed in linguistics, especially in the field of pragmatics, have proven useful.

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2. Lady Macbeth's guide to properly wash your hands

Since one of the prescriptions to contain the pandemic was to pay particular attention to hand washing, and since the correct way of doing it was represented in an omnipresent detailed infographic in the early phase of the pandemic, the graphic has been used as a source to produce internet memes. One of the ways in which internet memes work is by melting two different worlds of meaning, often a contemporary reference and a content capable of addressing a specific audience with a shared base of knowledge, a shared encyclopaedia.

The contemporary reference being the pandemic, the fixed visual content provided by the World Health Organization of the washing hands guide is an image composed of twelve boxes, numbered from 0 to 11, that shows a detailed sequence of actions to be performed in order to obtain an effective, hopefully virus free cleanliness. The image (Figure 1) is to be found on the website of the WHO, with the further indication that "Washing your hands properly takes about as long as singing 'Happy Birthday' twice" (World Health Organization).

Figure 1
How do I wash my hands properly?

It is likely that this unusual timeframe indication has unleashed the imagination of the internet users as to different contents to insert as a replacement, since the description of the sequence of actions has been replaced by several quotations, taken from different sources, mostly well-known songs such as Aqua's *Barbie Girl*, Britney Spears' *Gimme More* and so on (See Soen 2020). Internet memes created in this way have been shared with the hashtag #WashYourLyrics, and a website by the same name allows users to create a new internet meme by simply inserting a song title and the name of a singer.

The importance of the target audience can be gleaned from the fact that there are memes for a wide range of different audiences, from very large ones (such as when popular songs are involved) to niche ones. A content in general, and an internet meme content in particular, has a niche audience when it is to be understood only by those who can make sense of a very specific reference, such as a scene from a TV series or a passage from a literary classic. If the song content of the washing hands internet memes, apart from the original reference to the Happy Birthday song, is justified by the duration time (a catchy sound is useful to make the process of washing hands last for the right amount of time, no matter the actual lyric), the television or literary quotation are contents more likely to be selected for their meaning or, more generally, for the semantic area they belong to. The *Twin Peaks* washing hands meme, for instance, is a quotation related to water ("This is the water / and this is the well, / drink full and descend / The horse is the white of the eyes / and dark within"[3]). It is not surprising that in this context, William Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth has been quoted from the scene in which she tries to clean invisible blood from her hands (*Macbeth* 5.1):

> LADY   Out, damned spot! Out, I say! – One: two: why then, 'tis time to do't. – Hell is murky! – Fie, my lord, fie! A soldier, and afeard? – What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account? – Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him? (Shakespeare 2017, p. 158)

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[3] See *30 Twin Peaks Memes*. The phrase, a sort of dark magic formula, is pronounced by a hideous character in the 8th episode of *Twin Peaks'* third season (2017), while he is crashing a radio speaker's skull. As for the whole series, this scene and the meaning of the phrase remain object of speculation.

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Figure 2
Lady Macbeth's washing hands internet meme.

3. A classic never ends: the protean quality of Shakespeare and his medium leaps

There is no doubt that *Macbeth* is a classic, whose liveliness and persistence in Western culture confirm its place in the Olympus of literature. A classic is a book which is capable of travelling through centuries and always finding a new audience, its intrinsic quality consisting in being the bearer of a message out of time, larger than life, a universal truth. Thus the traditional interpretation. Or, maybe, a classic is a work capable of posing the right questions, never answering them – and *maybe* it is that indeterminacy, which is the key to its liveliness, which qualifies a book as a classic (think of the mystery of *Hamlet*).[4]

Of course, a classic is not necessarily a book. A book is only a medium, a technological support that allows a story to be carried through

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[4] See Garber (2004).

space and time: Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the classics par excellence, became books only at a late stage of their literary life. The same is true for the works of Shakespeare. His works were born as living and breathing narratives, inseparable from the stage, the actors, and even the circumstances they were conceived for.[5] Sometimes, a *book* is thus only a crystallisation of an endlessly mutable story.[6]

As Charles Augustin Saint-Beuve contends, an author can also be considered a classic in his wholeness, as in the case of Shakespeare:

> A true classic, as I should like to hear it defined, is *an author* who has enriched the human mind, increased its treasure, and caused it to advance a step; who has discovered some moral and not equivocal truth, or revealed some eternal passion in that heart where all seemed known and discovered; who has expressed his thought, observation, or invention, *in no matter what form*, only provided it be broad and great, refined and sensible, sane and beautiful in itself; who has spoken to all in his own peculiar style, a style which is found to be also that of the whole world, a style new without neologism, new and old, *easily contemporary with all time.* (1963, p. 67, emphases added)

In spite of all the motivations that can contribute to the definition of a classic, its capability of being "easily contemporary with all time" is the key to a classic's continuing relevance and prospering. But which part of a classic is transmitted and is actually capable of travelling through space and time? Sometimes it is the plot, sometimes the characters, when they have become iconic; or, its language and/or its precise words, which can turn into proverbs or even clichés. Shakespeare has been adapted in each of these ways – we could say in every way possible – and still consistently provides, even in the lyophilized form of the meme, the viral content of the contemporary digital world, proving a vitality and a transmissibility arguably shared by no other author or story.

Shakespeare's protean quality has always been noted: in 1765, Samuel Johnson wrote: "He has long outlived his century, the term commonly fixed as the test of literary merit" (1963, p. 317), and "the stream of time, which is continually washing the dissoluble fabric of other poets, passes without injury by the adamant of Shakespeare" (p. 323). For Johnson, the Bard's transmissibility may lie in the "representations of general nature. […] the pleasures of sudden wonder are soon exhausted, and the mind can only

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[5] Or, at least, this is the common belief; for a different opinion, see Erne (2008).

[6] The dialectic between crystal and flame is an incisive image used by Italian writer and essayist Italo Calvino to refer to the art of writing (see Calvino 1993); the American writer John Barth wrote about a contraposition of algebra and fire (see Barth 2013), and this balance of opposite forces is also explored in E.M. Forster's *Aspects of a Novel*, where the elusiveness of life is opposed to the clockwork functioning of an impeccable plot.

repose on the stability of the truth" (pp. 317-318): consequently, the poisonousness of jealousy can be easily translated with the same plot from a sixteenth century setting to a contemporary one, as is the case of the movie *O* (2001), an adaptation and modernization[7] of *Othello* in which the main character is a basketball player and the story recast in the form of a dark teen drama. Also a modernization and a teen drama, *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999) adapts *The Taming of the Shrew* to a 1990s American high school setting, maintaining the original plot and names of the Shakespearean characters. Still, during the years between the end of the 20th and the beginning of the twenty-first century, Baz Luhrman's *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) adapts the star-crossed lovers' classic to a contemporary US setting, but interestingly maintains the original dialogues, so that not only the plot but also the language and the exact Shakespearean words are transmitted, providing a natural access point to the source material (which should hopefully be the ultimate destination of an adaptation's audience).

The film adaptations of the Shakespearean works represent a first medium leap. Theatrical representations of his tragedies, comedies, histories and romances are the natural reincarnations of the stories in the literary genre they were conceived for, while book editions are only a means of preserving the stories, but hardly a completely satisfying one, when it comes to an oeuvre conceived for the stage. Still, theatrical representations and books have also evolved and contributed to adapting Shakespeare in order to establish a connection with a contemporary audience; as for the theatre, cross-gender casting contributes to revitalizing a new staging, as in the case of the 2018 Shakespeare's Globe production of *Hamlet*,[8] in which the eponymous character, Horatio and Guildenstern were played by female actors, while Ophelia was played by a man. Book adaptations and, broadly speaking, contaminations have also proved fertile in spreading Shakespearean seeds through space and time, as in Ian Doescher's rewriting of popular movies (such as the *Star Wars*[9] saga and *Back to the Future*[10]) as Elizabethan tragedies through a mimicry of the Bard's rhyme, metre, and stage directions.

If theatre houses a first level of adaptation, maintaining the original Shakespearean medium and playing with its semiotic components (such as the bodies of the actors and the consequent dialectic between their phenomenal value and their semiotic one, see Fischer-Lichte 2004), film adaptations not only operate on the field of modernization but can also exploit the medium's own potential, as Peter Greenaway does in *Prospero's*

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[7] About the theory of modernization, see Eco (2003).
[8] Directed by Federay Holmes and Elle While.
[9] Doescher (2014).
[10] Doescher (2019).

Books (1991) by superimposing different images and playing with their juxtaposition (see Squeo 2014). In this case, Shakespeare's material's vitality is expressed by the adaptability of the plot, the iconic quality of the main character and the universality of the theme of revenge.

Shakespeare is also remediated (see Bolter and Grusin 2001) as a character himself, and becomes the protagonist of fictional stories which contribute to the continuing process of his iconization, for example in the Oscar winning movie *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), in which he is involved in a love story that is entangled with the creation of *Romeo and Juliet*. In an episode of the TV series *Doctor Who*, Shakespeare is visited by the eponymous time traveller and his companion Martha and, by quoting his works, they end up suggesting to the Bard a number of 'his own' ideas, causing a "causal loop" (see Susca 2020). Another proof of a classic's protean quality is its adaptation for a younger audience,[11] as is the interesting case of the Disney comics versions of Shakespeare's works such as *Hamlet* and *Othello*:[12] here the process of adaptation has to follow precise rules – for example, Disney characters never die, and that is a challenge when it comes to the Shakespearean bloodshed in the ending of his tragedies.

Whatever Shakespeare's core quality which allows him and his works to be successfully transmitted through time might be (is he really the inventor of the human, as Harold Bloom (1998) asserts?), his messages have always been capable of assuming the shape of the next medium: exactly as Proteus, Shakespeare is a god of water, constantly changing in order to fit new containers, the (currently) last of which is the internet meme.

4. Which we call a meme, by any other name would spread as well

In his book on genes (1976), scientist Richard Dawkins theorized upon the existence of memes, the cultural equivalent of genes: this was the starting point of a fruitful field of studies, memetics. If the genes are responsible for the transmission across time of people's intrinsic biological features, the memes are units of cultural transmission, i.e. the way in which gestures, phrases, stories and instructions succeed in overcoming temporal boundaries. Memes "should be regarded as living structures" (Dawkins 2016, p. 249), and "meme transmission is subject to continuous mutation, and also to blending"

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[11] Using the comic versions of Shakespearean works can be a means of addressing young students compelling them to read the original oeuvres.

[12] *Paperino-Amleto Principe di Dunimarca* and *Paperino Otello* are published in the 37th volume of the collection Capolavori della letteratura 2020.

(p. 253). Memes therefore permit a literary character or plot to live on, but they do not guarantee philological exactness. Dawkins notes that, when it comes to memes, "fecundity is much more important than longevity of particular copies" (p. 252). Of course, every science has its own internal debates, and the memetic is not an exception. Since Dawkins christened them, memes' nature has been disputed, generating several competing approaches, such as "mentalist-driven" memetics, which distinguish "idea complex and meme vehicles" (Shifman 2013, p. 366), and "behavior-driven" memetics, which focuses on the practice of spreading contents.

A particular type of meme is the internet meme, since its diffusion via the web has deeply influenced its nature and exponentially increased its virality; Limor Shifman stresses the fundamental differences between memes and internet memes:

> According to Knobel and Lankshear (2007), the word meme is employed by Internet users mainly to describe the rapid uptake and spread of a "particular idea presented as a written text, image, language 'move,' or some other unit of cultural 'stuff'" (p. 202). This vernacular use, the authors submit, is utterly different from the one prevalent in the academic study of memetics: If the former tends to describe recent, often short-lasting fads, longevity is the key of "serious" memetics, since successful memes are defined as the ones that survive in the *longue durée*. (2013, p. 364)

In the same article, as he tries to approach memes in general and internet memes in particular, Shifman proposes "to isolate three dimensions of cultural items that people can potentially imitate: content, form, and stance":

> The first dimension relates mainly to the content of a specific text, referencing to both the ideas and the ideologies conveyed by it. The second dimension relates to form: This is the physical incarnation of the message, perceived through our senses. It includes both visual/audible dimensions specific to certain texts, as well as more complex genre-related patterns organizing them (such as lip-synch or animation). […] the third-communication-related dimension […] relates to the information memes convey about their own communication [and] is labeled here as stance. […] I use "stance" to depict the ways in which addressers position themselves in relation to the text, its linguistic codes, the addressees, and other potential speakers. Like form and content, stance is potentially memetic; when re-creating a text, users can decide to imitate a certain position that they find appealing or use an utterly different discursive orientation. (2013, p. 367)

Shifman's internet memes dimensions can be used to analyse the Lady Macbeth washing-hands internet meme. The "content" is an inescapable aspect, common to memes and internet memes. It answers to the question: what is the message of this meme? In the Lady Macbeth case, the message is a

quote from Shakespeare (which can also be labelled as an adaptation and a parody).

Shifman's "form" is a semiotic category (is the meme a phrase, a video or an image?). An internet meme's form is a structure which has become viral; it can be a fixed image to which different texts are superimposed, a video format, or a stylistic feature which is replicated or referred to (often with the filter of the parody). The Shakespearean internet memes here analysed have a form composed of a fixed image and a text subject to variation.

As to Shifman's "stance", it is a pragmatic feature which involves the audience: it deals with the tuning of the message to a certain kind of addressee, equipped with the notions necessary to make sense of the message of the internet meme as deriving from the juxtaposition of its content and form. Despite their viral nature, internet memes always speak to niche audiences, which can be larger or smaller. An audience can be addressed also by the choice of a certain platform or group, and not only by aspects related to language pragmatics.

Dissecting memes is useful in order to reflect on what aspects of 'Shakespeare' are being transmitted and remediated in the digital context; the memetic one is a particular case of remediation with its own rules. As far as Shakespeare is concerned, its plots, phrases and characters are used as contents, but Shakespeare himself also has become a content. As to the stance, a Shakespearean meme's audience is usually acquainted with the Bard's oeuvre but might also be partially composed of people who do not know much about Shakespeare or his plays and will, potentially, swim upstream toward the source text.

5. Shakespeare and the internet memes during the 2020 pandemic

To answer the question posed in Section 2 about the nature of a classic, we could say that a classic has what we might call a *meminess*, a unique combination of elements which favours its time travelling in the form of memes, even if this results in modifications and distortions. A classic is capable of transmitting itself through time and space by the means of generating adaptations, parodies, and internet memes; as for adaptations and parodies, the memetic transmission works as a sequence of tele-transports, each of which interferes with the content and modifies it (which is why the starting point of every adaptation should always be the uncorrupted original source, even when the adaptation is a palimpsest of references).

Shakespeare's *meminess* is so deeply rooted that plots, quotes, and the figure of Shakespeare himself have all become internet meme material,[13] which means that they can be easily melted with new contents and frames, and can engage new audiences, so that they can indeed be "easily contemporary with all time" (Saint-Beuve 1963, p. 67).

As to the creation of Shakespearean internet memes during the time of the pandemic crisis in 2020, the Lady Macbeth washing hands internet meme was composed by the melting of a Shakespearean content (the verbatim quote from *Macbeth*) and the contemporary need for cleanliness due to the pandemic: as to the form, it is composed of a fixed image and a variating text. Another internet meme created at the same time had instead a fixed Shakespearean text reference which could then be completed with different contents. The sentence "Shakespeare wrote King Lear [while] in quarantine. I…" (see Marsh, online) is a fixed content, and everyone could fill in the gap with an autobiographical content, which in many cases aimed at ironising people's poor use of their unexpected free time, as for "Shakespeare wrote King Lear while in quarantine and all I've done is stress eat."[14] Other variations of this internet meme – whose main feature lies precisely in the balance between the repetition and variation of the content – constitute a response to the first kind of self-accusatory contents, as in the tweet: "Enough with this Shakespeare wrote King Lear in quarantine shit. Shakespeare didn't have access to rocket league."[15] Some of the contents of this evolution of the internet meme had a visual form, as in the use of gifs (Figure 3).

The internet meme in Figure 4 exemplifies the importance of finding the right audience in order for a meme to be appreciated and diffused; even a viral content addresses an audience who share digital literacy. The internet meme in Figure 4 has a Shakespearean content which has been modified to fit in the present time (the pandemic), and is composed of distinct text and image (they are not overlapping in a unique image). A content whose comprehension requests a shared knowledge can only work for a selected audience: as a matter of fact, this meme has been posted in a Facebook group dedicated to English literature.

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[13] I consider a Shakespearean meme an internet meme that explicitly refers to the Bard and/or his oeuvres. Other essays on memes in Shakespeare are based on a broader understanding of the concept of meme, *e.g.* the archetype of the father-son conflict in the analysis of the memes on *Hamlet*, even when the tragedy is not explicitly referred to; cf. Denslow (2017).

[14] Tweet by Ryan Knight, @proudsocialist, 14 March 2020.

[15] Tweet by dunce mACABbre, @Babo_Yaga, 14 July 2020.

Figure 3
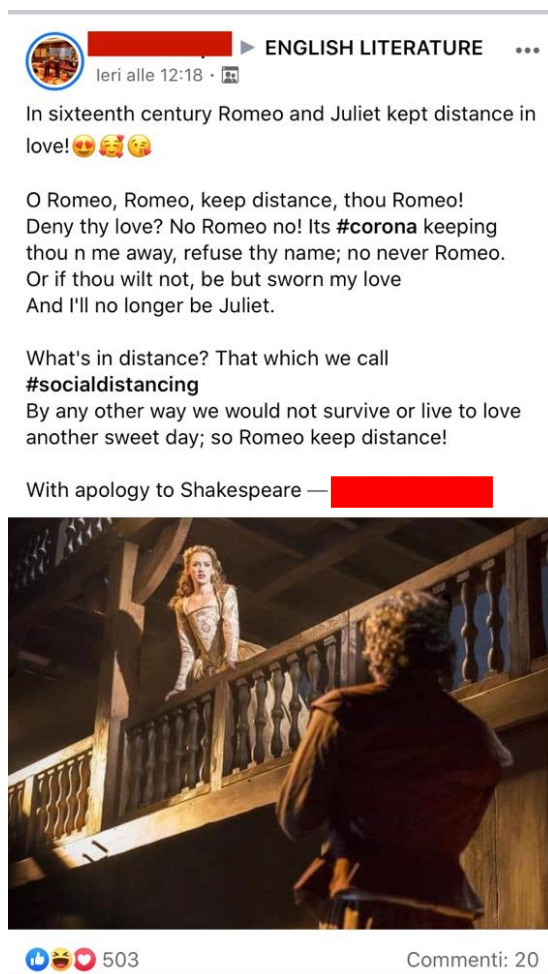A Shakespearean textual and visual content.

Figure 4
A Shakespearean meme for a niche audience.

The text of the meme in Figure 4	The original text
O Romeo, Romeo, keep distance, **thou Romeo!** **Deny thy** love? No Romeo no! Its #corona keeping thou n me away, **refuse thy name**; no never Romeo. Or if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love **And I'll no longer be** Juliet. **What's in** distance? **That which we call** #socialdistancing **By any other** way we **would** not survive or live to love another sweet day; **so Romeo** keep distance! With apology to Shakespeare	**O Romeo, Romeo,** wherefore art **thou Romeo**? / **Deny thy** father and **refuse thy name. /** Or if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love / **And I'll no longer be** a Capulet. […] **What's in** a name? **That which we call** a rose / **By any other** word **would** smell as sweet; / **So Romeo** would, were he not Romeo call'd, / Retain that dear perfection which he owes / Without that title. […] (Act II, scene II, Shakespeare 2001, p. 51)

Table 1
The text of the internet meme (left) and the Shakespearean source text.

Table 1 shows how deeply modified the source text is, which, in fact, works only as a distorted echo in the internet meme text. But it is an echo capable of activating the memory of the Shakespearean text in the right audience, as the one of a private group called "ENGLISH LITERATURE" should be. Even if an internet meme of this kind works as an in-joke for literature enthusiasts (and only works for those who are able to understand the reference), it does not require having actually read or viewed a performance of *Romeo and Juliet* – as a matter of fact, merely watching Baz Luhrmann's modernization *Romeo + Juliet* could guarantee valid credentials to be part of the qualified audience for this meme. In other cases, just having heard the titles of Shakespearean plays allows for a complete understanding of a Shakespeare based internet meme, as in the case of Young Vic Theatre's modified Shakespearean contents in the pandemic context for an audience with a basic cultural literacy. On 8 April 2020, on its Twitter profile, the theatre based in London published the following tweet (Figure 5):
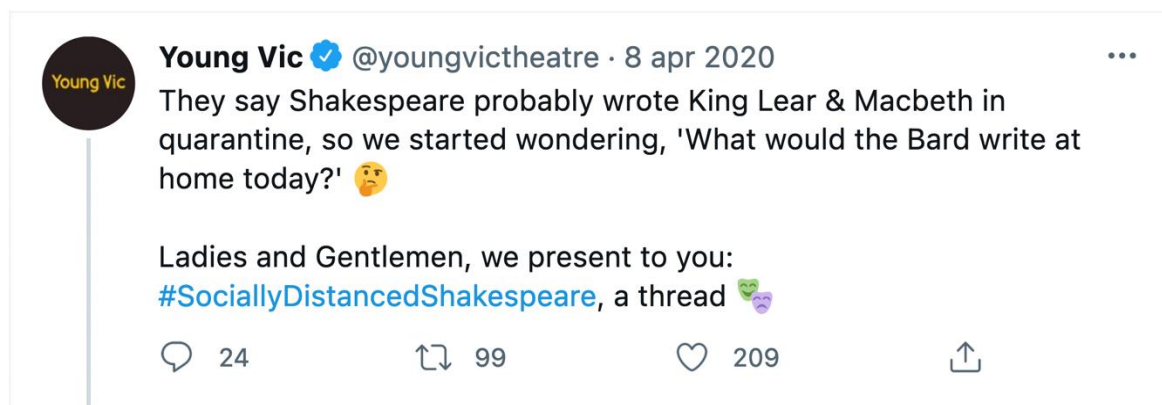
Figure 5
Young Vic's tweet.

From the same profile, a series of ironic elaborations of contemporary 'Shakespearean' plays was published:

Figure 6
Young Vic's Socially distanced Shakespeare.

As in the previously analysed memes, these variations on the theme are based on the echoing of Shakespeare – in this case, of the titles of Shakespeare's plays. The blending of the Shakespearean content with the contemporary references for a selected audience (whose only competence consists in being able to recall the titles of tragedies and comedies) results sometimes in a loose formulation: titles as *The Facemask of the Shrew* and *All Well That's Handgel* do not even respect the sentence structure of the original title, while *A Midsummer's Skype Meet* and *Much to Zoom About Nothing* not only are closer to the original sentence structure but also make sense and convey irony

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on one of the most felt changes during the pandemic, i.e. the pervasiveness of online meetings.

6. Conclusion

Far from seeking a possible conclusion, this article's purpose is to point out how contemporary forms, such as internet memes, can be vehicles of literary contents, and so contribute to the process that makes a classic and keeps it alive. Shakespeare's ability to endure (his *meminess*) depends on his being a classic, but at the same time *makes* him a classic, a content capable of adapting (being adapted) through time and space. Shakespearean internet memes, even when recalling the author's life and plays merely superficially and loosely, contribute to his transmission, and constitute access points to Shakespeare's plays. Ultimately, it is the knowledge of these plays which remains is the only true means of maintaining vivid and prolific all the adaptations, even in the condensed form of the internet meme.

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BACK TO THE FUTURE
Hamlet Encounters and the use of VR to address a time "out of joint"

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Abstract – The aim of my contribution is to investigate how Shakespeare has entered the cyberspace and in particular the reasons for and modalities in which the arts company CREW chose *Hamlet* to portray a time "out of joint" (Shakespeare 2003, p. 126). Since every generation seems to find in Hamlet and his troubled time a metaphor for current conflicts, CREW used the play to draw a parallel between the quest for truth in the conflicted world of the seventeenth century and our own times. The use of VR inevitably leads to the loss of reference points, therefore the experiencer of the virtual space must negotiate his/her senses that cannot be trusted anymore. Thus, *Hamlet Encounters* offers the tool needed to highlight how technology is changing our own perception of the world and how it brings us to question ourselves like Hamlet does.

Keywords: Shakespeare; cyberspace; CREW; media; theatre; immersant.

1. Introduction

The aim of my contribution is to show how the introduction of Shakespeare to a Virtual Reality world opens up new opportunities and challenges for addressing the Bard – and especially *Hamlet* – with new media technologies. The possibility to experience Shakespeare in such a way not only questions the role of the spectator but also today's time "out of joint" (Shakespeare 2003, p. 126), because the virtual space brings about a radical redefinition of our senses and therefore invites us to embark on a quest for truth.

In the last decades, Shakespeare has entered the so-called 'cyberspace'. The term 'cyberspace' was initially coined by William Gibson in his book *Neuromancer* in 1984. He described it as:

A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation […] A graphic representation of data abstracted from banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding. (1984, p. 67)

Gregory Kramer later defined it as "a simulated environment where communicators in different places and different times can meet face-to-face" (1995, p. 291). Another definition of 'cyberspace' was given by Dodge and Kitchin. In *Mapping Cyberspace*, they point out that:

At present, cyberspace does not consist of one homogeneous space; it is a myriad of rapidly expanding cyberspaces, each providing a different form of digital interaction and communication. In general, these spaces can be categorized into those existing within the technologies of the Internet, those within virtual reality, and conventional telecommunications such as the phone and the fax, although because there is a rapid convergence of technologies new hybrid spaces are emerging. (2001, p. 1)

One of the challenges to virtual reality concerns the loss of critical distance, a problem which arises when applying VR to what we call the 'immersive theatre'.[1] As Catherine Bouko states,

The immersant experiences confusion between the real and the imaginary universe, even at the level of his approach to the existence of his body in the space: the body scheme can be manipulated; the ability to situate one's body in a space can be impeded. The immersion achieved in this third stage is such that even when the immersant stops cooperating, he is unable to distinguish between the real and imaginary worlds, his approach to his own body being hampered. It is hardly worth stating that such moments of immersion are temporary and very difficult to attain. (2014, p. 460)

The peculiarity of immersive theatre is the breaking down of the frontality that characterizes traditional theatre, but at the price of leading the immersant, who is physically and sensorially sunken into the imaginary world the virtual reality created, to lose his/her reference points. Since the boundaries between stage and audience are deleted, the experiencer must

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[1] The phenomenon is well explained by Gareth White, who believes that immersive theatre is "an inviting but faulty term to use to describe the phenomena it currently designates. Immersive theatre often surrounds audience members, makes use of cleverly structured interiors and ingenious invitations for them to explore, addresses their bodily presence in the environment and its effect on sense making, and teases them with the suggestion of further depths just possibly within reach. But it has no strong claim to creating either fictional or imaginative interiors in any way that is different in kind than in more conventionally structured audience arrangements" (2012, p. 233).

therefore redefine his/her own senses and actively work in order not to lose the critical distance traditional theatre provides.

2. Shakespeare and Virtual Reality

Shakespeare's extraordinary way of describing human nature in a kaleidoscope of visions and perspectives has always held a particular appeal for artists in general, as well as for those who experiment with new technologies, and VR artists are no exception. Virtual Reality – a term coined by Jarod Lanier in 1989 – is defined by Coates as electronic simulations of environments experienced via head mounted eye goggles and wired clothing which enable the end user to interact in realistic three-dimensional situations (Coates 1992, p. 127). The Royal Shakespeare Company, for instance, used Motion Capture technology to create an onstage digital avatar of Ariel in *The Tempest* in 2017,[2] and for its version of *Titus Andronicus* in 2018. In the last five years there have been at least three VR artists who have taken Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and turned it into a VR experience. The first one is Javier Molinas, whose work *To Be with Hamlet*[3] is a production created for the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death. This project consists of a live theatre performance, but what is extraordinary about it is that everyone in the world can be a part of it. Thanks to Motion Capture technology, you can walk with Hamlet and look around the battlements of his castle: "The project's M3diate technology will allow up to fifteen audience members to perceive each other as they explore Elsinore Castle together"[4]. The second one is *Hamlet 360: Thy Father's Spirit* created in 2019 by the Commonwealth Shakespeare Company in partnership with Google. In this 60-minute adaptation of the play the viewer plays the role of the ghost of Hamlet's murdered father and has the opportunity to explore the scene in a cinematic 360° experience. Its creators explain that the performance not only changes

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[2] For this occasion, the Royal Shakespeare Company co-operated with Andy Serkis and his London-based production company called the Imaginarium Studios. Serkis is famous for his performance as Gollum in Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, in which VR was used for the first time in cinema history to create a complex character. He managed to create a version of *The Tempest* in which the character Ariel, thanks to sensors, could transform and change shape before the very eyes of the spectators. See: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/04/theater/at-this-tempest-digital-wizardry-makes-rough-magic.html.

[3] As Javier Molina clearly explains on his website: "In order to bring the immediacy and intimacy of theater to the virtual space, we are using Ikinema software with Optitrack face and motion capture technology to create a live, photorealistic avatar of Prince Hamlet. A 3D scan of the actor will be applied to a virtual 'skeleton' made from the motion capture data to create a virtual Prince Hamlet that is as dynamic and realistic as a live actor [...] For nearly half a millennium, productions have given you the chance to see Hamlet. This is your first chance To Be With Hamlet": https://www.javiermolina.net/tobewithhamlet.

[4] *Hamlet VR*: http://hamletvr.org.

the way one can experience theatre, but also offers the opportunity to bring it to a wider audience. It also can be a powerful tool for teachers to bring into their classrooms[5]. The third one, and the focus of this article, is *Hamlet Encounters*.

3. *Hamlet Encounters* and the time "out of joint"

The IFTR (International Federation for Theatre Research) World Congress entitled "Theatre and Migration. Theatre, Nation and Identity: Between Migration and Stasis" was an event that took place in Belgrade from the 9th to 13th of July 2018. In room 509, on the fifth floor of the Faculty of Philology, I had the chance to experience *Hamlet Encounters*, a project by the Belgian multidisciplinary artist Eric Joris and the Professorial Fellow at RCSSD Robin Nelson that combines theatre and Virtual Reality. The project was made by CREW,[6] an arts company experimenting with digital technology applied to live events whose aim is to "visualize how technology is changing us"[7]. The group was founded by Eric Joris, who has been working with experimental immersion-based performance since the 1990s. CREW, as Kurt Vanhoutte and Nele Wynants state,

> triggers the theatrical imagination of design and production, text and sound. The artistic outcome tends to be hybrid; with the technological live art of CREW troubling installed categories of theatricality leading to immersive embodied environments that challenge common notions of (tele)presence, spectatorship, interactivity and narration. (2010, p. 69)

Two of the most important installations of CREW are *Crash* (2004), which "problematizes the distinction between the body seeing and bodies being seen. It is impossible to distinguish between them because the visitor is at once spectator and performer" (Bokhoven 2008, p. 208), and *U_raging standstill* (2006), where the 'immersant' was for the first time free to move around with the aid of multimedia tools, such as prostheses. The person loses himself/herself during the performance and is eventually able to physically feel his/her body, even though the experience is virtual (Merx 2005, p. 224).

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[5] You can watch *Hamlet 360: Thy Father's Spirits* – in two dimensions if you do not have a VR headset – at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jc88G7nkV-Q.

[6] "'VR' appears to be transformational by nature: instead of looking at an image, one feels to be a part of it. This embodiment is enhanced by physical movement, touch, sound, etc... For the 'immersant' it blurs the distinction between live and mediated reality. It is this shifting moment in between the perceived and the embodied world, the 'transitional zone', that became 'the stage' of CREW's live performances and research. The immersive experience becomes therefore a construct in the mind and body of the spectator. In a way he co-directs the performance", *Artist Talk - Digitale Kunst: Eric Joris*: Artist Talk - Digitale Kunst: Eric Joris (dieangewandte.at).

[7] *CREW online*: http://www.crewonline.org/.

One of the main themes of CREW is that the experiencer perceives his/her body not only in space but also in time.[8] This is also one of the main themes in *Hamlet Encounters*.

Hamlet Encounters is only the second part of a larger work by CREW focused on Shakespeare's most famous tragedy. It all begun in 2017 with *Hands on Hamlet I* and *Hands on Hamlet II*, a prototype and the first part of the Belgian company's long-term project which finally culminated in *Hamlet's Lunacy* in 2019. *Hands on Hamlet I & II* are two Virtual Reality installations. The first one is addressed to one person at a time and has a duration of 18 minutes, while the second is for one actor and one spectator, with each session lasting 20 minutes. The experiencer is provided with an HTC Vive, a Virtual Reality head-mounted device that allows him/her to be immersed in the experience.[9] These two experiences were the first step in what *Hamlet Encounters* would eventually become. In fact, there are some similarities between this first step and the second one (the use of VR and the immersive dynamic of the installation), but also some differences, since the project has been steadily developed in order to provide a better and more captivating encounter.

4. The illusion of creation

To experience *Hamlet Encounters*, the immersant puts on a VR headset and suddenly finds himself/herself in the world of *Hamlet*. He/she is led by Joris through the experience and moves through the real space that is marked within the room with a red line. The VR environment you can enter is Elsinore castle, where you have the chance to meet the avatars of some of the characters of the play: Hamlet, Ophelia, Gertrude, Polonius, and the Ghost. Portraying the Ghost has always been one of the biggest challenges for companies performing

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[8] "Crew's plays preserve the fluctuation between the real and the imaginary. In particular, this is made possible by the way in which the immersant is addressed. At the beginning of *Eux*, a male voice calls the immersant by his first name, at the same time as it is shown on a screen. The participant is invited to embody a character, yet his personal identity is nevertheless taken into account" (Bouko 2014, p. 462).

[9] The method used by Eric Joris and his CREW is well explained by Catherine Bouko: "The immersant's body experiences first-hand the fluctuation between what is real and what is imaginary. In numerous immersive performances, the perceptive confusion caused by illness acts as a starting point to explore our perceptive processes and identity construction. In the Belgian company Crew's performances, the participant is plunged into a modified perception of character via a head-mounted display. The feeling of immersion essentially comes from the 360-degree vision which the display allows; the image which is projected in front of the participant's eyes follows every movement of his head. These images mix pre-recorded sequences with scenes produced with performers in real time, around the participant. One such example is in *Eux* (Crew, 2008), where the spectator takes on the role of a patient suffering from agnosia (a loss of recognition)" (2014, p. 461).

Hamlet on stage. Sometimes it was represented only as a shadow, sometimes like a human being. In this case, the ghost is an avatar. This allows the experiencer not only to see the ghost – just like Hamlet does – but also to experience the transcendent and supernatural nature of the spirit by moving through its body. Furthermore, since the experiencer can move freely and even walk through the characters' bodies, he/she can also be considered a ghost. One of the peculiar characteristics of this project is that the immersant becomes part of the play, as he/she shares the space and time of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

The way *Hamlet Encounters* immerses the experiencer in the story vaguely recalls *Sleep No More*,[10] the 2011 project of the British theatre company Punchdrunk based on the play *Macbeth*. It was set in a five-floor hotel space and the public, instead of being seated, could freely move around the set. The abolishment of the stage as well as of the fourth wall is something that occurs also in CREW's project. However, the difference between *Sleep No More* and *Hamlet Encounters* lies in the degree of agency of the immersant. In the first project the public can only walk on the actual stage and move around; in the second one, the experiencers can skip from one scene to another and interact with the avatars. In fact, using a remote, the user can explore the scene going back and forth, thus experiencing a nonlinear form of storytelling. Further, while walking through the Castle, the immersant comes across some white bubbles. Putting her head into them, she is transported into a studio in Brussels where she can see the actors, wearing MoCap suits, recording the scenes from *Hamlet*. This allows the experiencer to actually see the process behind the virtual experience while being immersed in it. Nevertheless, there is a distinction between the parts recorded in the studio and the full VR environment. The process in the studio is captured on 360° film, to let the experiencer of *Hamlet Encounters* fully look around in the "go back" session. However, she cannot move freely, as the virtual space of the experience allows her to do.

When entering the room, one does not immediately put on the VR headset and start the performance but, as Joris and Nelson are keen to point out, every audience member has to look at a screen where they can see how the person before them is experiencing the performance.

> Rather than a difficulty to be hidden, the medium's visibility is exploited and lodges itself at the heart of this theatrical language: at particular moments, the immersant may be absorbed to the point of substituting the environment for everyday reality; the medium appears transparent and the created world seems to

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[10] As Josephine Machon states, the British company Punchdrunk aims for participants to "become most aware of being in the moment": http://people.brunel.ac.uk/bst/vol0701/felixbarrett/home.html. More information about Punchdrunk and their project here: https://www.punchdrunk.org.uk/project/sleep-no-more/.

be offered without any intermediary. At other times, he becomes aware of the artificial nature of the world into which he is plunged and adopts a position external to the work. (Bouko 2014, p. 463)

Watching the previous experience allows immersants not only to get a sense of the whole process and the creation of the illusion, but it also gives them a perception of the experience from the outside and influences their 'encounter'. Furthermore, CREW wants the experiencer to see not only the illusion but also the creation of it by letting her wait outside and watch what is happening in the environment where the previous attendant is experiencing the virtual world. Thanks to this strategy, as Ármeán states, "The participant is mostly a visitor until the point where s/he gets the VR headset and literally steps into the VR world" (2020, p. 6).

5. Theatre or VR? That is the question!

The difference between traditional theatre or cinema and the kind of experience provided by CREW's project is that in the first case, what is primarily involved is the relation between mind and eye, whereas in the second one the relation is much deeper and more complex. Thanks to Virtual Reality, theatre can allow the audience member to take a step forward and let herself get involved not only with mind and eye, but also with her whole body. As Meyer states: "The use of space in a VR drama is more like theatre and less like film. In theatre, actors must negotiate the positions and distance of the stage. The users of a VR drama will likewise occupy the space of the story" (1995, p. 219). The main difference between the space in theatre and VR can be found in the role of the actor as well as the audience. While theatre as traditionally performed in Europe since the eighteenth century is typically characterized by a strict separation between the enlightened stage and the darkness in which the spectator is immersed, in cyberspace there is no difference between them, since the experiencer is both an actor and the audience simultaneously. In fact, at some point when an experiencer is watching and listening to Gertrude and Claudius talking to each other, Polonius turns towards the immersant and asks if she is still following what is going on. Human experience is of course based on a cognitive level, but traditional theatre or cinema can only provide an objective symbolic representation which we can call, at the very end, reductive. In comparison with theatre, where the spectator is seated in a proscenium and separated from the stage, the space in a VR production is not perceived as a fixed frame but as a moving space where our senses are engaged in a multisensorial and multimodal way. As a matter of fact, productions such as *Hamlet Encounters* are keen on involving the experiencer in a 'journey' to involve his/her body

in a creative reflection about de-automation that cannot be achieved in traditional theatre.

Another difference between theatre and VR, and one of the main topics explored by CREW, is how human beings perceive themselves. Even if surrounded by obscurity, the audience members of a theatre play are still aware of their bodies, while when experiencing the same play with VR technology they will loses their way. This state of disorientation inevitably brings a whole new perception of the self now immersed in a virtual space. Body and mind are challenged to radically redefine themselves and subsequently to find new ways to relate to and act in space and time. The spectator, wearing a head-mounted display, is completely lost in a space disconnected from a touchable reality that he/she nonetheless tries to interact with. The gap between touchable reality and virtual space "could evoke an intensified corporeal experience" (Bakk 2019, p. 173). The experiencer must negotiate not only her perception of the body but also the way she now experiences what she hears and sees.

The full-body vision of the experience provided by *Hamlet Encounters* and VR in general, leads to an avoidance of the common binary separation of meaning and experience. It is a multisensual experience. Some aspects of *Hamlet Encounters* are by all means cinematic, but the ability the immersant has to move through the space or to see what the actors in the Brussel studio are doing brings a new perspective to the experiencer that is precluded by traditional theatre or cinema. In fact, when the immersant finds herself in the dimension of *Hamlet Encounters* she is simultaneously in three different worlds.[11] The first one is the real world, in which she is wearing the mocap suit; the second is the world of the actors in Brussel, and the third is the one of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. This combination, along with the way in which the project redefines the body as well as the mind, brings about a different way of perceiving oneself that dislocates the normative way of moving around space and interacting with it. As previously said, VR creates an immersive environment where you lose critical distance. CREW is not interested in achieving this effect for its own sake: they want to create a space where critical distance is simultaneously nullified and amplified. This leads to self-reference and self-reflection. It is up to the experiencer to decide what to do, how to change the perspective or the distance, or even where to go by using the remote control to switch from one space to another. In *Hamlet Encounters*, the immersants can take control of their own experience and become directors of themselves.

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[11] In his *The Second Media Age*, Mark Poster states that our culture "is increasingly simulational in the sense that the media often changes the things that it treats, transforming the identity of originals and referentialities. In the second media age 'reality' becomes multiple" (1995, p. 3).

6. The quest for truth in a conflicted world

Since Shakespeare wrote it, *Hamlet* has been a crucial and fundamental text that every generation is confronted with. The appeal of the play is due to the fact that Hamlet not only questions his own world, but also ours. Since its main themes are so universal, every author, reader or spectator can easily find his/her own personal universe reflected in it (Harris 2010, p. 10). Using various technologies or methods of staging, directors and artists have provided their own specific interpretations of the text, with each focusing on one or more specific aspects of the play. As Shaughnessy states, every generation finds in *Hamlet* "a uniquely sharp and eloquent image of current conflicts and anxieties" (2011, p. 191). That is why *Hamlet Encounters* represents not only one among many Virtual Reality experiences, but also reflects the thoughts of its creators on history and the state of truth in contemporary society. Indeed, *Hamlet Encounters* can be seen as a metaphor of that time "out of joint" (Shakespeare 2003, p. 126) that the Shakespearian protagonist must face in the play. Eric Joris and Robin Nelson want to highlight a parallel between the seventeenth and the twenty-first century. The world Shakespeare lived in was a world in transition, a time of great changes in terms of culture and society that shifted everyone's perspective on life. It was, therefore, also a strongly conflicted world. The seventeenth century was characterized by some great conflicts such as the wars of religion that devastated Europe between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries and the English revolution, just as our contemporary time is still devastated by conflicts and wars. In that time "out of joint" (Shakespeare 2003, p. 126) Hamlet is left alone confronting not only himself but also all the other characters of the play, most of whom he cannot trust. The quest for truth in *Hamlet* is, according to Nelson, comparable to the search for truth that twenty-first century people find themselves engaged in in an age of fake news. Joris and Nelson suggest that as the seventeenth century marked the rise of science and the birth of the Enlightenment, so the twenty-first marks its demise. In an interview with Ágnes Karolina Bakk, one of the collaborators of CREW, Chiel M. Kattenbelt, clearly underlines the link between our time and the one of Hamlet:

> The world of our own times could also be considered as a world-out-of-joint, as a conflicted world, in particular politically (the rise of populism), economically (the rise of protectionism) and ecologically (the issue of climate change). (2019, p. 170)

Despite the strategies to ensure a critical distance to the experience, using VR technology still affects the natural awareness of the immersant. In fact, the senses are so completely redefined that she will eventually lose track of the passing of time. This is precisely one of the criticisms which has been leveled

against VR: it creates a sort of immersive environment which brings the user to lose the critical distance required to distinguish what he/she sees and experiences from reality.

> A person exposed to an immersive display sees an audiovisual interactive scene that fully envelops him/her and is updated according to head and body movements. Hence participants in an IVE tend to experience place illusion: the sensation of physically being part of a scenario instead of seeing images of it from the outside. (Blom, Llobera, Slater 2013, p.471).

VR embodies mediality, media as "extensions of ourselves serv[ing] to provide new transforming vision and awareness" (McLuhan 1994, p. 76), as described by Marshall McLuhan, to an unprecedented degree. Therefore, experiencing *Hamlet Encounters* does not just invite reflection about *Hamlet*, but also reflection about the perception of oneself in a VR space that allows the immersant to re-discover a new ontology of their own body, realising Ryan's vision from the early 2000s: "In this world of our creation we would take on any identity we wished, but our virtual body would be controlled by the movements of the real body, and we would interact with the virtual world through physical gestures" (2001, p.49). For instance, descending the stairs of the VR castle the experiencer has to negotiate the virtual space, as well as the actual one because she has the feeling of going down – she also reaches for the handrail – while actually standing on a flat floor.

One of the main features of Shakespeare's plays is the use of dramatic irony, and this feature is prominent in *Hamlet* as well. This kind of literary device allows characters to disguise themselves under a mask that hides their real intentions or feelings. Most of the characters in *Hamlet* fight out an internal conflict between truth and falsehood. One of the great questions about the text addresses the nature of Hamlet's lunacy. Is his madness real or fake? It is precisely this aspect of the use of language that is underlined by Crew in order to create a link between the quest for truth in *Hamlet* and the quest for truth in the VR space where the audience can no longer trust their senses. During the 'encounter' they find themselves in a virtual place where they lose all points of support. Therefore, they must revise their way of approaching the world through movements and, metaphorically, through thought and language. Thus, if in *Hamlet* the characters cannot trust one another because they are aware of intrigue and deception, in *Hamlet Encounters* the experiencer cannot even trust him/herself. Hamlet has to embark on his quest for revenge while his whole world is shifting from one vision to another: he is experiencing the shift to modern times, and also from trusting his loved ones to fearing their lies. Everything is drawn into question. Hamlet himself goes crazy, to the effect that both the other characters and the reader/spectator must question his madness:

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> The choice of *Hamlet* as the theatrical frame is important because Shakespeare's play deals with a historical time and a narrative moment when everything becomes questioned, the whole world is out of joint, conflicted. (Ármeán 2020, p. 8).

Negotiating with our own senses means that we cannot trust them anymore. Subsequently, we must find out what is true and what is false. That is to say, through the VR medium we are immersed in a situation which meta-theatrically reflects the state of confusion and destabilisation which Hamlet experiences in the play.

7. Conclusion

New technologies are challenging our world and the way we experience it. With *Hamlet Encounters*, CREW wants to raise awareness about our troubled time, creating not only a fully immersive experience but also a new reality in which the audience can have the possibility to experience Shakespeare's drama in an unprecedented way. The installation emphasises how the strengths of VR technology, especially the fully immersive dimension, engenders a lack of critical distance, a feature provided instead by the theatrical frame as well as by the boundaries between stage and audience. Taking advantage of this situation, *Hamlet Encounters* uses this virtual and unobstructed dimension of VR to highlight the parallels between Hamlet's and our own time "out of joint" (Shakespeare 2003, p. 126).

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SHAKESPEARE IN JAIL
Hamlet in Rebibbia: from stage to live streaming performances

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Abstract – "Since I have known art, this cell has turned into a prison" was the last line of *Caesar Must Die*, the film directed by Paolo and Vittorio Taviani and winner of the Golden Bear for best film at the 62nd Berlin International Film Festival. Now, after six years, the doors of Rebibbia open again to the world to let art in. The company of prodigious inmates/actors, directed by Fabio Cavalli, come back to Shakespeare in order to stage *Hamlet in Rebibbia*: the tragedy of revenge. If *Caesar Must Die* was a perfect blending of theatre and cinema, where everyday life in jail was mixed with theatre rehearsals, in an alternating montage of color and black and white scenes that culminated in a film disguised as filmed theatre, *Hamlet in Rebibbia* is a completely different kind of experiment. *Hamlet* is the universal symbol of the dialectic between Revenge and Justice and has a direct connection to the problems that dominate the prison context and the origins of many inmates. For this reason the tragedy perfectly suits the actors in the prison's company and the place where it is staged. However, the aim of the director Fabio Cavalli was to bring the resulting play outside the jail. In order to reach as many people as possible, the play was shown all around the country through full-HD live streaming performances. Following the example of the National Theatre Live, Fabio Cavalli experimented with a new kind of theatre that, with the help of digital technologies, could go beyond the physical borders of the stage and meet cinema halfway. The aim of this paper is to take *Hamlet in Rebibbia* as a case study to investigate the relationship between theatre and cinema when one medium verges on the other in order to create a new, vibrant and meaningful work of art.

Keywords: Shakespeare; adaptation; cinema; streaming; theatre.

1. Introduction

"Cinema has the power to connect different destinies. At least for a few hours, free or imprisoned, we will dream the same dream" (ROMAsette 2017, online). With these words the director Fabio Cavalli introduces the collaboration between the 12th Rome Film Fest and Rome's Rebibbia prison, an experiment of integration between theatre and cinema, free and imprisoned people.

For the second time the Rome Film Fest symbolically broke down the barrier between city and prison, and from 30th October to 2nd November 2017 returned to Rebibbia and to its wonderful actors who, after the great success of *Caesar Must Die*, the film directed by Paolo and Vittorio Taviani and winner of the Golden Bear at the 62nd Berlin International Film Festival, come back to Shakespeare and to a drama of revenge and justice.

The dream of Fabio Cavalli found its realisation in the Auditorium of the New Complex at Rebibbia, with the premiere of *Hamlet in Rebibbia*, a performance that was broadcast in full-HD live streaming from the prison directly to the Auditorium of the MAXXI museum, Teatro della Tosse in Genova, Teatro dell'Arca (inside the District Penitentiary of Marassi), Teatro Massimo in Cagliari and Teatro Eliseo in Nuoro. The event was a product of the collaboration between the Fondazione Cinema per Roma, the Department of Penitentiary Administration and the Department of Philosophy, Communication and Live Performance at the Università degli Studi Roma Tre, with production support from La Ribalta – Centro Studi Enrico Maria Salerno.

Written and directed by Fabio Cavalli, *Hamlet in Rebibbia* saw on the stage the inmate actors of the Free Theatre in Rebibbia – the G12 High Security section of the new complex of Rebibbia prison, helped by Vanessa Cremaschi who played the part of Gertrude and Chiara David in the role of Ofelia. The special project of the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism 2017 featured the artistic direction of Laura Andreini Salerno, music by Franco Moretti, set design by Franco De Nino and Fabio Settimi, costumes by Paola Pischedda with the organization of Alessandro De Nino. "The avantgarde of the new expressivity of the stage" (ROMAsette 2017, online) – this is *Hamlet in Rebibbia* as described by the director Fabio Cavalli. It opened the doors of the prison to the world, with a work of art that was at the same time theatre, cinema, and web.

Born as a theatre performance, *Hamlet in Rebibbia* was conceived to be staged in a concrete place in front of an audience, exceptionally invited inside the complex of Rebibbia, like all the other plays staged by this company, including *Caesar Must Die*, but this time a new element was included: cameras. The presence of cameras made this performance different from all the others that took place in Rebibbia, because through the broadcasting they gave to the play the opportunity to be watched by a wider audience, at the same time as it was performed.

Cameras had already overcome the gates of Rebibbia for the shooting of *Caesar Must Die*, but in that case the intent was completely different because the directors Paolo and Vittorio Taviani were shooting a film, later edited with colours, music, cuts, and all that concerned their final idea of that work, according to the cinematic codes. On the other hand, *Hamlet in Rebibbia* was recorded at the same time as it was being performed live, and broadcast in live streaming, without editing or cuts. In this way the eye of the camera is not the eye of the

director, but the eye of the audience itself that watches exactly what is happening on the stage, even if it is not physically present.

Live streaming productions from a prison are still unexplored territory in Italy, even if live streaming performances have already had great success all over the world with the National Theatre Live and its shows like *Hamlet* (by Lyndsey Turner with Benedict Cumberbatch, now seen by over 900,000 people worldwide and still in theatres), or *The Winter's Tale* and *Romeo and Juliet* (directed by Kenneth Branagh and Rob Ashford, and presented by the Kenneth Branagh Theatre Company in live streaming from the Garrick Theatre in London). *Hamlet in Rebibbia* is a pioneer in this respect, because it lets the audience into an unknown place, different from all the theatres they are used to, not only for the unique place where the performance is staged, but also for the actors, who are not professionals, but imprisoned men with unique stories. Both elements make the live streaming an added value to this performance, turning it into an experiment, not only from an artistic but also from a social point of view.

Cameras can go where most people cannot and are able to explore all those places that usually are closed to sight, like the dressing rooms of the theatre, the private space of rehearsals, or even that obscure space that extends inside the gates of Rebibbia. Cameras can go beyond physical and mental barriers, and by filming what they see, they can carry the audience wherever they want. In this respect the tools of cinema can bring theatre to a different level, by driving a theatre performance, a work of art so connected to the space and time in which it is happening, beyond its physical limits, to make it become something else, a middle ground between cinema and theatre that can be displayed anytime and anywhere.

2. Hamlet: a universal drama

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a tragedy of revenge and justice. Starting with the young prince, called upon by the ghost of his father to revenge his murder on Claudius, he is obligated to be the killer, the executor. But he refuses to act without evidence of the crime and, in order to bring to light the guilty, uses the theatre as a weapon by staging the killing of his father in front of its alleged murderer. In his mind, revenge and justice are two sides of the same coin and there is no other way to restore order than to exchange death for death.

> Hamlet reflects the fates of many of the actors in the prison's Company. And all our destinies – says Fabio Cavalli, the director of *Hamlet in Rebibbia* – Can we not argue that the corruption in ancient Denmark is no different to what's going on in Rome, Naples and Reggio Calabria today? What feuds, betrayals and struggles between clans are painting the city streets with blood, staining the palaces of a far-away dark power? The leap in space and time from Elsinore castle to our metropolises is almost imperceptible. (ROMAsette 2017, online)

The director of *Hamlet in Rebibbia*, Fabio Cavalli, brings to light in these words how a tragedy written at the beginning of the XVII century could be closer than we might think to our own history and reality, afflicted in the same way with power games and blood conflicts, and how the lives of the fictional characters of *Hamlet* resemble in words and actions those of the inmate actors staging the play. They are at the same time far away in space and time but unbelievably close as the words of Shakespeare immediately recall those yelled by people fighting in the streets of Rome, Naples, Reggio Calabria, and all over the world.

Rome looks like Elsinore; Rebibbia looks like the high stone castle where Hamlet lives. Within this framework, *Hamlet in Rebibbia* acts like a mirror of the human condition of the inmates, even if it is told in Shakespeare's words. All are Hamlet, Claudius and Laertes, and everyone is searching for justice, mourning a killed parent, or paying for his crimes. This common condition makes the characters more accessible to the inmate actors, even when they speak in an unknown and complex language, or act in an unfamiliar way.

As Paolo and Vittorio Taviani showed in *Caesar Must Die*, the words of Shakespeare could be the very words that are usually uttered among inmates in the corridors, cells or yards of Rebibbia, in a timeless space where there are no princes or kings, but just men. Salvatore Striano, who played the part of Brutus in *Caesar Must Die* and now, as a free man, is a successful writer and actor, explains how Shakespeare's plays are deeply connected to the lives of inmates:

> I lie back down with a heavy heart. Shakespeare is like that: he interrogates you; he slaps you around, he sets the world out in front of you, shining a big bright light on it that you can't ignore. And he almost chases you down in his eagerness to make you understand. If we're going to talk about my sins, past and present, I'd have preferred to have Hamlet come and visit me. How many Hamlets have I known back in my neighbourhood? How many fathers murdered, and not always by the Camorra. In Naples you don't only worry about not dying, you have to be careful how you die. When you're killed in a duel between two feuding gangs, there's no shortage of flowers at the cemetery: you're a god in a way you never were in life, because you died with honour. But if you're killed for being an infame, because of a tip-off, or the betrayal of a friend, then everyone abandons you, because slowly, the truth that cost you your life convinces even your own family that you didn't deserve to live. You die twice. After the tragedy and the tears, after the wailing and the despair, the voice of the neighbourhood begins to tell another story, one where you're an infame, and that if you hadn't been a traitor you wouldn't have died. Eventually, it's not even worth the trouble of taking flowers to the cemetery for you. As a reaction to all this, your son ends up becoming another Hamlet. How many sons are there in Naples who can't decide whether or not they should avenge their father? Will they kill me, or won't they, these sons wonder. (Striano 2017, pp. 335-336)

According to the words of Salvatore Striano, a man who has clearly seen the common features between the tragedies of Shakespeare and those taking place in

the streets of our countries, Hamlet could live today in Naples, Rome, Reggio Calabria, wherever there is an unpunished crime and thirst for revenge. And recognizing this character as someone close to personal history and goals makes it easier for actors to understand and embody him on the stage.

The same is true for *Julius Caesar*, performed by the same company in *Caesar Must Die*. Here the parallels between Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and the everyday life of inmates were depicted by showing the actors playing *Julius Caesar* on the stage of the prison in front of an audience in their stage costumes, in an alternate montage with the rehearsals of the play in all parts of the prison, even in the private spaces.

The contrast between the play and real life was also underlined by the use of colour, so that the play scenes were filmed in colour and the rehearsal scenes in black and white. The film in fact opens in colour with the inmates staging the death of Brutus, and gradually the audience and the small stage are revealed. But after a few minutes a caption informs us that this is the high-security wing of Rebibbia prison, and the actors, that shortly before were on the stage, are locked back one after the other in their cells. The colour switches to black and white and the scene time travels back in showing the inmates, six months earlier, speaking about the play with the director. The actors present themselves during the auditions in their own dialects and the play begins. From this moment on rehearsals are mixed with everyday life scenes from the prison and all the scenes are in black and white, except the last one where the inmates are playing again on the stage in front of the audience. But even if fiction and real life were so carefully separated by colours in the final editing of the film, the language cancels this distance and makes it a compact work, where the men more than the characters are in the spotlight and move in their world in a realistic and spontaneous way, so that it is almost impossible to distinguish between fiction and reality.

Unlike *Caesar Must Die*, *Hamlet in Rebibbia* has no editing, because it is not a film, even if there are cameras in front of the stage of Rebibbia, and cannot rely on black and white scenes or other cinematic codes to help the actors and the director to express themselves. The play can rely only on what is happening under the eyes of the audience in the *hic et nunc* of the performance. *Hamlet in Rebibbia* is broadcast in "live" streaming, without filters, showing common men on a stage playing a Shakespeare tragedy with the words they know, trying to see themselves in the histories of the characters they embody. In this attempt they seem very comfortable in the shoes of their characters, and more than actors seem to be just men trying to overcome death, pain, and the desire for revenge in their own way. Madness and violence are their allies, on the stage as in life, and both these dimensions merge and blend into one another in a feeling that is familiar and universally true.

Jan Kott in *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary* describes *Hamlet* "as a sponge [that] immediately absorbs all the problems of our time", a play that is always

modern despite the age when it is staged because of the universal human feelings expressed.

> Many generations have seen their own reflections in this play. The genius of Hamlet consists, perhaps, in the fact that the play can serve as a mirror. An ideal Hamlet would be one most true to Shakespeare and most modern at the same time. Is this possible? I do not know. But we can only appraise any Shakespearian production by asking how much there is of Shakespeare in it, and how much of us. (Kott 1974, p. 52)

It does not matter if the actors wear medieval clothes or contemporary t-shirts, because Hamlet will always work as a mirror for the audience, and for actors too, as it happens in *Hamlet in Rebibbia*. *Hamlet* actually speaks about universal issues like love, family, politics and betrayal and everyone can find himself in these lines, especially the inmate actors of Rebibbia, who immediately felt that the play was familiar and perfectly tailored to their lives. As Salvatore Striano underlines, showing how closely related life and theatre could be, Shakespeare's works are so close to modern human behaviours that they seem to be written in this age and just for the stage of Rebibbia.

> I wonder if the audience is aware that we're talking about ourselves here, that nothing is more real than the human dynamics this play depicts. From Naples down, Shakespeare's on home territory. (Striano 2017, p. 383)

One of the strengths of *Hamlet in Rebibbia* is that it leaves spectators in constant doubt: Who is speaking? Are these the words of characters written by Shakespeare, or the words pronounced by men staging a play? Are those speaking kings in a castle or inmates in a prison?

Life and theatre meet and blend into one another on the stage of Rebibbia to such an extent that sometimes it is impossible to part fiction from reality. But the deep comprehension of the Shakespearian works by the inmate actors does not only occur through the comprehension of universal human feelings and behaviours, but also through the understanding of the language of Shakespeare, its deep meaning, shades and loose ends.

3. What language does Shakespeare speak?

In this depiction of contemporary human behaviours, the words pronounced on the stage play a key role and it is very important for the actors to understand what they are saying, even if it is spoken in a foreign language, written for a 17th century audience. In order to make this clear, director Fabio Cavalli chose to cancel the space and time distance between the dramatic text of Shakespeare and its performance text on the stage by translating the text from English into Italian, and then from Italian into the native dialects of the inmates.

Roman Jakobson, in his essay *On Linguistic Aspects of Translation* (2000, pp. 113-118), argues that a verbal sign can be translated into other signs of the same language (intralingual translation), into another language (interlingual translation), or into another nonverbal system of symbols (intersemiotic translation). According to this theory of translation, the first stage of adaptation in *Hamlet in Rebibbia* concerns the Shakespearean text and the interlingual translation of the English text into Italian. But the next and most important stage is the intralingual translation because the text has been translated from standard Italian into the native dialects of the inmates. At last, the dramatic text has been translated into a performance text, which includes all the cultural codes not connected with the language (general kinesic codes, proxemic codes, vestimentary codes, cosmetic codes, pictorial codes, musical codes, architectural codes, etc., cf. Elam 2005, p. 36), and makes it also a case of intersemiotic translation.

The coexistence of these three kinds of translation is even more evident in *Caesar Must Die*, where the Shakespearean dramatic text has been translated from English into Italian, following the interlingual translation process, and then intralingually translated from standard Italian into Roman, Neapolitan, Sicilian and Apulian dialects, in order to make the text more understandable for the inmates than standard Italian, and easier to translate into a performance. Here the adaptation of the dramatic text into the performance text is enhanced by the use of dialects, deeply connected with the cultural codes expressed on the stage and more stimulating for the inmate actors who had to translate Shakespeare texts into gestures, movements and emotions. Paolo and Vittorio Taviani in fact chose to perform Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* in the native dialects of the actors with the precise intention of bringing the play even closer to their lives and feelings, in a common and comprehensible language, the same they spoke in their everyday life, in prison as outside.

> We asked ourselves what we could do for them, how we could show their reality – says Vittorio Taviani in an interview – and we thought that *Julius Caesar* might be a good choice. Everybody knows the story of Brutus and we wondered how the text would sound if translated into the Neapolitan dialect of these "men of honour". They were simultaneously in their own world and in Shakespeare's. The play is about the power, betrayal, and assassination of a leader. We thought that perhaps we could include their experiences, their personalities, and their realities into the play. They could easily identify with these characters. With the film, we wanted to show life, the trauma lived by these prisoners, violence, suffering, failure, grief. (Lux Prize 2012, online)

Shakespeare here speaks another language that is not standard Italian, but Neapolitan, Sicilian, Roman and many other dialects of southern Italy. The result is powerful, because the actors speak their own language and are closer than ever to the characters they are playing. The translation of Shakespearian texts into

many different Italian dialects made the text shorter and simplified, but the inevitable loss in the language was compensated by a stronger performance by the inmate actors that mastered this language and were able to melt it with gestures, movements and intentions of the characters they were playing.

As has been said, the translation of Shakespeare's plays from standard Italian into the local dialects was a key element also of *Caesar Must Die* and, as Paolo and Vittorio Taviani remember, this was a spontaneous choice of the actors, not an idea of the directors. It was not a refined experiment to create a linguistic *pastiche*, but occurred almost as an epiphany:

> One day, by chance, we saw six or seven prisoners sitting around a table, reading our screenplay, and writing. Some of the actors were translating it into their own dialect – Neapolitan, Sicilian, Apulian. They were helped by their fellow prisoners who were not in the cast. We realized that the dialectical distortion of the lines did not weaken the serious tone of the tragedy but rather it gave them an edge. (Latto 2013, online)

Playing with the language of Shakespeare was also the idea of the director Fabio Cavalli in 2005, when he met the future actors of Rebibbia prison for the first time. He presented to the inmates his project to stage *The Tempest*, but not in its ordinary version. He wanted to stage with them the Neapolitan translation made by Eduardo De Filippo in 1983. The play had never been performed before and it was a challenge for a group of amateurs, but it was also a fateful encounter that changed their life forever, as remembers Salvatore Striano:

> When I started reading *The Tempest*, I realized something. We love Eduardo, but he's inadvertently making our situation worse. He writes about our world, and he makes family tragedies familiar in a way that is immediately comprehensible to us. Whereas Shakespeare… Reading him was like diving into a body of water when I couldn't even see the bottom. It was like diving into something bigger than I've ever encountered before. We allowed Eduardo into our group, and he became our leader. But in doing that we were locking ourselves up again. Forming another gang. It was just another way never to come out. This is what Cavalli meant when he tried to present Shakespeare to us: 'Theatre allows you to face up to your feelings.' Feelings, not situations. 'All right, then,' I say, to whittle away any remaining resistance. 'Let's put on Eduardo's *Tempest*, not Shakespeare's'? (Striano 2017, pp. 223-224)

Eduardo's *Tempest* was staged in Rebibbia in the Neapolitan dialect in 2005, and the experiment turned out to be a one-way trip. At the beginning Shakespeare spoke to the inmate actors of the G12 through the translation of Eduardo De Filippo, in a language that they knew very well, and later his plays became part of their lives, filling their days with readings, rehearsals and reflections on their current situation, sometimes so close to that of their favourite characters. Thanks to Fabio Cavalli and his dedicated work in Rebibbia the inmates have come to

know Shakespeare more and more deeply through the years, and his characters became so close to them that the line between fiction and reality has become almost invisible.

4. Inside and Outside

Even if the fourth wall that divides the stage from the audience and the space of theatre from that of reality is so thin that it is almost impossible to see, it has been there all the time. *Hamlet in Rebibbia* took place in a well-defined physical space, on the stage of Rebibbia prison in front of the audience of the theatre, and at the same time it could also be watched in other theatres and cinemas thanks to live broadcasting. In this second case the performance is seen through the lenses of cameras, another wall that separates actors and audience.

In this last "wall" lies the basic difference between stage and screen performances because in a theatre, actors and audience are separated by a distance ranging from a few feet to hundreds of feet in a large auditorium, and everyone in the audience needs to see the action and hear the dialogue on stage, so theatre actors must exaggerate their movements and speak loudly to bridge the gap. On the other hand, in screen performances there is a camera that eliminates the distance between performers and observers. Cameras, lights, microphones, special effects, and music all serve to enhance an actor's performance, so no embellishment is needed. The goal of an actor framed on a screen is to replicate reality and cameras help him in picking up every twitch, inflection, and subtle pause, so that he can speak and gesture to the other actors as he normally would. This difference is very clear during the National Theatre Live broadcasting of theatre performances, as underlined by Ben Caron in 2016, when the Kenneth Branagh Theatre Company had presented its first season at the Garrick Theatre in London:

> One of the things we did with the actors, where possible, was talk about finding a different performance level on the night. Stage performances are, by definition, different from screen performances – something that feels natural in the theatre can seem exaggerated on screen. […] The challenge with projecting plays to the big screen – because it's a new form – is to find the middle ground between theatre and film. We're not trying to make a film, we're trying to give people a live experience, yet it's always going to be different because the audience is watching a screen. (Warner 2016, online)

In this middle ground between theatre and film lies *Hamlet in Rebibbia* that was taking place at the same time in the well-circumscribed space of Rebibbia and in many cinemas and theatres all over Italy, through the live broadcasting becomes a "live" experience for all intents and purposes. The performance is perceived as live by the audience attending the show in front of the stage inside the prison

Rebibbia, and at the same time by people watching it from outside. Even if they are watching a screen, with the help of cameras, they can watch and feel the actors close, just like the audience inside Rebibbia. Cameras have the power to overcome distance and break the walls of the performance as they do with the walls of Rebibbia, because they can put people inside the prison and the actors outside at the same time. The paradox is that at first sight the scene takes place in a very closed dimension that includes the narrow space of a stage and the gates of the prison, but at a closer look, it is evident that cameras cancel all the space limits. And if this is true for every live streaming performance that can be watched at the same time throughout the world, it is even more obvious in the case of *Hamlet in Rebibbia*, where the actors are inmates and are not allowed to move physically in the outside world. In this case the play and its live broadcasting is the only way to overcome the walls that surround the prison and to step into the world.

The space of the prison is a very characteristic place, very different from any other theatre, as the director Fabio Cavalli remarks:

> The prison has features that are not found anywhere else. […] Concentration places cannot be compared to anything in free people's everyday life. […] What can be perceived by a spectator who enters a prison to watch a play? Can he see what is really happening or is it like a mirroring? How much distance can he maintain from the content? I believe that the spectator in the prison sees what he projects on the performance. That said, I could say that staging the same play in conventional theatres like Argentina, Eliseo, Quirino and so on, cannot have the same impact that we have with the "enclosed" stage. Inside is different from outside. Even if the play has a high artistic quality, the theatrical event in the prison has a different value. We don't know how much is added or subtracted, but it is different from a traditional show. Anyway, our aim is to help the spectator to forget where he is, because art should aim to be universal. (Di Fabio 2015, online)

Inside is different from outside, and to stage a play in a prison involves a series of rules and limits, especially for the audience invited to attend the show inside the prison that requires special permissions, has to pass security checks and can watch the show only when the prison grants access to outsiders. All these limitations make the access to the live performance difficult from the outside and that is where live streaming performances come into play, opening doors that were closed before, and giving an exceptional point of view on a world, as that of prison, unknown to most.

5. Hamlet is finally free

Time and space, the distance between the event and its audience is the main difference between theatre and cinema. As André Bazin explains:

> Theatre seems naturally inclined to establish a distance between the audience and the play. Complete illusion is difficult to create because of the actual presence of the players on stage. This presence in the flesh requires a strong and active will from the spectator to abstract the actors and to institute the illusion of a fiction. […] Stage fiction would only give a weak impression of reality because theatre is much too real. As the actors are present in the same time and space as the spectators. (1967, p. 99)

A play happens under the eyes of the audience; they see it at exactly the same time as it happens. It can be perceived with all the senses and is therefore an extremely concrete experience. It is as real as its performers who can be seen, listened to, and even touched, and for this reason it is difficult to perceive it as fiction. On the other hand, cinema is perceived as fiction because it happens far from the audience and from real life. It is more like a dream, far away and untouchable, as Christian Metz says:

> Even if the spectators perceive film images as a show occurring 'live', a movie is a recorded event, which is experienced after some delay. One of the particularities of the film is to topple everything it nominates into an accomplished time. The actors played their parts in the present during the shooting and, each time the film is shown, this 'past present' works in the present mode again. If in the theatre the action is performed, in the cinema it is reported. (2000, p. 423)

What happens on the screen belongs to an indefinite time and space and reaches the audience only at a later stage, after a long process of editing that transforms the initial performance into a complex narration, told by the director-narrator that shows on the screen his point of view on what is happening, instead of a simple recording of the performance. As Sarah Hatchuel underlines:

> The film, therefore, presents itself as a closed sequence of events, as a fictional narrative with a beginning and an end, produced by a telling authority. This narrative is inclined to conceal its enunciation by virtue of the medium. What is perceived is not the object itself but its shadow. The film unwinds from the distance (like a play on stage), but also in the absence (unlike a play on stage). The screen completely segregates the film and the audience. Real life can never interfere with the reported action. (2004, p. 67)

Despite what happens in the film performance, where the audience is virtual and the narration needs to be as realistically involving as possible, in the theatrical performance the narration is created by the spectator who catches with his eyes what is happening on the stage according to his own point of view, and plays a

part in effecting the performance that he is watching by interacting with it. The presence or the absence of a live audience involves also different performance conventions and techniques, as Maurice Hindle remarks:

> The very different conventions of performance and reception operating in theatre and film also mean that movie actors need to use rather different performance techniques if they are to communicate with us effectively. The sound amplification technology, enabling a cinema audience to hear what is being said from anywhere in the screening auditorium, means that actors are not required to 'project' their voices in the way stage actors do. Instead they need to speak more at the level used in the interactions of everyday life that we all experience. Without a live audience to cater for, film actors instead perform more exclusively to/with one another, such that the 'eye of the camera' is satisfied, the ultimate decision in this regard normally remaining with the film's director. (2007, pp. 3-4)

But who is the narrator in *Hamlet in Rebibbia*? It was a play for all intents and purposes when it was staged in Rebibbia under the direction of Fabio Cavalli, but it became something else when people all around the world were watching it. It was then not a film but a photographed version of the stage production, filmed with advanced visual and sound technologies and refined multi-camera filming techniques. In this case the narrator was whoever combined wide-shots of the stage with close-ups, determining which elements were in wide-shots, close-up and mid-shots, as well as controlling the movement and duration of those shots. However, his aim was not to give his own point of view on what was happening on the stage, like a film director, but to give the viewer a high-quality, finely detailed image in a comparable way to how someone watching the show in the theatre would have seen it. It was therefore an experience shared by the people in the theatre inside the prison and those who were watching the show outside, and even if the emotional involvement experienced by a cinema audience was very different from that achieved in the playing space, the recorded screen event could give a coherent and vivid sense of what it was like to be in the theatre watching the play. Unlike films, these broadcasts were completely live experience, and even though they also involved creative filming and editing techniques, they allowed people to engage with the performance with the same feeling existing in theatre.

This means that *Hamlet in Rebibbia* had two kinds of spectators: those who were watching the performance live, and those who were physically remote from what was filmed and edited in another time and place; still, all of them were watching the same play. In this way this *Hamlet* was no more and not only in Rebibbia, but indeed potentially everywhere. It could open all the doors and climb over all the walls that surrounded the stage, thanks to the magic of broadcasting. Hamlet was free to go wherever he wanted and to speak with all kinds of people, at least for the time of the show. And this freedom of expression that paradoxically came from a place of confinement made this play unique, a

successful experiment that showed that art can cross all boundaries and awaken the consciousness of all people involved, spectators and actors included.

6. Conclusion

Once again, the inmate actors of the Free Theatre in Rebibbia have accomplished a miracle. By staging a Shakespeare's play with all the features of a universal tragedy, where characters act and speak like men who are more accustomed to fighting in the streets than on the stage, they have captured the essence of Hamlet's drama. And it didn't matter that the play was changed, simplified or translated in order to be understandable to a bigger audience, because its value was not diminished, but rather amplified. The actors were ready to put all of themselves into the roles they played, their feelings, experiences, origins, lives, and, by doing this, have figuratively come down from the stage in order to go, at least for the time of the play, out into the outside world.

This is called freedom, the most precious good and also the most difficult to achieve in places like Rebibbia. Here art is the only key to open the door of the mind, the only way to be free to go anywhere, with no limits of space and time. And Fabio Cavalli gave to his company of talented actors this key, allowing them to discover unexplored worlds and to look at their reality from a new point of view. Art has the power to show reality through the mirror of fiction – as noticed in the last sentence of *Caesar Must Die*, "Since I have known art, this cell has turned into a prison" – and *Hamlet in Rebibbia* follows this path, by showing the reality of prison through the fiction of a Shakespeare play in a perfect combination of theatre and cinema, with a live streaming performance that cancelled the physical distance between actors and spectators and brought the world closer.

The last words are assigned to Salvatore Striano, one of the inmate actors of the Free Theatre in Rebibbia, that explains how Shakespeare saved his life, showing him the world through art, and how important it is to bring art from the inside world of fiction to the outside world of reality, in order to reach as many people as possible.

> Shakespeare, give me my freedom. Give it to me now. If you truly give it back to me, I promise to give you ten years of my life. Ten years in which I'll take your philosophy – of giving, doing, loving – out into the world. Ten years during which I'll take the truest emotions of mankind and put them on stage, and in your words. Because what we need today is someone who can help people interpret the world, and artists need to go out among the people and teach life.' I clench my fists, concentrating on the winking of that minuscule star, bright and indomitable, like my hope. 'I promise to be there, Shakespeare. I'll be wherever I can be of service – in prisons, in schools. In the streets and right in the midst of the evils of the earth and I'll be afraid of nothing, ashamed of nothing, and there will be words for all,

and forgiveness for all. But give me my freedom. Give me my freedom. (Striano 2017, pp. 404-405)

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Annexes
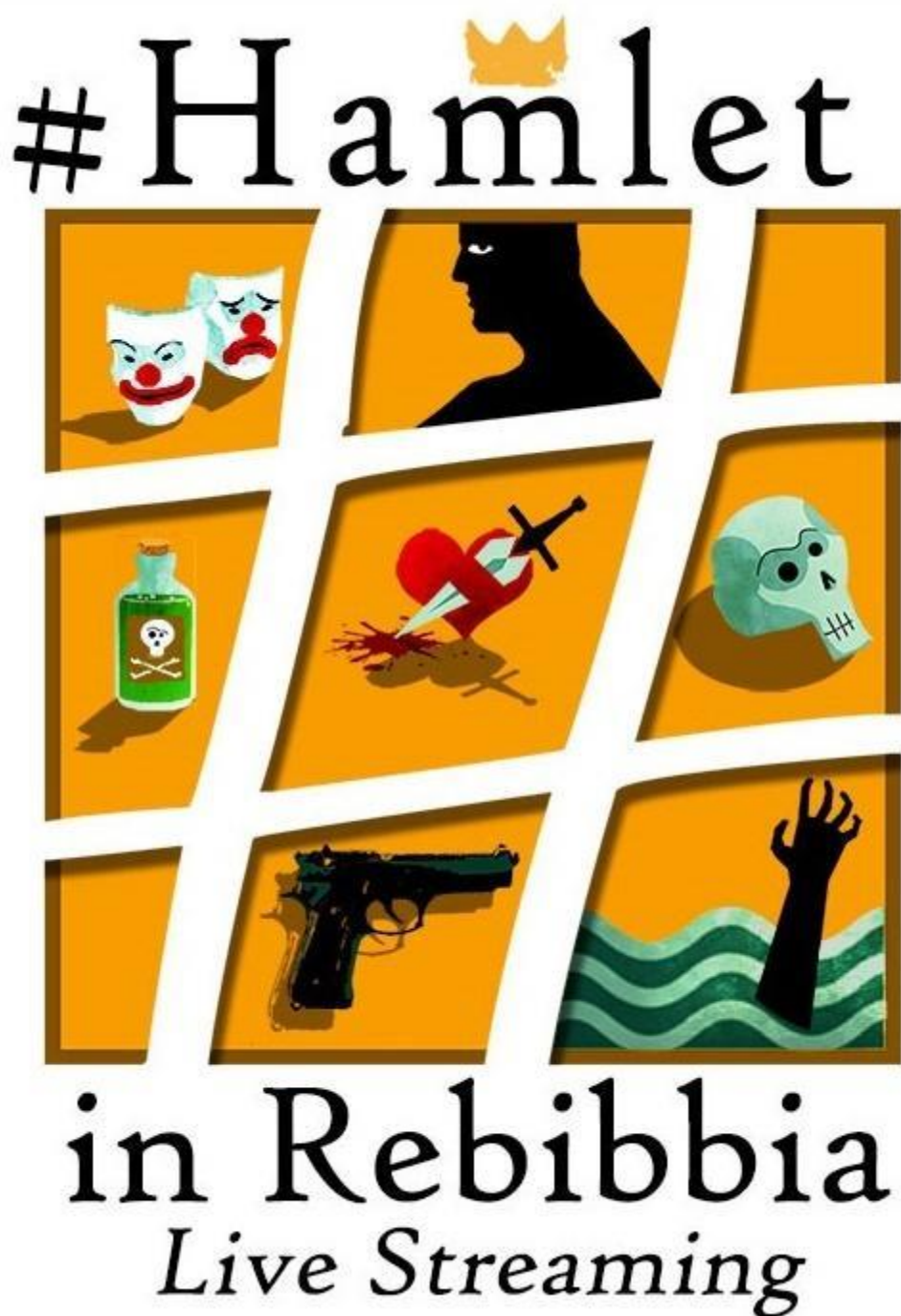
Picture by Alessandro De Nino (La Ribalta Association – Enrico Maria Salerno Study Center)

Picture by Paolo Ferrari (La Ribalta Association – Enrico Maria Salerno Study Center)

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Picture by Paolo Modugno (La Ribalta Association – Enrico Maria Salerno Study Center)

HACKING *HAMLET*
Sam Esmail's *Mr. Robot* as update, port and fork of the Shakespearean source code

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Abstract – This article reads the television series *Mr. Robot* (created by Sam Esmail, 2015-2019, USA Network) as a hack of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Deriving the interpretative framework to analyze *Mr. Robot* from the series itself, the essay first explains the use of the notions of computer hacking and source code in the context of artistic adaptation, outlining how hacking can function as an extended conceptual metaphor which enables a fresh, unified understanding of both processes and products of adaptation and appropriation. The framework of hacking is then applied to an extensive comparative reading of Shakespearean source code and televisual hack which focuses on a tightly integrated complex of issues involving the heroes' madness, audience manipulation, and narrative consistency. The central argument of this reading is that the updating, porting and forking of the source code of *Hamlet* performed by *Mr Robot* amounts to an interpretation as much as to a modification of Shakespeare's play. Hamlet's manipulation of the audience throws light on the technologically upgraded means of direct audience communication used in *Mr. Robot*. *Mr. Robot*'s reinterpretation of the Ghost as both a part of the protagonist's mind and a manifestation of his madness in turn suggests an intriguing new reading of Hamlet's madness, and its mode of storytelling enables a reassessment of the various inconsistencies of Shakespeare's tragedy. Reassessing *Mr. Robot* and *Hamlet* in the context of artistic hacking affords new insight into both contemporary complex television series and early modern plays.

Keywords: adaptation; appropriation; television series; complex TV; Shakespeare.

1. Introduction

In this article, I will read the television series *Mr Robot* (created by Sam Esmail, 2015-2019, USA) as a hack of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. First, I will briefly introduce the use of the notions of computer hacking and source code in the context of artistic adaptation.[1] Then, I will apply these notions to

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[1] My argument in this article builds directly on the theory I have developed in Winckler 2021. Since this article functions as a case study of the approach developed in detail

Mr Robot and attempt to show how reading the series as 'Shakespeare' can enrich our understanding and appreciation of it, while also shedding new light on the continuing fascination of *Hamlet*. My central argument is that the updating, porting and forking of the source code of *Hamlet* performed by *Mr Robot* amounts to an interpretation as much as a modification of Shakespeare's play, and as such affords new insight into both contemporary complex television series and early modern plays. Hamlet's manipulation of the audience throws light on the technologically upgraded means of direct audience communication used in *Mr. Robot*. *Mr. Robot*'s reinterpretation of the Ghost as both a part of the protagonist's mind and a manifestation of his madness in turn suggests an intriguing new reading of Hamlet's madness, and its mode of storytelling enables a reassessment of the inconsistencies of Shakespeare's tragedy.

2. Adaptation, Appropriation, Hacking

Computer hacking is a versatile, highly contested term (Steinmetz 2015; Holt 2020). In this article, I will predominantly use it to describe the practice of manipulating source code for a certain purpose, benign or malicious, legal or illegal, in order to solve a particular problem or improve a program's functionality. Source code is the code of a computer program as typed into the machine by a human being, which is then translated by other programs (called compilers and assemblers) into the binary machine language, consisting of ones and zeros, based on which the computer executes the program. Hacking can refer to both the writing of new code and the manipulation of existing code through the updating, "porting" and "forking" of source code (Kelty 2008, p. 346).

     While updates are essentially hacks which improve a program's functionality, conducted or at least condoned by the program's (group of) developers, porting source code refers to the transfer of a program from one computer system to another, which usually necessitates various modifications. Forking source code, by contrast, means "modifying the existing source code to do something new or different" (Kelty 2008, p. 346). Successful computer programs evolve through a long chain of versions, each of which represents a slight improvement over its predecessor – improvement in the sense of enabling the program to function more successfully in a constantly changing cultural, technical and market environment.

     As I have argued elsewhere (Winckler 2021), the model of the hacker who creates new versions of computer programs, as well as new programs, by

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there, I will refer to my own work somewhat more than would seem appropriate to me in other circumstances.

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updating, porting and forking existing source code opens up a new
perspective from which to understand artistic adaptation. Recent theories of
adaptation have been trying to evade the establishment of a vertical hierarchy
between an adaptation and its projected source and the hierarchy of value it
seems to imply by conceiving of adaptation horizontally in the manner of a
rhizome (Lanier 2014). In this effort, they can be read as abandoning the idea
of a linear relationship between source and adaptation altogether, which leads
to a number of theoretical and practical problems (Winckler 2021). As an
alternative to such an approach, I suggest to conceive of the source in terms
of *source code*. This reconceptualisation makes it possible to respect the
crucial importance which the source has for any study of an adaptation *as
adaptation* (Hutcheon 2013, p. 6) while avoiding the authoritative
implications of the term as traditionally used in adaptation studies. Instead of
a restrictive, tyrannical original against which the hack has to be measured,
the source is conceived as encouraging of, indeed dependent on, its hacks,
because its continuing relevance is predicated upon them. Given the rapidly
changing technical and cultural environments in which it functions and to
which it caters, any computer program would become obsolete in no time at
all without updates, ports and forks, and the same is arguably true for many
works of art, and especially Shakespeare's dramatic literature. Adaptation as
hacking features in this model as a profoundly creative act, a crucial step in a
continual process of artistic renewal.

   As the cultural practice of computer hacking evolved along with the
development of the first modern computers in the United States from the
1940s onwards, hacking quickly developed an ethical dimension. The young
men who spent their days and nights writing software at the MIT artificial
intelligence lab in the 1960s and 1970s soon came to define themselves as
"hackers" against the "suits", the corporate programmers and developers who
worked for corporations such as IBM. They were convinced, in Steven
Levy's formulation, that "access to computers... should be unlimited and
total" and that "all information should be free" (2010, ch. 2; cf. Coleman
2013, pp. 17-20). This vision, which in modified form persists today,
eventually set hackers on a collision course with a law that did not endorse
the hacker ethic and has struggled to keep up with technological change ever
since.

   As a result, legal and illegal varieties of hacking evolved, with a
constantly shifting grey area in between. As Gabriella E. Coleman has
observed, what all of the various groups into which hackerdom has
diversified over the years have in common is "a certain relation to legality.
Hacker actions or their artifacts are usually either in legally dubious waters or
at the cusp of new legal meaning" (2013, p. 19; cf. Coleman, Golub 2008).
On the legal side, this is particularly obvious with respect to the hacker-led
rebellion against the perceived "enclosure" of software by corporations by

means of copyright laws in the 1970s and 1980s (Boyle 2003), which eventually became known as the free software movement (Söderberg 2008, pp. 11–50). On the illegal side, it is perhaps telling that the term "hacking" first became popularly associated with the criminal activity of digital breaking and entering in the pop-cultural wake of the Hollywood movie *War Games* (Badham 1983). In subsequent court cases, a number of teenagers who had been breaking into computer systems (but who would never have qualified as hackers in computer expert circles due to their limited knowledge of the systems they were compromising) admitted to having been inspired by the movie to become "hackers" in the criminal sense (Brenner 2010, pp. 15-17) – a stereotype which the movie romanticized heavily, creating the "nerd hero" (Brown 2008, n.p.) (what M. Hawn has described as "a schizophrenic blend of dangerous criminal and geeky Robin Hood" (1996)) at the very moment it also created the hacker menace in the popular imagination. It is arguably this moral complexity which has made the hacker such an intriguing figure for film and television producers: hacking is simultaneously good and evil, creative and destructive; hackers are freedom fighters and terrorists, geniuses and madmen, heroes and villains (cf. Comaroff, Comaroff 2004, p. 807; Rosewarne 2016, pp. 119-165).

This moral and legal ambiguity of hacking contributes to the flexibility of the notion as metaphorically applicable to artistic adaptation. The two theoretical terms which have been predominantly employed in the critical literature in the discussion of the modern uses of Shakespeare's plays in the forms of derivative films, television and web series, novels, comic books, video games etc., "adaptation" and "appropriation", have been the subject of much critical debate. While adaptation has been seen as both the product and the process of creating a work of art through the "(re-)interpretation and... (re-)creation" (Hutcheon 2013, p. 8) of another, appropriation, in Jean Marsden's statement, has "connotations of usurpation, of seizure for one's own uses" and is "associated with abduction, adoption and theft..." (1991, p. 1). In Julie Sanders' seminal account, the chief difference is one of the degree of the openness with which the adaptive/appropriative relationship is declared: while "an adaptation signals a relationship with an informing sourcetext or original... appropriation frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain" (2006, p. 26). Yet the impression of two clearly distinct notions is deceptive, as Christy Desmet and Sujata Iyengar have concluded: "the difference between adaptation and appropriation, from a theoretical and historical perspective, proves to be a difference in degree rather than kind", so that "context" has to decide which is the appropriate term in each individual case (2015, pp. 16, 17).

One of the major strengths of hacking as a conceptual metaphor[2] for the creative processes, practices and products which both "adaptation" and "appropriation" seek to characterize is that it unites the various aspects of the two notions in a single term. As noted above, "hacking" describes the creative work of writing source code, which is typically performed on the basis of pre-existing source code written by others, while a "hack" is simultaneously the process, the method and the product of such work. In this it can be understood to be a form of adaptation in Hutcheon's sense. Yet it simultaneously smacks of criminal intrusion, of acquiring illicitly what "rightfully" belongs to others, of legal, moral and political transgression – the hallmarks of appropriation. If adaptation and appropriation are conceived of as existing on a "continuum *with* one another", as Desmet and Iyengar (2015, p. 16, original emphasis) suggest, hacking bridges the two terms without sacrificing the specificity of either. In embodying and performing the interplay of creation and destruction, craft and art, legality and criminality, and real life and fiction in digital form, hacking constitutes a potent metaphor for the uses of Shakespeare's works in the internet age. It therefore seems fitting that one of the most sophisticated Shakespeare hacks to have been performed in recent years transforms Hamlet into a hacker.

3. Going mad, seeing ghosts: Disentangling and reintegrating the codes of *Mr. Robot* and *Hamlet*

In the following close reading, I will focus on one specific complex of tightly interconnected themes and dramatic devices which unites and differentiates Shakespearean source code and televisual hack: the focalization of the story through the hero's perspective, the hero's madness, and the ghost of his dead father.[3] Reading back and forth between hacking and hacked code, the argument seeks to lend support to my basic theoretical claim that the concept of adaptation as hacking source code enables a re-envisioning of the source as a creative rather than restrictive influence on the adaptation and the hack,

[2] "Metaphor" is not inferior to "theory". Indeed, all theories can be understood as elaborate metaphors, especially in the humanities. "Adaptation" and "appropriation", as used in literary criticism, are themselves metaphors, and their perceived appropriacy and explanatory efficacy subject to critical debate. Cf. Elliott 2020, pp. 256-264.

[3] Much more can be made of the connection of *Mr. Robot* and Shakespeare than can be discussed here. Besides *Hamlet*, the source code of *Macbeth* also features prominently in *Mr. Robot* in the form of several extended quotes and, more importantly, the story of Tyrell Wellick (Martin Wallström), Senior Vice President of Technology of E Corp (and later its CEO), who is pushed by his demonic wife Joanna (Stephanie Corneliussen) to pursue promotion in ever more dangerous and devious ways, providing a neo-Shakespearean *Macbeth*-subplot to the *Hamlet*-hack described in this article.

despite and because of its invasive character, as an enriching, life-extending upgrade of the original source code. At the same time, it aims to provide an example of how reading a work of art against its source code can provide insight into both source and hack.

I would like to stress that, as with any other case of writing about an 'unmarked adaptation' (Lanier 2017, p. 300), reading *Mr. Robot* as a hack of *Hamlet* is a *choice* – we could just as well read the series as a hack of *Fight Club* (Fincher 1999) or *The Matrix* (Wachowski, Wachowski 1999), as other commentators have done, or interpret it completely on its own terms. One of my goals in the following will be to show that this choice, though voluntary on my part, is not arbitrary: that the connections established here are more than just a testament to my (unquestionably relevant) scholarly "desire to make [the work of art] count as Shakespeare" (Denslow 2017, p. 98). As I have outlined in the article which constitutes the theoretical basis of this case study, I believe that, given a desire to connect a work such as *Mr. Robot* with a Shakespeare play, "a convincingly reconstructable relation with the Shakespearean source code through... ports and forks" can provide an "objective criterion" (Winckler 2021, p. 14) for whether a given text such as *Mr. Robot* can count as a Shakespeare hack or not. Since the texts of Shakespeare's plays, as we have them, are "work-determinative" (Nannicelli 2013, p. 6) in the sense that they imply theatrical production, but do not fix these productions deterministically because of the ambiguous nature of human language (as opposed to computer programming languages), the Shakespearean source code is understood here to include not only Shakespeare's words, but also the play's "distinguishing features such as characters, themes, and images" (Winckler 2021, p. 12), both of the scripts and of the production(s) implied by them. I will argue that with respect to all of these features, *Mr. Robot* can be shown to be updating, porting and forking the source code of *Hamlet*.[4]

For anyone familiar with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, a host of parallels with *Mr. Robot* will be readily apparent. Both works of art revolve around a young, male, psychologically unstable protagonist habitually dressed in black whose extraordinary intelligence goes hand in hand with the rejection of adult and state authority, depression and social awkwardness. The fact that Elliot's and Hamlet's shared personal attributes are as characteristic of the modish Elizabethan melancholics Shakespeare parodied in his main character (Gellert

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[4] As I have outlined in Winckler 2021, the source code of *Hamlet* exists in different versions, in line with the "collaborative, fluid, and constantly evolving nature of all source code" (12). When I speak about the source code of *Hamlet*, I therefore refer to the aggregate of the existing early versions (what are usually called Quarto 1 (or "the bad quarto"), Quarto 2 ("the good quarto") and Folio in Shakespeare scholarship), and the performances implied by them, not to one particular text. See Thompson and Taylor 2016, pp. 75-87.

Lyons 1971) as of the current-day hackers whose essence *Mr. Robot* seeks to capture (cf. "A Portrait of J. Random Hacker"; Thomas 2002, pp. 47-80) illustrates the felicitousness of using *Hamlet* as source code for a show about hacking: even considered completely apart from the story which is told in *Mr. Robot*, the highly intelligent, socially awkward hacker makes for a logical late-capitalist update of the gloomy Elizabethan scholar (and his posthumous Romantic idealization) as a cultural arche- and stereotype. In the 16th century, intellectual young men who were "particular" (*Hamlet*, 1.2.75)[5] became melancholy scholars; in the 21st century, "different" (*Mr. Robot*, Season 01, Episode 01) young men become psychotic hackers.

Like Hamlet, *Mr. Robot*'s protagonist Elliot Alderson (played by Rami Malek) is driven by the ghost of his late father (MR. ROBOT, played by Christian Slater, the leader of the hacker collective fsociety[6]) to take revenge on whom the ghost, who later turns out to be a dissociated personality of Elliot's, proclaims responsible for his death – and who happens to be the most powerful man around: in Hamlet's feudal world the current King of Denmark, Claudius, and in Elliot's age Phillip Price (Michael Cristofer), the CEO of the world's largest corporation, E Corp (even though he later turns out to be merely a puppet of an even more powerful, shadowy figure). Both protagonists feel profoundly uncomfortable in the role of avenger, worry about being manipulated, and use their brain power to discover the truth behind the ghost's respective accusations. At the same time, the dead fathers' revelations confirm their sons' preexisting conviction that the world around them is fundamentally corrupt, positioning the ghosts as potential manifestations of the protagonists' repressed desires. Finally, in *Mr. Robot* as in *Hamlet* the discovery of the unavenged murder of the father and the moral dilemmas which accompany the seeming obligation of the son to take revenge create a rift which runs through the son's mind as much as through his family and his society as a whole, bringing about destruction on all three levels. *Mr. Robot*, the hack, thus retains the basic structure of its Shakespearean source code: an individual psychological struggle embedded in a private family drama which precipitates a national and international political crisis.

Within this structure, *Mr. Robot* updates a number of the key features and characters of Shakespeare's tragedy in line with its identity as an American prime time television show set in the New York City of 2015. While the global reach of the show,[7] the replacement of *Hamlet*'s rotten state of Denmark by an international conglomerate as the central power structure,

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[5] All quotations from *Hamlet* are from Thompson and Taylor (2016).

[6] For the sake of clarity, I will refer to the TV series as *Mr. Robot* and to the eponymous character as MR. ROBOT throughout.

[7] Relevant locations which feature in the story include New York City, Lithuania, the Congo, and China, even though not all of these locations are actually shown.

and the use of computer hacking and social engineering (see Thomas 2002, pp. 61-67) rather than meta-theatrical play-acting as the protagonist's weapon of choice all figure prominently, more invasive updates to the *Hamlet* source code are made on the level of character, particularly in the form of the significantly enlarged role and agency of female characters. This includes the introduction of a sister character for the protagonist, Darlene (Carly Chaikin), who supports Elliot in his quest for revenge and also plays a crucial part in his struggle for mental liberation; and a much larger role for the show's version of Ophelia, Angela Moss (Portia Doubleday), who (even though her trajectory from falling victim to the manipulation of her father and various other men through madness to death is ultimately left unmodified) gets a chance to seek her own vengeance. The show thus diversifies Hamlet's lonely revenge quest against the central villain by putting it into the hands of not just one but four characters (if we count MR. ROBOT), while complicating the act of vengeance by making the enemy systemic – unlike Claudius, conglomerates like E Corp cannot be stabbed in the heart, because, as MR. ROBOT puts it, "they don't have hearts" (S01E01). The portrayal of a number of homosexual and transsexual characters likewise brings Hamlet up to date with the contemporary American moment, most prominently in the main villain Zhang/Whiterose (played by B.D. Wong). Greatly heightening the complexity of *Hamlet*'s rather straightforward (if formidable) central villain Claudius, the split character of the transwoman Zhang/Whiterose mirrors the splintering of Elliot's mind into multiple personalities inhabiting the same body. In *Mr. Robot,* both hero and villain thus conjointly come to embody the schizophrenia which both Fredric Jameson (1998) and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1983) have characterised as a central feature of late-stage capitalism (also cf. Peretti 2010), and which Paul Booth (2011) has described as a key component of the narrative and temporal complexity (Mittell 2015) typical of 21st century television shows.

On a technical level, *Mr. Robot* retains what I would argue is the key feature of *Hamlet*'s dramatic design structure: the focalization of much of the story through the protagonist's subjective perspective. In both works, viewers are manipulated into identifying with the protagonist in spite of his often ruthless and questionable acts, and thereby forced into a position of complicity which necessitates them to interrogate their own responsibilities and moral standards as much as those of the (anti)hero (cf. Bruun Vage 2015, pp. 39-63). Shakespeare manipulates the audience into seeing the world from Hamlet's perspective by, first, creating a shared pool of knowledge which only Hamlet and the audience, but not the other characters, have access to (most notably about old Hamlet's Ghost and murder, Hamlet's ensuing revenge quest, and Hamlet's announcement to "put an antic disposition on" (1.5.71), which makes us see as cunning and mockery what appears to the other characters as madness in the following acts (see Anglin 2017). Second,

he puts Hamlet into what Robert Weimann (1978, pp. 49-151) has called a
platea position on stage, a position at the edge of the fictional world of the
tragedy from which the Prince can communicate his private thoughts directly
to the audience through puns, quibbles, and soliloquies.[8]

Updating this design feature in line with the possibilities of the
televisual medium to which Sam Esmail ports the Shakespearean source
code, *Mr. Robot* likewise forces the audience to "get... into Elliot's head"
(Esmail 2017a, n.p.), but in a much more radical fashion. Elliot's voice-over
monologues, which dominate much of the show's storytelling, establish a
continuous private line of communication with the viewer, even in scenes in
which Elliot is walking around in a crowd, hacking or conversing with other
characters. Tonally and thematically, the "techno-cynicism" (Volmar 2017, p.
1) expressed in Elliot's quasi-soliloquies[9] updates Hamlet's preferred
Christian theme of postlapsarian, pre-apocalyptic corruption (Hunt 2004;
Keller 1996; Lynch 2019) for a late-capitalist context. Elliot's "fuck society"
monologue in the show's first episode, for example, updates and forks code
from Hamlet's first soliloquy (*Hamlet*, 1.2.129-37) in which the Prince
describes the world as "stale, flat and unprofitable" and as an "unweeded
garden / That grows to seed" (*Hamlet*, 1.2.135-36)), as well as the theme of
cowardice from "To be or not to be" and other soliloquies, for the social
media age:

> KRISTA: What is it about society that disappoints you so much?
> ELLIOT: Oh, I don't know. Is it that we collectively thought Steve Jobs was
> a great man, even when we knew he made billions off the backs of children?
> Or maybe it's that it feels like all our heroes are counterfeit... Spamming
> each other with our burning commentary of bullshit masquerading as
> insight. Our social media faking as intimacy... I'm not saying anything new.
> We all know why we do this... because we wanna be sedated. Because it's
> painful not to pretend. Because we're cowards. Fuck society." (*Mr. Robot*,
> S01E01)

Yet *Mr. Robot* goes much further than merely updating Hamlet's soliloquies
thematically. While Hamlet's speeches would have originally been given by a
solitary Hamlet on the empty stage of the Globe theatre, during Elliot's
monologue shots of his face, moving in from a medium close-up into a
decentred close-up in which Elliot's head occupies the entire left half of the

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[8] Weimann derives the term *platea* from an analysis of the tradition of the English
   morality play.
[9] These are not soliloquies in the strict sense because, unlike Hamlet's soliloquies, Elliot
   is frequently in the presence of other characters when we hear him 'think' the speeches
   in voice-over. Technically, they therefore resemble Shakespearean asides more than
   soliloquies. Still, the fact that they are long, coherent speeches which give insight into
   the inner life of the character aligns them closely with the latter.

screen, are cross-cut with a quick succession of real media images of Jobs, counterfeit heroes like Lance Armstrong and Bill Cosby, and Mark Zuckerberg's Facebook page, visually underlining Elliot's words and illustrating his thoughts in a way unavailable to the Shakespearean stage medium.

In addition to the voice-over, much of what in *Hamlet* is an inner conflict communicated to the audience chiefly in monologue and soliloquy is in *Mr. Robot* reconfigured as what we might call an *internal dialogue* between Elliot and the other personality in his head, the 'ghost' MR. ROBOT. This is best illustrated by the series' rendition of "To be or not to be, / That is the question" (*Hamlet*, 3.1.55-87). Rather than functioning as a piece of seemingly abstract rumination removed from the plot, in *Mr. Robot* the speech is fully integrated into the action. The updated version, employing the computer rather than the book as the dominant metaphor for the human mind, is used by MR. ROBOT to persuade a hesitant Elliot to participate in the planned cyberattack on E Corp: "Tell me one thing, Elliot. Are you a one or a zero? That's the question you have to ask yourself. Are you a yes or a no? Are you going to act or not?"[10] In the bulk of *Hamlet*, the demand to take action exists only as the memory of the Ghost's words from the beginning of the play, and turns out to be nowhere near as strongly imprinted in the "book and volume" (1.4.103) of Hamlet's brain as the Prince initially proclaims. In *Mr. Robot*, by contrast, the murdered father MR. ROBOT is a constant, forceful, aggressive presence on the screen. In later episodes, it becomes clear that in *Mr. Robot* the 'ghost' can indeed not only demand action but act himself, taking over the protagonist's body against his will. *Mr. Robot* thus gives physical shape to what in *Hamlet* is mainly a mental and emotional wrestling with the Ghost's demands.

Further, in *Mr. Robot* the viewer is not only directly addressed, but *created*, and subsequently treated as a character, by the protagonist. The pilot episode begins with a black screen, over which we hear Elliot's voice in voice-over: "Hello friend. Hello, friend? That's lame. Maybe I should give you a name. But that's a slippery slope. You're only in my head. We have to remember that. Shit. It's actually happened. I'm talking to an imaginary person" (*Mr. Robot*, S01E01). This speech act echoes the meta-theatrical implications of the first line of *Hamlet*, "Who's there?" (1.1.1), which addresses an unknown presence on stage as much as the audience in the theatre (and simultaneously alludes to the way in which a beginner computer programmer traditionally announces her digital re-birth as an active agent in the world of computers, instructing the computer to print the line "hello world" to the screen). Yet it goes far beyond Shakespeare's tragedy in

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[10] Elliot's answer that 'Life is not that binary' provides one of several examples of tongue-in-cheek literary criticism of its Shakespearean source code evident in *Mr. Robot*.

suggesting from the very start that nothing the audience will be experiencing in *Mr. Robot* will necessarily be congruent with objective reality, but will, like the viewer's very existence, always depend on Elliot's frequently unreliable perspective. This becomes fully evident in *Mr. Robot'*s version of the graveyard scene towards the end of the first season (S01E09). At the grave of Edward Alderson, we realize together with Elliot that MR. ROBOT, who appeared to be a real person up to that point, is merely a mental projection of Elliot's, based on an idealized version of his dead father: we and Elliot can see and hear MR. ROBOT, but the other characters cannot.[11] The audience therefore directly shares in Elliot's subjective experience by seeing and hearing what he sees and thinks – a radically skewed point of view which forces the viewer to share in Elliot's paranoia and dissociative mental states.

This leads to a reconfiguration of the meta-theatrical elements so integral to *Hamlet.* In Shakespeare's tragedy, the staging of the play within the play by professional actors, Hamlet's penchant for play-acting and the discussions of acting styles, genre conventions and gossip alluding to contemporary developments in London theatre serve to constantly remind the audience that what they are watching is a play, not reality, to momentarily suspend the suspension of disbelief – a suspension aided by the Elizabethan stage's anti-realistic staging conventions. Yet, at the same time, the fictional world of Hamlet's tragedy itself remains stubbornly stable, unmoved by the Prince's attempts at meta-theatrical subversion.

The televisual port intensifies the destabilizing effect by inverting these parameters. While *Mr. Robot* uses all the resources of a high-budget quality TV show to strive for a maximum of authenticity in its portrayal of hacker culture (Zetter 2016) and its positioning of the show in the cultural, economic and political reality of the New York City of 2015 (including, for example, the extensive use of manipulated news footage (Riesman 2016), this realism exists side by side with the show's radical subjectivism: the viewer constantly has to consider the possibility that *the entire story*, including the viewer's own role in it, might be just a figment of Elliot's imagination. This is particularly obvious in Season 2, where the viewer learns only in Episode 7 that Elliot had been in prison for the previous six episodes. The updated version puts the viewer at the protagonist's mercy to an unprecedented extent.

Still, this mode of directly sharing in the hero's subjective experience is already evident in the closet scene (3.4) of *Hamlet*. There, Hamlet and the audience, but not Gertrude, can see (and hear) the Ghost "in his nightgown" (3.4.99, stage direction, only in Q 1). Gertrude takes the fact that her son

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[11] *Mr. Robot* is not completely consistent on this point, as there are many scenes in which Elliot is not present and which the audience still witnesses. The formula also gets more complicated as the show progresses beyond its first season, where it is the most stringently applied.

*L*ingue e
*L*inguaggi

does, as she sees it, "with th'incorporal air... hold discourse" (3.4.114) as an indication that Hamlet is mad, providing source code for Darlene and Angela's reaction to seeing Elliot talking to the invisible MR. ROBOT at his father's grave. The possibilities explored in *Mr. Robot*'s hack of *Hamlet* suggest a reading of the closet scene which focuses on the various layers of access to Hamlet's mind implied by it: Shakespeare puts us directly into Hamlet's head, letting us share in the Prince's subjective perceptions, to the exclusion of the other character on stage. We can perceive the Ghost, not necessarily because it is really there, but rather because *that is what Hamlet perceives*. This raises the possibility that the Ghost in this scene, like MR. ROBOT in the hack, could be a product of the hero's imagination, implying that the Ghost's intervention to save Gertrude from her son's wrath might really be made by a dissociated part of Hamlet's own troubled mind. This in turn would lend an appropriate, ironic double edge to the Ghost's line, "Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works" (3.4.110), which is usually taken to refer to Gertrude, that embodiment of alleged female "frailty" (1.2.146) in both Hamlet's and the Ghost's (cf. 5.1.41-58) estimation, but might now equally well point to the melancholy-stricken, Ghost-seeing Hamlet himself – enabling a reading of the hero's revulsion of women which permeates the play as a dissociated form of self-hatred. Pushing this line of interpretation further, we might then double back to the first act and ponder in how far the specific instructions to take revenge that Hamlet receives from the Ghost in 1.4 – a dialogue likewise seen and heard only by Hamlet and the audience – might actually originate in Hamlet's own "prophetic soul" (40). As *Mr. Robot* shows, this interpretation provides an intriguing premise for a hack of the play. One might object that it is not consistent with *Hamlet* as a whole, but then much of *Hamlet* itself is inconsistent – key aspects of the play's plot and themes remain ambiguous, the nature of the Ghost among them.

Along with leaving the question of the Ghost's origins, reality and intentions unclear (Greenblatt 2013, ch. 5), *Hamlet* does not definitively settle the question of whether it's hero's madness is real or mere pretense: Hamlet's announcement of the antic disposition in Act I and the histrionics he engages in in front of Ophelia, Polonius and others in the subsequent three acts stand unmitigated next to his declaration that "What I have done... was madness" (5.2.208-09) in Act V. *Mr. Robot*'s resolves this ambiguity. The crucial move in Sam Esmail's forking of *Hamlet*'s source code consists in making Elliot's madness the cause of MR. ROBOT's existence, and MR. ROBOT's existence the manifestation of Elliot's madness.

In line with its contemporary American setting, Elliot's 'madness' corresponds to a diagnosed clinical condition, "dissociative identity disorder" (S04E13), and is managed with drugs and psychotherapy. Ontologically speaking, the 'ghost' MR ROBOT is nothing more or less than the most

prominent symptom of this disorder; its traumatic origin, the "method to Elliot's madness" (S04E07) is definitively explained towards the end of the series as being sexual abuse by his real father when Elliot was a boy.

Still, as with the nature of *Mr. Robot*'s 'ghost', we can find Elliot's mode of madness prefigured, though not dominant, in *Hamlet*. The series manifests televisually, virtually word for word, the straightforward-sounding excuse which Hamlet offers to Laertes in Act V as to why he killed Polonius: "What I have done... I here proclaim was madness... If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away / And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes, / Then Hamlet does it not; Hamlet denies it. / Who does it then? His madness. His madness is poor Hamlet's enemy." (5.2.208-17) If we substitute "Elliot" for "Hamlet" and "MR. ROBOT" for "madness", we have a remarkably accurate description of what happens in *Mr. Robot*. MR. ROBOT repeatedly takes over Elliot's body while Elliot is asleep or unconscious to do what the protagonist does not, first conducting the 5/9 hack against Elliot's intentions and subsequently trying to stop Elliot, at times violently, from reversing it. During Seasons 1 to 3, MR. ROBOT literally acts as Elliot's enemy.

Within the context of *Hamlet*, however, the Prince's apology to Laertes has seemed anything but convincing to many frustrated critics, who couldn't help but notice its incongruity with Hamlet's deliberate antics in the first four acts. Perhaps most notoriously, T.S. Eliot's pronouncement that *Hamlet* is "most certainly an artistic failure" (1921, 90) is made partly on the grounds that Shakespeare did not make a clear decision about the nature of his Prince's madness when hacking *his* source code, the so-called *Ur-Hamlet* (a lost play which Eliot attributes to Thomas Kyd), leaving Hamlet's mental state "less than madness and more than feigned" in Shakespeare's own version (1921, 93).

Intriguingly, even though *Mr. Robot* expunges the ambiguity surrounding its hero's madness, the series reproduces its source code's inconsistencies towards the end of its run. In the series finale, it is 'revealed' that whom we took to be Elliot throughout the series purportedly had all along been just another dissociated personality, the Mastermind, who had taken control of Elliot's body and (most of) his mind. In a scene taking place inside Elliot's mind, the Mastermind is characterized by Elliot's mental projection of his therapist Krista, with apparent authority, as "the personality created to carry Elliot's rage" who tried to "shelter" Elliot by manipulating his memories and trying to "take down all the evil that surrounded him in the real world", and therefore "formed fsociety" (S04E13). The show ends with the real Elliot, who had been trapped by the Mastermind in a simulated perfect world, finally waking up, seeing the 'real' Darlene instead of the 'imaginary' viewer he addresses in *Mr. Robot*'s very first scene. But this resolution contradicts everything that happens during the first three seasons of the show. There, it is *MR. ROBOT* who rages against the system and tries

to destroy it, while Elliot (Mastermind?) spends most of his time in frantic attempts to stop him. Just like *Hamlet* seems to forget about Hamlet's antic acting between acts I and IV in its concluding act, the finale of *Mr. Robot* seems to forget about the existence of MR. ROBOT in Seasons 1 to 3.

In the remainder of this essay, I would like to suggest that reading *Mr. Robot* as a fork of *Hamlet* opens up a new way to think about this problem in both source code and hack, enabling a fresh take on the venerable problem of Hamlet's real or pretended madness, as well as on the respective inconsistencies of *Hamlet* and *Mr. Robot* as a whole. In an interview, creator Sam Esmail has stated that for him, plot consistency is not the most important consideration when it comes to writing a TV show because "you don't remember plot. You remember the characters" (Esmail 2017b). Accordingly, the main purpose of the storytelling in *Mr. Robot* is to gradually (and sometimes radically) change the viewer's perception of its protagonist through what Esmail has described as a series of reframings: "There is a linear story, but as we fill in the details of the past, the present starts to get reframed. So we have this circular logic to our storytelling" (2017a). This "circular logic" goes hand in hand with the complex serial format in which *Mr. Robot* is presented. Each episode simultaneously constitutes a narrative unit in itself, carries on the linear story, and reframes what came before. Because multi-season complex TV series are produced over a period of several years in a dynamic process which takes viewer feedback into account (Kelleter 2017, pp. 12-16), attempts to read such series as a singular, integrated whole, with both beginning and end firmly in view, inevitably fail to do them justice;[12] rather, complex TV series are meant to be appreciated in sequence, with earlier episodes slowly fading into the background of the viewer's memory so that later episodes are able to reframe earlier experiences to create new effects at the current moment of watching – even if those moments are to some extent inconsistent with earlier ones. As Vikram Murthi (2019, n.p.) has pointed out, the final twist in *Mr. Robot* "works less because it fits into the plot and more because it makes emotional sense."

What happens to the problem of Hamlet's madness if we take the hint from its fork *Mr. Robot* and read the play serially, treating character as more important than plot and the earlier acts as open to later reframings? Given the nature of *Hamlet* as a drama which would have originally been performed in a single afternoon, such a procedure might appear misguided. However, an argument can be made that it is encouraged by the structure of the Shakespearean source code itself.

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[12] Of course, doing just this also constitutes part of complex TV's appeal through what Mittell terms "forensic fandom" (2015, p. 137). As Mittell points out, TV producers often get in trouble because the expectations of fans for logical coherence are almost impossible to fulfill over a TV show's multi-year run.

In a manner which is mirrored inversely by the role switch between Elliot and MR. ROBOT at the beginning of the final Season 4 of *Mr. Robot* (where MR. ROBOT begins to advocate restraint and also to communicate directly with the viewer, while Elliot isolates himself from the audience and behaves in an increasingly villainous fashion), both *Hamlet* the play and Hamlet the character undergo a sudden, radical change in the last act. Following the graveyard scene in which Hamlet confronts both his childhood and his mortality in his conversation with the skull of his childhood friend "Yorick... the King's Jester" (5.1.167), Hamlet's previous mode of lamenting the state of the world and his own insufficiency in soliloquy, alternating with play-acting in and against the world around him, gives way to a serene acceptance of the ineluctability of fate: "If it be, 'tis not to come. If it be not to come, it will be now. If it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all" (5.2.198-201). However, as in *Mr. Robot*, the apparent psychological plausibility of this shift is largely a wishful, ad-hoc construction of viewers and critics on the basis of an overall incoherent text: in the actual text of *Hamlet* the transition is *not* psychologically straightforward at all. On the contrary, as Margreta de Grazia has noted, instead of ushering in a new maturity, the confrontation with death actually gives rise to "the high point of his antic act" (1996, p. 151), namely Hamlet's spectacular leap into Ophelia's grave and subsequent fight with Laertes. The Prince's hyperbolical declarations of his love for Ophelia – he would "weep... fight... fast... eat a crocodile" (5.1.263-66) for her – grotesquely exaggerate what the audience already knows to be untrue. Yet in the very next scene (5.2), little more than ten lines after this absurd declamation, the mature Hamlet of the rest of the play suddenly emerges and declares that everything that went before had been madness – another move forked and amplified in *Mr. Robot*, where the introduction of the Mastermind personality in the last episode declares the Elliot of *all* previous episodes to have been a psychotic illusion.

The fight in the grave has frequently been ignored by post-Romantic Shakespeare critics who, in a seeming bid to make the development of the titular character appear more consistent and psychologically realistic than the text of *Hamlet* actually supports, opted to believe Hamlet's claim that he had really been mad. De Grazia takes this inconsistency as a reason to dismiss 'modern' readings of the play altogether (2003). Yet if we follow *Mr. Robot*'s clue, I would argue that the interpretative mistake she detects on the part of post-Coleridgian 'psychological' critics of the play itself makes perfect psychological sense: as in *Mr. Robot*, emotionally satisfying character development has been deemed more important than overall logical coherence. Inconsistencies have been overlooked or explained away in favor of embracing a Hamlet who (finally!) behaves as the protagonist of a revenge tragedy should.

All this might seem arbitrary, were it not for the fact that this approach is arguably followed by Hamlet himself when he declares his pretended madness to have been real. He says, after all: "What I have done... I here *proclaim* was madness" (5.2.207-10, my emphasis). Shakespeare thus has Hamlet unabashedly *reframe* his own actions as real instead of pretended madness, despite the blatant contradiction with the play's earlier acts. In the context of the current discussion, I would therefore like to suggest that Hamlet himself encourages us here to read his tragedy serially: not as an integrated whole whose parts have to make coherent sense when considered as a unit in the manner of New Criticism, but in sequence, scene by scene, act by act, permitting the reframing of earlier story events when the play and especially the characters demand it at a later point. Who, apart from a few experts, really remembers the plot of *Hamlet*? Yet who, conversely, does not remember the character?

4. Conclusion

Reading *Mr. Robot* as a hack of *Hamlet* throws new light on both 21st century television series and Elizabethan play. By focusing on one particular section of their set of complex interconnections, this article has sought to document how the thematic updates, in tandem with the technological innovations engendered by the porting of the Shakespearean source code to the televisual medium, tweak, modify and amplify key aspects of Shakespeare's characters, plot and themes to fork a new, contemporary work of art out of the early modern source code. Viewed from this angle, *Mr. Robot* emerges as a television series about hacking which is itself a hack, encompassing both the hacked Shakespearean source code and the theoretical metaphor for its own analysis.

In porting Hamlet's story to work in a 21st century medium and updating it to appeal to a contemporary audience, *Mr. Robot* takes advantage of what has long been perceived as a major bug in the Shakespearean source code, but what I would argue is really a feature. As the analysis has shown, it is precisely *Hamlet*'s manifold ambiguities and inconsistencies which account for the play's astonishing longevity and continuing relevance: the difficulties of the manipulated audience to know whether to sympathize with or despise Hamlet, the uncertain provenance of the Ghost and the fact that the question of the reality of the Prince's madness is left unresolved have become one of the primary engines of what Russel Samolsky, borrowing a concept from Jacques Derrida, has called the "programming machine" (2008, p. 34) of *Hamlet*, able to generate ever new meanings out of new ideas fed as input into the text.

Here as elsewhere, Hamlet can not only contribute to appreciating *Mr.*

Robot in a more substantial way: *Mr. Robot* can also be drawn on to arrive at a clearer understanding of *Hamlet*. Elliot's comment about software bugs equally applies to the source code of Shakespeare's tragedy: "The bug forces the software to adapt, evolving something new because of it. Work around it or work through it. No matter what, it changes, it becomes something new, the next version, the inevitable upgrade" (S01E03). This is what has happened, and continues to happen, with *Hamlet*: it is precisely the ambiguous, 'problematic' elements of the play's source code which have proved the most fertile basis for its unending stream of updates, ports and forks, including *Mr. Robot* itself. Indeed, over the centuries these hacks have added to the very nature of *Hamlet*. While the original work, a stage play to be seen and text to be read and interpreted, still provides the source code that anchors and identifies the phenomenon, *Hamlet* has gradually evolved into what Gwenllian Jones has described as the "transmedia fictions" as which complex television series function in the 21ˢᵗ century, namely "cosmologies to be entered, experienced and imaginatively interacted with" (2002, p. 84) – that is to say, to be hacked.

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