THE ARDEN SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare and Seriality

PAGE, STAGE, SCREEN

EDITED BY ELISABETH BRONFEN & CHRISTINA WALD

SHAKESPEARE AND ADAPTATION

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ILLUSTRATIONS

CONTRIBUTORS

Aleida Assmann held the chair of English Literature and Literary Theory at the University of Konstanz, Germany, from 1993 to 2014. She taught as a guest professor at international universities (Rice University, Princeton, Yale, Chicago or Vienna). The main areas of her research are history of media, history and theory of reading and cultural memory, with special emphasis on Holocaust and trauma. Together with her husband Jan Assmann, she received the Peace Price of the German Book Trade in 2018. From 2020 to 2023, she directed a research group at the university of Konstanz on 'Civic Strength'. Publications in English: *Memory in a Global Age: Discourses, Practices and Trajectories* (ed. with Sebastian Conrad, 2010); *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (2012); *Memory and Political Change* (ed. with Linda Shortt, 2012); *Introduction to Cultural Studies: Topics, Concepts, Issues* (2012); *Shadows of Trauma. Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity* (2016); and *Is the Time Out of Joint? On the Rise and Fall of the Modern Time Regime* (2020).

Carla Baricz is the Librarian for Literature in English and Comparative Literature at Yale University Library. Her work has appeared *in Sixteenth Century Journal*, *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* and other publications. As a literary translator, she is assistant editor and translator of *Romanian Writers on Writing* (2011) and *Exiled Shadow: A Novel* by Norman Manea (2023).

Elisabeth Bronfen is Professor Emeritus from the University of Zurich and Global Distinguished Professor at New York University. Her publications include *Night Passages: Philosophy, Literature, Film* (2013), *Crossmappings: On Visual Culture* (2018) and *Serial*

Shakespeare: An Infinite Variety of Appropriations in American TV Drama (2020).

Kinga Földváry is Associate Professor at the Institute of English and American Studies at Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Hungary. Her main research interests include problems of genre in film adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, twentieth- and twenty-first-century British literature, and theories of visual and popular culture. She has published widely in journals and essay collections; she is the author of *Cowboy Hamlets and Zombie Romeos: Shakespeare in Genre Film* (2020). Currently she is working on a comprehensive survey of Hungarian Shakespeare film adaptations, supported by the Hungarian National Research, Development and Innovation Office (NKFI-142603).

Sarah Hatchuel is Professor of Film and Media Studies at the University Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3 (France) and former president of the Société Française Shakespeare. She has written extensively on adaptations of Shakespeare's plays (*L'Ecran shakespearien*, 2022; *Shakespeare and the Cleopatra/Caesar Intertext: Sequel, Conflation, Remake*, 2011; *Shakespeare, from Stage to Screen*, 2004; *A Companion to the Shakespearean Films of Kenneth Branagh*, 2000) and on TV series (*The Leftovers: le troisième côté du miroir*, 2019; *Rêves et séries américaines: la fabrique d'autres mondes*, 2015; *Lost: Fiction vitale*, 2013). She is general coeditor of the CUP *Shakespeare on Screen* collection and of the online journal *TV/Series*.

Isabel Karremann is Professor of Early Modern Literature at the University of Zurich. She is the author of *The Drama of Memory in Shakespeare's History Plays* (2015) and the general editor of *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* (since 2022). She has co-edited essay collections on Shakespeare and early modern drama, among them *Shakespeare in Cold War Europe: Conflict, Celebration, Commemoration* with Erica Sheen (2016) and, with Jonathan Baldo, *Forms of Faith: Literary Form and Religious Conflict in Shakespeare's England* (2017) and *Memory and Affect in Shakespeare's England* (2023). She is editor of *Shakespeare/Space* for the Arden Shakespeare Intersections Series (The Arden Shakespeare, 2024). Her current research explores the spatial, cognitive, affective and perceptual ecologies of early modern drama.

Jonas Kellermann is Assistant Professor of British Studies at the University of Konstanz. He studied English Philology and Theatre Studies at Freie Universität Berlin and the University of Edinburgh and received his PhD from the University of Konstanz in 2020. He is the author of *Dramaturgies of Love in Romeo and Juliet: Word, Music, and Dance* (2021) and a recipient of the Martin Lehnert Prize by the German Shakespeare Association. At the moment, he is preparing a second monograph on *Queer Spectralities in Contemporary Anglophone Novels*. His work has appeared in several journals, including *Cahiers Élisabéthains*, *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, *Critique* and *Adaptation*.

Claudia Olk is chair of English and Director of the Shakespeare Library at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München. Until 2019 she was chair of Comparative Literature at the Peter Szondi Institute of the Freie Universität Berlin and Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and the Humanities. Her main fields of research are Medieval and Renaissance Literature, Shakespeare Studies as well as Modernism. She is a member of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences and Humanities and served as President of the German Shakespeare Society from 2014 to 2023. Her publications include *Travel and Narration: The Development of Fiction in Late Medieval and Renaissance Travel Narratives (1999)*, *Virginia Woolf's Aesthetics of Vision (2014)* and *Shakespeare and Beckett: Restless Echoes (2023)*. Her edition of one of Virginia Woolf's hitherto unpublished manuscripts was published in 2013 by the British Library.

Stephen O'Neill is Associate Professor in English, National University of Ireland, Maynooth. He is the author of *Staging Ireland* (2007), *Shakespeare and YouTube* (The Arden Shakespeare, 2014) and a range of publications on adapted Shakespeare. He co-edited *The Arden Research Handbook of Shakespeare and Adaptation* (The Arden Shakespeare 2022).

Christina Wald is Professor of English Literature and Literary Theory and Director of the Centre for Cultural Inquiry at the University of Konstanz. She previously taught at the Universities of Cologne and Augsburg, the Humboldt-Universität Berlin and Harvard University. Her research focuses on contemporary drama, performance, film and TV series, as well as on early modern drama and prose fiction, with a particular interest in questions of adaptation, intertextuality

and cultural transmission. She is the author of *Hysteria, Trauma and Melancholia: Performative Maladies in Contemporary Anglophone Drama* (2007); *The Reformation of Romance: The Eucharist, Disguise and Foreign Fashion in Early Modern Prose Fiction* (2014); and *Shakespeare's Serial Returns in Complex TV* (2020). She has co-edited several books, among them *The Literature of Melancholia: Early Modern to Postmodern* (2011). Her work has appeared in journals including *Shakespeare Survey*, *Shakespeare*, *Shakespeare Bulletin, Modern Drama, Adaptation, The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* and *Classical Receptions Journal*.

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Elisabeth Bronfen and Christina Wald

Introduction

Theorizing Shakespeare's seriality

Elisabeth Bronfen and Christina Wald

'Sometimes one has the impression that Shakespeare has in fact written three or four plays and kept repeating the same themes in different registers and keys', Jan Kott observed in his landmark study *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (1975: 171). As Kott and others have noted but never discussed in detail, Shakespeare can be regarded as a serial writer interested in revisiting his own writing from new angles, in new constellations and in new genres. Using the works of previous authors as well as replicating the works of rival theatre companies, he placed his plays in an adaptational network that has grown significantly ever since and now includes all Shakespearean adaptations written, performed and filmed across centuries and art forms. This network allows for serial readings that explore the ways in which Shakespeare's plays were adapted in a serial manner, that is, in patterns of repetition with variation that invite comparison, often in a way that sheds light on the serial dramaturgies of the plays and between the plays. This volume examines seriality in this twofold sense, as a particular form of (self-)adaptation and as a method of serial reading that establishes intertextual and intermedial links.

Reading for seriality sharpens our awareness of the ways Shakespeare's plays make use of internal contrastive correspondences and repetitive sequences within each individual text as well as between the plays, but also between Shakespeare's oeuvre and its subsequent adaptations, appropriations and remediations in different historical moments and different aesthetic media. As a new formalist method, serial reading draws attention to the way each play not only gives shape to cultural, political, psychological and aesthetic concerns but also gives shape to these *again*, thus producing something different in the process. As Umberto Eco has argued, seriality is characterized by a 'dialectic between repetition and innovation' (1985: 175), and for serial storytelling, this means that repetition has to be transformed into novelty. This dramaturgical challenge 'on closer inspection turns out to be a core problem of modernity itself: the problem of renewing something by duplicating it' (2017: 29), as Frank Kelleter has pointed out. Shakespeare's plays, written at the onset of many developments that shape our late modern, late capitalist, postcolonial and pre-apocalyptic present moment, lend themselves to a serial reactivation also for this reason: they allow for a self-referential revisiting of modernity's core characteristics, its past and its potential futures. Vice versa, locating serial patterns in Shakespeare's oeuvre means identifying the early modern forerunners of an aesthetics that has often been understood as the hallmark of modernity in response to the industrialized production and distribution of serial products, the standardization of everyday life by patterns of seriality, and the rising importance of seriality in the natural sciences. As the chapters on early modern seriality in this volume demonstrate, self-referential revisiting was already part of historiographical and dramaturgical practice in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Serial reading, therefore, entails a two-way hermeneutic approach. By serially mapping various Shakespeare plays onto each other, as well as onto other contemporary dramatic works and later historical refigurations, the readings produced are themselves performative. To revisit the plays serially means thinking together repetition and difference, the historical and the contemporary, the theatrical and the cinematic. If every part of a series is reconfigured by the continuation of the series, then Shakespeare's seriality tells us a lot about how both later adaptations and our academic engagement with his plays change the plays themselves.

Reading Shakespeare serially means to look at repetitions as the creation of difference (Bronfen, Frey and Martyn 2016: 9). Douglas Lanier has described this transformative effect of serialization as a question of mutual projection: 'every adaptation actively projects – rather than passively reflects – its source(s), after which the adaptor can then strike a particular attitude – reverent, ambivalent, revisionary, hostile – towards that projected source' (2017: 299). This transformation of the earlier or first part of the series by its later parts is, however, not only an effect of the adaptor's work but also of the observer's activity, who perceives and interprets such a series. Since every adaptation changes our view of its serial predecessor, '[s]trictly speaking, and by definition, the work does not precede its variations in a clearly identifiable way', as Maurizio Calbi has argued for Shakespearean returns in twenty-first-century film (2013: 7). Serial reading can also establish links between Shakespeare's plays and later works that have not been noted before and that are not signalled in any explicit way, as we can see in the current debate about the border between Shakespeare and 'not Shakespeare' in adaptation studies (Desmet, Loper and Casey 2017) and the status of 'found adaptations' (Cartmell and Whelehan 2010: 18), 'unmarked adaptations' (Lanier 2017: 300), or 'non-adaptations' (Mallin 2019).

Thus, serial reading not only investigates a given series but itself establishes a series in acts of serialization that enable a comparative analysis of the parts. As Simon Rothöhler has pointed out in his introduction to theories of seriality, the series is to be understood as a process rather than a product or substance (2020: 14), and therefore, it makes intelligible not only the recurrence of forms but also their change. Its productive tension between repetition and variation is further enriched by the tension between continuity and discontinuity, relationality and distinction, the whole and its parts, redundancy and innovation, hierarchy and coequality, segmentation and sequencing, as well as stagnation, return and progress (Rothöhler 2020: 11–12; 14–15). Each act of serial reading will navigate this spectrum and explore the specific seriality of concrete case studies. Looking at Shakespeare's plays and their afterlives in their specific contexts, our volume is dedicated to the interplay of aesthetic and epistemic or theoretical forms of seriality.

Because *Shakespeare and Seriality* is interested in cross-pollinations when reading the historical and the contemporary

together across art forms, it covers a broad historical range, starting with Shakespeare as a serial writer in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and ending with complex TV serial dramas of the twenty-first century. Its three main sections on 'Reading Shakespeare Serially', 'Performing Shakespeare Serially' and 'Televising Shakespeare Serially' connect the early modern and the modern. Thus, for instance, chapters on Shakespeare's serial writing read Shakespeare's texts with psychoanalytical theory and look at how James Joyce's and Samuel Beckett's modernist aesthetics return to and unfold Shakespeare's serialities. In our section on serial Shakespeare performances, we bring together an exploration of how audiences may have watched plays serially in early modern London with later theatrical experiments of serializing the plays, either by presenting them as sequels or by staging them in a serialized form, as successive instalments, that probes into the multiple meanings created by a changing cast. The chapters in 'Televising Shakespeare Serially' ask how, with this performance and publication history in mind, the complex TV series of the twenty-first century not only create new adaptations but also allow us to read Shakespeare's plays in a different light.

Our approach thus follows the work of scholars like Nicholas Grene, Emma Smith, and Tara L. Lyons who use current serializations of the history plays as a starting point of historical inquiry. Thus, Grene opens his study *Shakespeare's Serial History Plays* with an account of his experience of watching the BBC broadcast of *The Wars of the Roses*, an adaptation of the three *Henry IV* parts and *Richard III*, to ask whether Shakespeare's histories might have had a comparable impact on their original audiences (2002: 1–2). Smith explores the 1960s TV series *An Age of Kings* for its 'reciprocal relations between Shakespeare, serialization, and popular culture in the 1590s and the 1960s' (2007: 134) and shows how 'the juxtaposition of "Shakespeare" and "serialization" enables us to articulate some significant questions about narrative production and consumption in the sixteenth and twentieth centuries' (2007: 147). If contemporary theatre practice and TV drama privilege a serial conception of these plays, a historical perspective draws into focus how they may also have been popular as individual plays before they were launched as a series in the 1623 Folio edition. It also shows that they need to be understood in the larger theatrical sphere, in particular the 'interplay between the rival companies,

[which] suggests that the broader serial of English history on stage was not constructed around a single author or playing space, and that, for early modern audiences, consuming plays across these categories was a more usual form of theatrical spectatorship' (Smith 2007: 141). However, there is also ample evidence that the histories were conceived and received in a serial manner before their Folio publication, as indicated by the titles of the Quarto editions such as *The First Part of the Contention betwixt the Two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster*. Lyons has argued that 'the principles of seriality and historicity, and not authorship, largely motivated' the variety of dramatic collections that preceded The First Folio (2012: 187). As she explains, serialization was driven by economic factors. Book sellers found that by marketing these plays as prequels and sequels, they were able to convince customers to return to their bookstalls and buy new instalments of serial historical drama, much as this serialization also drew audiences back to the theatres for new performances. Adam G. Hooks makes a similar claim for the way serial publication produced Shakespeare as a brand. As he notes, once Shakespeare's 'plays had been shown to be profitable, his name could be recognized and exploited as a marketing tactic' (2016: 136).

However, as the considerable work in repertory studies has shown, the order in which early modern audiences watched plays is far from certain: each audience member would have experienced specific serial effects depending on the order in which they saw particular plays. As Eoin Price has put it, it is very probable that many theatregoers saw plays 'out of order' due to the current revivals in the repertory system, watching imitative plays before their models and hence perceiving the earlier plays as repetitive or imitative (2022: 161). What is more, repertory studies have pointed out that some recurring features of plays were perhaps less due to the serial writing methods of particular authors, but more to practices of particular companies (cf. Rutter 2008; Kuhn 2017; Tavares and Johnson 2022). The engagement with Shakespeare both as a marketable brand and as modern myth as well as the reversal of origin and copy are at the heart of many of the chapters that look at how Shakespeare's plays were and can be read serially, how they were staged and keep being staged serially and how they are reimagined for specific sociopolitical concerns and aesthetic predilections in current TV series.

Reading Shakespeare serially

The first section, 'Reading Shakespeare serially', discusses Shakespeare as a serial writer who not only recycled works by others but also revisited his own earlier writing in his plays, thus establishing serial reconfigurations across his oeuvre. For instance, Richard P. Wheeler has argued that

> the development of Shakespeare's art is repetitive. . . . There is nothing like a clear, linear progression from one work to another or from early work to late. As in the development of the human psyche, nothing is ever just left behind in Shakespeare's art. From the *Comedy of Errors* and the early history plays to *The Tempest* and beyond, characteristic themes, conflicts, relationships, configurations of desire and frustration and fear are repeated over and over again. But nothing is ever just repeated either. Instead we can watch his art finding new possibilities in old configurations, and renewing the basis on which the old configurations exist. (2001: 296–7; see also Bronfen 2018)

Russ McDonald has shown for Shakespeare's late plays that his method of serialization included both the macro-level of plot elements like fraternal power struggle and the micro-level of single sounds that create a serialized 'sonic texture', which added to the impression that the 'late plays feel almost obsessively reiterative' (2009: 97). As these observations indicate, the plays themselves may invite us to develop a principle of serial reading that always works in both directions, making us read the earlier plays in the light of their later refigurations and vice versa. We take this method further to look at the adaptational series that we can identify in the vast adaptational network that has kept growing for more than four centuries. Given the twofold reading direction as well as the awareness that authors collaborated in writing, that company practices shaped the texts and that scripts may have been adapted in later revivals, serial reading does not aim to establish teleological thinking and value judgements that cherish Shakespeare's late writing as the culmination of his art (McMullan 2009). Rather than suggesting that Shakespeare's serial writing meant a process of perfection, this volume seeks to explore the multidirectionality of serial reading and the seriality effects created by specific readings.

The section's opening chapter by Elisabeth Bronfen elaborates her method of serial reading for an analysis of the serial patterns in Shakespeare's romance *Cymbeline*, which reworks the interest in secrets, secrecy and cryptomania that Bronfen already locates in his earlier plays *Twelfth Night* and *Romeo and Juliet*. While Bronfen thus offers a case study of how Shakespeare adapts and transforms his own earlier plays, Aleida Assmann's chapter chooses *Othello* to discuss the fundamental relation between the role of empathy and the serial patterns of storytelling in which it is enhanced. Desdemona's empathy is stimulated by Othello's stories, and this immersive listener craves not only for endless repetition but also adapts the fictional narrative by inventing for herself a series of new roles in which she can enter her imaginary world. She is thus akin to the readers of early modern romances that recycled well-known plot elements in repetition with variation.

The next chapter turns to the question of whether Shakespeare's historical dramas, usually, as discussed above, arranged in two tetralogies in posthumous printed editions, were conceived and received as serial in early modern London. As Grene has elucidated, Shakespeare's history plays explored dramaturgies of sequentialization in which 'no play was complete in itself' but required and advertised a 'narrative sequel' (2002: 21). In the interplay of repetition and variation, continuation and interruption, Shakespeare created 'a series that is chronologically continuous but formally discontinuous' (247). A serial reading of the history plays was endorsed by the First Folio publication that placed the plays in their sequential chronological order rather than in the order of their composition and that retitled the plays to emphasize the royal succession order (Smith 2007: 144–5). While, as Smith argues, 'a serial understanding of the history plays has become a theatrical norm' today, she draws attention to the way this goes back to the Folio's organization of the history plays 'as a specific intervention, not a natural reflection of authorial intention or readerly expectation' (2022: 4). As L. Monique Pittman has recently discussed, the serialized histories keep having relevance in the twenty-first century for the negotiation of race, gender and nationality (2002). Carla Baricz's chapter identifies two different principles of serialization in the tetralogies: while seriality in the *Henry VI* tetralogy is dominant and each play can be analysed as continuation and supplementation of the previous plays, Shakespeare in the later *Henry IV* tetralogy

pursues a strategy of serial rewriting that is more revisionary and focused on character rather than plot. Here, seriality is recessive rather than dominant.

As the final piece in this section that opens the discussion to adaptations by later authors, Claudia Olk's chapter traces how Joyce and Beckett adapted Shakespeare's writing for their own modernist poetic operations that created seriality as an important structural principle. Joyce and Beckett read Shakespeare serially to construct self-conscious and gendered intertextual genealogies for their works that retrospectively reactivate Shakespeare.

Performing Shakespeare serially

The theatre has developed its own ways of serializing Shakespeare's plays, which are explored in the second section on 'Performing Shakespeare serially'. Theatrical performance is an inherently serial art form for several reasons: Firstly, every theatrical production is repeated with differences on each occasion of performance. As Richard Schechner has put it, every performance consists of 'restored behaviour', so that '[p]erformance means: never for the first time. It means; for the second or the nth time. Performance is "twice-behaved behaviour"' (1985: 36). The relationship between origin and copy is equally unclear in theatrical performance as in any aesthetic series, since a production's particular performance aims at reproducing a non-existent original and can in turn become that new imaginary original: even though 'neither the play text, nor any script with production notes, nor the opening night's performance can be considered the "proper" or "original" performance which all subsequent shows are meant to imitate as perfectly as possible, all artists involved in a particular performance will orientate themselves according to such an illusionary original' (Wald 2007: 18), thus establishing a series with a shifting hierarchy. Marvin Carlson speaks of 'a potential, an ideal, or a remembered original model' that guides each theatrical performance and, thus, the serial replication (2004: 5). As typical of seriality, variation is almost as important as repetition here. As Herbert Blau has pointed out, each performance requires a sense of novelty or originality, which means, paradoxically, that 'it wouldn't be the same if it were only the same, it would be nothing but repetition, not as right as it

was, spontaneous, as when it happened for the first time' (2001: 28). Blau hence concludes that for serial theatrical performances, there is '*no first time,* no origin, but only recurrence and reproduction, whether improvized or ritualized, rehearsed or aleatoric, whether the performance is meant to give the impression of an unviolated naturalness or the dutiful and hieratic obedience to a code' (1987: 171).

Secondly, all theatrical performances of Shakespeare's plays are adaptations – they necessarily differ from the text versions, which themselves differ from the original series of performances. This means, as Margaret Jane Kidnie has pointed out for *Hamlet*, that 'in terms of ontology one can never say, in an absolute sense, what *Hamlet* is, or where one can find it: there is no thing that will always, forever, be *Hamlet*. This is quite different from saying there is no *Hamlet*. There is always a *Hamlet*' (2005: 117) – and it is always already a serialized *Hamlet*, we may add.

Thirdly, theatre history invites a comparative viewing of new productions in the light of previous realizations – and can make audiences think about alternative future realizations, that is, about the future continuation of a series. As Carlson has shown, theatre history turns every stage into a stage potentially 'haunted' by past characters, objects, conflicts and motifs in each new production. Since 'the recycled body of an actor . . . will almost inevitably in a new role evoke the ghost or ghosts of previous roles', casting can create its own effects of seriality in the theatre (Carlson 2008: 10). Classics like Shakespeare's plays are particularly prone to such spectral presences of influential productions of the past, with *Hamlet* possibly being 'the most haunted of all Western dramas' (Carlson 2008: 4). Such spectral relations can also be the incentive for serial readings, for example when Brian Cox, who has become famous for his portrayal of *King Lear* in the acclaimed production by the National Theatre in 1990, directed by Deborah Warner, takes over the part of Logan Roy in the current TV series *Succession*, which has been discussed as an adaptation of *King Lear* (Wald 2020; Bronfen 2023).

Isabel Karremann's opening chapter contextualizes Shakespeare's plays in their early modern serial practices of production and reception. It investigates serial performance practices in early modern London with a focus on the character of Falstaff as a serial figure. Situating Falstaff and the historical figure on which

he was modelled in the larger context of early modern writing for and beyond the theatre, her chapter explores the configuration of serial memory. Sarah Hatchuel's chapter turns to the question of what it means to theatrically or filmically reconfigure one play as the sequel of another play. Focusing on projects that present *Antony and Cleopatra* as the sequel of *Julius Caesar*, she identifies three different operations that she calls sequelization, serialization and conflation, which each create with specific dramaturgical and ideological effects for the plays' gendered plots. Jonas Kellermann turns to the inherently serial art form of ballet, which is particularly insightful for analysing the tension between preserving and reforming aesthetic traditions in repetitions with variation. His case study of Benjamin Millepied's staging of Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* at La Seine Musicale (2022) investigates what it means to queer *Romeo and Juliet* via casting actors of different genders for each night's performance. Asking, for instance, whether the same pose taken by a male-male, male-female or female-female couple has different meanings, his chapter tests which analytical and theoretical insights we can gain from bringing together seriality and ballet.

Televising Shakespeare serially

Even though it is the final section, serial adaptations of Shakespeare's plays in complex TV were in a way the starting point for our volume. As Richard Dyer has argued, television can be regarded as the 'apotheosis of seriality' (2000: 146), and in TV series, the 'compulsion to repeat effectively' (Davis 2007: 28) becomes a constitutive narratological technique that makes audiences aware of repetitions with differences as well as of effects of accumulation and (over)saturation. TV series that belong to the recent trend of 'complex TV' (Mittell 2015) are characterized by long narrative arcs, large budgets, high production standards, a cinematographic look, elaborate scripts written by teams of prestigious authors, casts that include well-known actors, and, above all, by narrative complexity and self-reflexivity. Drawing on cinematographic seriality's enhanced emotional attachment (Hudelet and Crémieux 2021: 1), they have left behind the 'soothing, ritualized seriality' typical of soap opera (Hills 2005: 190) and developed sophisticated experiments with serial accumulation, reversal and variation. Frequently, they are not

aired weekly by broadcasters but instead are available on demand on streaming platforms and pay-TV channels. In this regard, they have left behind the structuring of the everyday lives of their viewers, who can instead watch entire seasons in an uninterrupted flow, replay and pause scenes – for instance, for the highly attentive watching of forensic fandom – follow the links to actor profiles that are often embedded in the series, and share their views in fan forums. Given these new transmedial reception circumstances and the innovative, narratologically complex dramaturgies, current TV series have often been labelled as 'not'-TV, 'post-network' TV or as series 'after TV' or 'beyond television' (Leverette, Ott and Buckley 2008; Halskov 2021; Dunleavy 2018; Spigel and Olsson 2004).

As we have shown in our own monographs, serial TV Shakespeares can be considered the most thriving and culturally influential adaptational Shakespeare aggregate of the new millennium (Bronfen 2020 and Wald 2020; see also Greenhalgh 2022 for an excellent overview). Drawing on a number of genres, TV series have refigured Shakespeare's plays to investigate topical concerns like the corrosion of democracy and the influence of media moguls on policy-making, inequalities in late capitalism, the rise of right-wing terrorism, the challenges of A.I., Europe's postcolonial responsibilities, and the current state of (post-)feminism. Current complex TV series in turn invite us to read Shakespeare's plays serially, both by tracing hitherto unnoticed intertextual links between the early modern plays and their postmodern adaptations – frequently via film and popular culture of the twentieth century – and by looking at the plays in the light of the serial patterns of outbidding, repetition with variation, accumulation and dramaturgical reversal that we have grown familiar with in current TV series. These series also invite us to think differently about Shakespeare audiences, who might better be understood as active 'users' (Fazel and Geddes 2017) or even co-creators, given the responsive scripts or 'evolving narratives' (Kelleter 2017) of TV series that take into account audience reactions and creative dramaturgical projections as developed in the various fan forums spawned by each TV series. Sometimes, as Matt Hills has shown, fans rework the serial features of the narratives in acts of 'collapsed seriality' that transform the slowly accumulating, multi-stranded and sometimes disorientating narratives of the TV series into spatially organized maps or encyclopaedia. A second fan strategy is 'navigated seriality', which focuses on particular strands

of the narrative and leaves out others, thus changing seriality via editing and 're-sequencing' (2005: 197). Others 'teleologise' seriality by re-interpreting previous episodes and seasons as the preparation of the ending, thus investing random circumstances that impacted the series' development with a deeper meaning (Hills 2005: 199–200).

The section's opening chapter by Stephen O'Neill discusses what we can learn from the selective Shakespeareanisms in the TV series *Succession* for adaptation theory and for our methods of locating and exploring Shakespearean intertexts. Exploring how *Succession* repeats with a difference, creating its own serial Shakespeare aesthetics and eliciting further seriality effects in online cultures, the chapter presents three forms of serial reactivations in and via *Succession*: Shakespeare as cipher, as ideology and value and as ontology. Kinga Földváry analyses the strategies of serial appropriation in *Shakespeare & Hathaway: Private Investigators*. She argues that the comedic crime series uses textual poaching in a manner that reflects on Shakespeare's own poaching from earlier authors and on the methodological challenges that any serial reading encounters. Christina Wald's chapter discusses how the TV miniseries *Station Eleven* imagines Shakespearean reactivations after a flu pandemic causes the end of the world as we know it. With a particular interest in psychoanalytic and ecocritical concepts of repetition compulsions as serialized forms of acting out and working through, the chapter links serial TV Shakespeare to cultural theories of serialization and asks about their political significance to (re)think the future beyond harmful repetitions of the past.

The post-apocalyptic TV series *Station Eleven* depicts an end and a new beginning – and for our collection, it likewise constitutes the finale and yet points to future potentials and alternative worlds of research on Shakespeare and seriality. The miniseries takes its title not only from the novel *Station Eleven* by the Canadian author Emily St. John Mandel, but also from the work of Mandel's fictional author figure called Miranda, who writes a graphic novel called 'Station Eleven' shortly before the global collapse of modernity. In the post-apocalyptic world, this graphic novel becomes a resource for several characters who draw on it as practical advice for survival and meaning-making and who derive aesthetic solace from its visuality in a time after cinema and TV. As Wald's chapter argues, not only the author's

name, Miranda, but also the graphic novel's action that explores possible futures after severe damage suggests an affinity to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Thus, while this collection contains no specific chapter on Shakespearean graphic novels, their cultural presence is registered in serial TV dramas in a transmedial manner. As current research has shown, graphic novels are a particularly vibrant cultural site for serial rewritings and serial readings of Shakespeare plays. For instance, Emma Hayley has shown that for artists working under the umbrella of *Manga Shakespeare* in the last decades, the gender-bending and the focus on double heroines in *Twelfth Night* and *The Merchant of Venice* have been a vital source of inspiration (2010). Shakespeare also holds a privileged position in Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* serial comic novels, in which his plays are used as 'pliable elements of mythology within a narrative of many, rather than as discrete and inflexible texts for translation', as Josh Heuman and Richard Burt have argued (2002: 162–3). Kevin Wetmore draws attention to the mutual influence between theatrical performance and graphic novels that require transmedial serial readings: comic books in the series *Classics Illustrated*, created by Albert Kanter, conceived themselves as the gateways to mature literature, hoping to encourage young readers to seek out the original texts or their theatrical performance. The way in which Shakespeare was reconceived in these comics, in turn, explicitly made use of famous theatrical productions, such as Laurence Olivier's film version of *Hamlet*, so that the linkage between different popularizations of this tragedy itself attests to seriality: 'the movie, inspired by the play, shapes the comic that is adapted from the same play' (Wetmore 2006: 176).

In addition to graphic novels, there are, of course, other contemporary media for future research in Shakespeare and seriality, such as video games and AI-generated literature. Here, too, we can expect a melange of transmedial influences and investments, along with transformations and mutations to emerge. And yet, Terence Hawkes' famous assertion 'Shakespeare doesn't mean: we mean by Shakespeare' remains applicable (1992: 5). If his plays are used by us to generate meaning, banking on his cultural authority and his brand, then he also continues to mean owing to the serial appropriations as well as serial readings of his work, in the past and in contemporary culture.

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I

Reading Shakespeare serially

Shakespeare as serial writer and serial rewritings of Shakespeare

1

Shakespeare's serial secrets

Cymbeline, *Twelfth Night* and *Romeo and Juliet*

Elisabeth Bronfen

Secrets outbid each other in *Cymbeline*. Several characters change their names so as to cover up their true identity and don clothes that disguise either their lineage or their sex. Other characters undertake clandestine actions and successfully become secret accusers, while still others involve themselves in conspiracies that will lead to their own demise. Serial encryption is, however, at work in yet another sense. In this late romance, Shakespeare recycles his earlier plays, as though he were compelled to repeat over and again an enactment of the fascination secrecy holds for his dramatic personae and for his audience. The banished hero Posthumus reiterates Romeo, though the parents in the earlier tragedy do not know about the clandestine wedding that has taken place. While the murderous lust which the slander against his wife inspires in the duped husband recalls *Othello*, the news of Innogen's faked demise immediately produces a sudden shift from demonization to idealization, refiguring the dark comedies *Much Ado about Nothing* and *All's Well That Ends Well*. Innogen, in turn, reclaims Viola's strategy of deception in *Twelfth Night*, when, in the final

scene of the play, she holds back the revelation of who she is until everyone on stage has discovered all the ways in which she has been abused. Indeed, as Brian Gibbons has argued, *Cymbeline* 'constitutes a kind of oblique, perhaps even secret, commentary on his personal history as a writer; it is a history within a history' (1993: 23).

In this chapter, I propose reading *Cymbeline* together with two earlier works – *Twelfth Night* and *Romeo and Juliet* – so as to draw into focus how the late romance transforms previous dramatic constellations revolving around the issue of shared secrets. A serial reading could have included the obsession with secrets in *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure* as well. For the purpose of this chapter, however, what I am concerned with by focusing only on three plays is drawing attention to correspondences that are rendered visible once this common thematic constellation has been established. At issue, in other words, isn't merely noting similarities and differences between the three plays. Rather, predicated on the isolation of the way secrecy produces a relationship between them, I want to ask about the signification that this allows me to find in the individual texts once the focus is on the way they can be seen to be in dialogue with each other; even if this is a dialogue, I am proposing as much as one intended by Shakespeare himself. My reading is, furthermore, self-consciously a psychoanalytic discussion. I do not treat the plays in relation to stage history, nor to theatrical performance. I am also not considering the plays in their chronological order and instead in the way that three genres – comedy, tragedy and romance – make use of an obsession with secrets. In other words, I treat these plays as literary texts, discussed through the lens of a set of theoretical concepts, most notably the methodology I have developed called crossmapping. With this critical term, I propose assembling the three plays into a series predicated on the common concern with secrecy, withholding information and the final disclosure.[1] Tracking the seriality at work in these plays has, thus, to do with the heuristic and the aesthetic value such self-citation affords. In this, I follow Stanley Cavell's proposal to read Shakespeare's romantic comedies in relation to a set of comedies in classic Hollywood.[2] Following his comparative reading practice, I am not only interested in detecting similarities between the three plays. Rather, having isolated aspects of the thematic constellation they share, my concern lies in thinking through the variations each play introduces into this series.

Given the discovery of the thematic concern with secrets which these three plays share, the question becomes what the consequences of reading them serially might be. What differences must be taken into account? What is the dramaturgic gain furnished by the variations and transformations? My wager is that reading for seriality sharpens our awareness for the way these plays thrive on form memory. At the same time, if *Cymbeline* contains an aesthetically formalized reiteration of the previous plays it invokes, reading the other two plays with the recycling afforded to them in this late romance in mind invites us to perform what Mieke Bal calls a 'preposterous' reading (1999).[3] Taken as a series, thus my claim, these plays mutually inflect the significance one can draw from them, as one thinks together repetition and difference, the single play and the set it is part of, as well as the distinction between romance, tragedy and comedy. Indeed, crossmapped in such a way that they are read as a series, one can take note of the way the comedy *Twelfth Night* stops before the knowledge withheld can have fatal consequence, while the romance *Cymbeline* continues beyond what might be a tragic outcome. This, in turn, raises questions about why, in the tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*, the lethal drive of secrecy is preserved until a resolution of the strife must, necessarily, come too late for the star-crossed lovers.

The theatrical charm of cryptomania

Before looking at these three plays in more depth, it is fruitful to address wherein, methodologically, the literary effect of an excessive use of secrets lies. Let me recall that, in all cases, secrets are a source of power. They allow those in the know to keep knowledge hidden from others and, because of the dissimulation and deception this entails, to manipulate and control those who are not privy to this information. So as to better describe the persistence with which secrecy is deployed in Shakespeare's plays, I have coined the critical term cryptomania, which I understand as a euphoric obsession with keeping something hidden. In so doing, I am self-consciously reformulating the psychoanalytic term kleptomania, which refers to a recurrent urge to steal without regard for need or profit. Along with the piece of information that is kept hidden, what is also endowed with psychic energy is the act of keeping something to oneself.

Cryptomaniacs not only enjoy a secret to such a degree that they passionately cling to it. Rather, experiences and actions gain in significance because they are all thought to be related to this intimate knowledge. At the same time, an obsession with secrets is predicated on ambivalence. The special power it affords, as Arnaud Lévy argues, may be precious and the source of a sense of empowerment, but can also be dangerous and a source of shame (1976: 120). Furthermore, as confidential as a secret may be, it is also an unstable possession. Secrets are fiercely protected because one can imagine that they might be discovered. In fact, one often even longs for their disclosure. As such, secrets always imply the presence of someone else, whom one assumes to be interested in the information one is withholding.

The pleasure that cryptomania affords can, thus, lie either in refusing to share secret knowledge, by keeping others in the dark, or in turning another person into a confidant. Making another person privy to one's secret is tantamount to an exclusive pact. The entrusted knowledge is not a gift, but a possession, which is deposited with the chosen person. Given that the others are not allowed to disclose the secret without explicit permission to do so, this pact involves three positions: the person who harbours a secret makes those whom he or she confides in into accomplices. This clandestine alliance is consolidated by the fact that a third group of people are explicitly excluded owing to their ignorance.[4] This triadic structure, in turn, explains the appeal of cryptomania. Scenes revolving around clandestine actions render visible how secret information moves from one character to the next, engendering ever more secrecy. Therein lies their potential for seriality. Both the monologues, in which figures give voice to their innermost thoughts, as well as the asides in which characters reveal information that others are not meant to hear, make those who are included in this exchange special by virtue of the exclusion.

Given that Shakespeare's plays such as *Hamlet* or *Measure for Measure* often make use of surreptitious surveillance as a dramaturgic strategy to reflect on the world as theatre, there is another aspect to this tripartite positioning of dramatic characters in the game of shared secrets. The pact with the audience or reader attributes to them exclusive knowledge. They are implicitly allowed to eavesdrop on all the secrets that circulate. Sometimes the characters address the audience directly with their monologues

or asides, letting them know that they are privy to their presence. In contrast to the audience, however, they never have access to the entire dramatic scheme. The actors and actresses know that the audience is initiated into the knowledge around which all the clandestine action on stage revolves. The dramatic characters they portray, however, usually know nothing of this bond. When we read the plays, this dimension falls away, or rather, we are asked to imagine this exchange. At the same time, the spectators or readers not only enjoy the concealments, the deceptions and the deceit being put on display. They also enjoy the act of surveillance, which allows them to participate in this game as invisible spectators with impunity. They know that they will never be discovered. The fact that Shakespeare's own serial return to secrets is predicated on variations and transformations, however, raises a further question, namely one relating to genre. In line with my methodology of crossmapping, one might ask: what differences are drawn into focus when one analyses how a late romance engages with cryptomania in explicit connection with the way an obsession with secrets is also deployed in the form of a comedy and a tragedy? When is the disclosure of secrets fatal, when can fatality be avoided and when can it be transformed into survival and reconciliation? These questions entail the heuristic gain serial reading affords.

A lover's game of hide-and-seek in *Twelfth Night*

In Shakespeare's oeuvre, the romantic confusion around which the comedies revolve relies on the power of secrecy.[5] Some characters insist on keeping their desires hidden, fearing that revealing their true feelings to the wrong person would be embarrassing. Revealing one's innermost self to another can be painful and dangerous, much as trying to read the emotions of the person one has fallen in love with can be treacherous. Characters also keep their intimate desires to themselves because they are yet uncertain or ambivalent about them. Cryptomania emerges as a useful shield, opening up a space for self-interrogation, testing and negotiation. It can, furthermore, also serve as the catalyst in a marriage plot, as in the comedy *Twelfth Night*. Secrecy allows two of the heroines to use their wit and their self-reliance, so as to gain the husbands they have chosen

for themselves: Viola, whom a shipwreck compels to take her fate into her own hands, and Maria, who has been plotting a revenge drama for some time.

The repetition of secret actions begins when Viola, who fears that her brother has drowned, asks the captain, who has followed her on shore, for masculine attire: 'Conceal me what I am, and be my aid / For such disguise as haply shall become / The form of my intent' (*TN* 1.2.50–3). Disguised as a page, she wants to serve at the court of Duke Orsino. For her scheme to work, she requires mutual secrecy. She asks the captain, whom she puts in charge of the clothes she was wearing on the ship, 'shape thou thy silence to my wit' (1.2.58) and he assures her, 'be you [Orsino's] eunuch, and your mute I'll be' (1.2.59). The secret on which her transformation into the page Cesario is based requires a confidante, while she alone will decide when to reveal the two aspects of her identity – her noble parentage and her femininity.[6]

Viola's cross-dressing allows her to keep another secret to herself as well. She has fallen in love with Orsino, even though he dispatches her as his love messenger to the countess Olivia, who has so far spurned him. The duke openly confides in his page, confessing to Cesario: 'I have unclasped / To thee the book even of my secret soul' (1.4.13–4). Orsino thus initiates another person into his innermost feelings, who keeps two things from him – her sex and her desire for him. The proxy courtship she undertakes in his name also entails a double dissimulation. On the one hand, Cesario confronts Olivia not as a woman of her own rank but as a young servant. On the other hand, she also covers up the emotional conflict into which her cross-dressing has plunged her. She is courting in coded language, wooing for the man she herself wants to wed.

This crisscrossing of desire is further heightened by the fact that Olivia has fallen in love with the page. The coded language that Cesario deploys to gain the countess's confidence hints not only at her deceptive external appearance but also implies that each of the two women is withholding something from the other. When Oliva asks Cesario whether he is an actor, the latter assures her, 'I am not that I play' (1.5.179), only to add soon thereafter: 'What I am and what / I would are as secret as maidenhead: to your ears, / divinity; to any other's, profanation' (1.5.209–11). The first part of her self-declaration gestures towards the theatrum mundi so often referred to in Shakespeare's plays to indicate that everyone is acting

their designated roles. It also hints at the seriality involved when the performance of an identity explicitly names itself as such. To declare that one is not the role one is playing means that the current role could be exchanged for others over and again. The double entendre of the second part of Viola's self-declaration, in turn, suggests that what she has to relate in her function as a cross-dressed messenger is so intimate that it is meant only for Olivia's ears. At the same time, she implicitly suggests that her identity ('what I am') and her desire ('what I would') concern a hidden intimacy ('secret as maidenhead'), which, were it to be discovered by the wrong person, would violate her integrity.

Viola emerges as the perfect messenger of love because she is the only one who can see through the coded language with which all three lovers obliquely express their secret desires. She aptly sums up the romantic conundrum her deceptive appearance in Illyria has engendered: 'My master loves her dearly, / And I, poor monster, fond as much on him, / And she, mistaken, seems to dote on me' (2.2.33–5). Until the final act, however, she opts for deferral, famously claiming: 'O time, thou must untangle this, not I. / It is too hard a knot for me t'untie' (2.2.40–1). At the same time, her secrecy is a catalyst for sustaining the cryptomania of the other two lovers. In *Twelfth Night*, the intensity of desire is not only heightened by withholding information. In their relationship with Cesario, both the duke and the countess also dupe themselves – Orsino tells himself that he loves a woman who spurns him; Olivia tells herself that she has fallen in love with a male page. In so doing, they keep the true object of their desire a secret from themselves.

Viola's refusal to intervene draws the allure of cryptomania into focus. She could unravel the love entanglements without endangering herself, but she doesn't because her power over others resides in her keeping them in the dark. With her silence, she embodies the principle of continuation, on which the dramatic tension is predicated. Because the others are players in a drama she is directing, she can determine the duration of the romantic game of hide-and-seek she has set in motion. At the same time, she serves as the point of connection to the parallel series of events – the play's internal seriality – which offer an ironic commentary on the dissimulation in which she has involved the duke and the countess. In this second clandestine courtship, Maria is the one who directs the performance. In contrast to Viola, she not only has several

accomplices. The trick she has devised for Malvolio is also part of the courtship between her and Sir Toby, who, enraptured by her acumen, calls her 'thou most excellent / devil of wit' (2.5.199–200). He will marry her at the end of the play.

Olivia's gentlewoman has discovered that Malvolio, the steward, harbours secret desires for his mistress and she uses this to shame the strict Puritan for constantly interfering with the inebriated fun which Sir Toby and his drinking buddies indulge in. She is able to stage a scene which exposes Malvolio's pious austerity as a pose because she is privy to the steward's vain secret fantasies. Able to forge her mistress's handwriting, she composes an encrypted love letter, of which she says it is 'so crammed, as he thinks, with / excellencies that it is his grounds of faith that all that / look on him love him, and on that vice in him will my / revenge find notable cause to work' (2.3.145–8). Maria is sure that, although the letter has no addressee, Malvolio will assume that it is meant for him, and drop it at a spot on the garden path where he likes to walk. To enhance the theatrical allure of cryptomania, she also plants her friends in a box-tree close by so that they can observe the effect that the letter has on their unwitting victim.

Malvolio is, indeed, immediately convinced that the encrypted love confession can only be meant for him. One might speculate that the Puritan so guilelessly falls for Maria's ruse because his daydreams are his undoing. Infatuated with the idea that there is an unspoken bond between him and the countess, he enjoys the fact that the letter presents love as a secret: 'Jove knows I love, But who? Lips, do not move, no man must know' (2.5.95).[7] He needs the letter to be cryptic. Only then can he convince himself that, because he alone can decipher its message, he is in possession of his mistress's secret. His cryptomania allows him to tell himself that Olivia is communicating to him in writing what she does not dare say in public. He is oblivious to the fact that this vain delusion is nothing other than the product of his exuberant imagination. What he is also oblivious to is the fact that he has a hidden audience cruelly enjoying the disclosure of his intimate wishes and that Maria's comrades comment for the audience, or the reader, how Malvolio has been duped.

It is indicative of the humiliating exposure of his love fantasy that the effects of his misunderstanding are shown more than once. The internal seriality of the play has Sir Toby and his accomplices

gleefully give Maria an account of how Malvolio fell for their ruse. With her own commentary, Maria underscores the humiliation that has already been witnessed. Satisfied with her directorial talent, she, in turn, announces a continuation of Malvolio's embarrassment because she knows how much he will displease the countess by performing the role she had scripted for him:

> He will come to her
> in yellow stockings – and 'tis a colour she abhors – and
> cross-gartered – a fashion she detests – and he will
> smile upon her, which will now be so unsuitable to her
> disposition, being addicted to a melancholy as she is,
> that it cannot but turn him into a notable contempt'
>
> (2.5.192–7)

The internal seriality of the comedy, furthermore, also makes Olivia react exactly in the way her gentlewoman had predicted. The ironic play between knowing and not knowing is heightened by the fact that Maria, aware of the reason for Malvolio's strange behaviour, keeps this information to herself. The fact that Olivia, who is not in on the deception, says of his performance, 'this is very midsummer madness' (3.4.53), further assures Malvolio in his love fantasy. Her rejection seems to confirm what was announced to him in the love letter.

So as to sustain the steward's romantic self-deception, Maria, like Viola, also waits until the last act of the play to reveal her secret. Malvolio can persuade himself that 'everything adheres together / that no dram of a scruple, no scruple of a scruple, no / obstacle, no incredulous or unsafe circumstance – what / can be said! – nothing that can come between me / and the full prospect of my hopes' (3.4.75–9). The audience, or the reader, however, knows how illusory his expectations are. The stubbornness with which he clings to his secret fantasy is, thus, exposed as the counterpart to his religious strictness. At the same time, Malvolio's grotesque trust in the secret language of love holds a mirror up to the coded love talk, in which the countess and the duke speak to Cesario, exposing their self-deception as well.

Although Viola and Maria share a desire for secrets, there is an important distinction to be made. Both use their secret knowledge to get the husband they have chosen for themselves. Maria, however,

enjoys the cruelty inherent in the revenge she has on Malvolio. In his yellow stockings and cross-garters, he, in turn, offers a ridiculous variation on Viola's cross-dressing. While male attire offers her protection against external harm, his silly costume reveals his whimsical love-sickness to be an inversion of his sombre Puritan behaviour. Furthermore, while Viola's breeches allow her to hide her secret desire, his flamboyant attire brings his secret love fantasy out into the open. A comparison between the two masquerades renders visible Viola's own acumen. By postponing the revelation of her secret and instead repeatedly claiming, 'I am not what I am' (3.1.139), she successfully plays hide-and-seek with all those she deceives, even while she avoids the embarrassment of disclosing her desire for Orsino until she knows with certainty that it is mutual.

The final scene of revelation in Olivia's garden further delays the unravelling of the entangled love intrigue. Although Viola already discovers in the third act that her twin brother, Sebastian, has safely arrived in Illyria, she continues to remain silent about who she is. Before revealing herself, the priest must first testify to the clandestine marriage between Sebastian and Olivia, who mistook him for Cesario. Even the reunion with her twin brother is not enough for a full disclosure. Only after they have exchanged intimate information about their family – the birthmark on their father's forehead, his death on their thirteenth birthday – does Viola finally reveal herself. The dramatic closure, however, renders visible how they have all been drawn into the satisfaction which the sharing of secrets affords. Viola asks Sebastian, 'Do not embrace me till each circumstance / Of place, time, fortune do cohere and jump / That I am Viola – which to confirm / I'll bring you to a captain in this town, / where lie my maiden weeds' (5.1.247–51). When Viola's identity and that of her brother have been disclosed, Olivia is forced to recognize that she has married a stranger. Orsino, in turn, has no choice but to offer his hand to Viola. Yet as long as she doesn't get back her woman's weeds, he intends to continue to treat her as Cesario. The captain, to whom she gave these, however, has been imprisoned, owing to an ambiguous legal dispute with Malvolio and the latter leaves the stage in anger after Olivia clears up the trick Maria played on him. An official reunion with the brother and marriage with the duke are, thus, indefinitely deferred. It is up to the reader whether she or he takes this to be a sign of the spirit of carnival

prevailing past the twelfth night or as the perpetuation of collective cryptomania.

Fatal secrecy in *Romeo and Juliet*

Turning to *Romeo and Juliet*, I do so with Bal's notion of a preposterous reading in mind. I am looking at the tragedy through the lens of questions raised by the romantic entanglements sustained by a game of secrecy, which the comedy – which was written later – allowed me to raise. At issue are both the similarities and the difference this crossmapping affords. In this play, the need for clandestine actions is not triggered by an accident at sea, but rather by the long-standing dispute between the Capulets and the Montagues. Their love at first sight, which overwhelms Romeo and Juliet on the dance floor, compels them to transgress the interdiction of their parents and keep their violent desires hidden from them. The dissemblance they proceed to perform is overdetermined from the start, as though the intensity of their love required an excess of secrecy. At the end of the masked ball, Romeo hides in the garden in front of Juliet's bedroom and waits for her to appear on the balcony. She is initially unaware that she is being observed when she calls out to an imaginary Romeo, 'Deny thy father and refuse thy name, / Or, if though wilt not, be but sworn my love, / And I'll no longer be a Capulet' (*RJ* 2.2.34–6). After Romeo reveals himself to her, she is the one to point out the danger he faces if their love were discovered. At the same time, she does not want to hide her love from him and admits, 'I should have been more strange, I must confess, / But that thou overheard'st, ere I was ware, / My true-love passion' (2.2.102–3). The double urgency – on the one hand, the threat posed by both their parents, and on the other hand, the fact that she has unwittingly revealed herself to him – is what induces her to come up with the idea of a clandestine marriage. Unlike Viola, who is willing to allow fate to untangle the romantic dilemma she finds herself in, Juliet wants to direct her fortune. She brashly promises to send someone to Romeo the next morning, so that he might determine the place and time when their wedding shall take place.

Because these star-crossed lovers are compelled to involve others in their secret, their cryptomania draws ever wider circles.

Romeo lets Friar Laurence in on his secret, which triggers an internal repetition. The latter agrees to perform the marriage ceremony because he harbours a secret fantasy of his own. He tells himself, 'for this alliance may so happy prove, / To turn your households' rancour to pure love' (2.4.87–8). Juliet's nurse, having been turned into an accomplice as well, is not only willing to carry messages back and forth between the two star-crossed lovers, but also brings Juliet to the Friar's cell under false pretences. As in *Twelfth Night* the clandestine marriage takes place off stage. Saying 'we will make short work, / For, by your leaves, you shall not stay alone / Till holy church incorporate two in one' (2.6.35–7), Friar Laurence quietly leads the bride and groom away. Soon after, both Mercutio and Tybalt are killed on stage because the battle between the two houses is everything but a secret. Given that these killings result in Romeo's banishment, the dangerous game of secrecy, serving as the counterpart to the official feud, also continues.

After Juliet discovers that Romeo has fatally wounded her cousin in the duel, she announces to her nurse, 'I'll to my wedding bed / And death, not Romeo, take my maidenhead' (3.2.136–7). Sustaining the internal dramatic seriality, Friar Laurence devises yet another clandestine ruse so as to dissuade the distraught bride from her lethal desire. Together with Juliet's nurse, he devises a scheme that will allow the couple to enjoy their wedding night before the bridegroom leaves for Mantua. The consummation of the marriage vows allows the Friar to continue indulging in his secret reconciliation fantasy. He imagines how, after a certain time has passed, he will publicly announce the marriage and, after getting Romeo pardoned, have him recalled to Verona, thus ending the family feud once and for all. Yet fortune is working against him. Juliet's father, unaware of what has happened, wants to force his daughter to marry her cousin, Paris. In so doing, he triggers a final round of clandestine actions. Juliet performs a twofold dissimulation in front of her parents. She must pretend that she hates her own husband, even while finding an excuse not to marry her cousin. In the face of her desperate situation, she is once more overcome by a death wish. She assures the Friar, in whose cell she seeks refuge, that she will kill herself if he cannot find a way to reunite her with Romeo.

The extent to which a collective cryptomania has drawn everyone into its maelstrom is rendered visible by the fact that, in contrast to Viola, Juliet does not cross-dress as a page and flees to Mantua.

Instead, she allows herself to be involved in the last episode of the Friar's reconciliation fantasy. He gives her a sleeping potion that will make it look as though she had died during the night. Rather than escorting her to the wedding altar, her father will have her laid out in state in the family crypt. The Friar's secret plan is for Romeo to make his way there under the cover of night so that, once Juliet has awakened, the two of them can flee. This final fantasy is, however, so secret that neither the nurse nor Romeo's trusted friend are in the know. Because the letter in which Friar Laurence confides his scheme to Romeo doesn't arrive in time, the violent delights of the two star-crossed lovers ultimately find their violent ends. The family vault proves to be an apt setting for the apotheosis of their theatre of secrets. In the place where the remnants of her ancestors are preserved, Juliet becomes the bearer of a secret that will never be revealed. Romeo, having arrived too soon, believes she has died and poisons himself. There is no final conversation between the two lovers that would explain why he has, indeed, ended up as fortune's fool.

Friar Laurence continues to indulge one last time in his fantasy that he can still avert calamity. After Juliet awakens, he suggests to her that he could keep her hidden in his cell until he can find a place for her in a convent. But because everything is so secret, he does not dare stay with Juliet, who refuses to abandon her husband's corpse, leaving her once more alone with her dead. The voice of a guard in the distance compels her to stab herself with Romeo's dagger, so as to protect the intimacy of her love. Soon the Prince is called to the crime scene, along with the parents of the dead couple, but what Friar Laurence can tell them concerns only his involvement in the tragic events. The dead shroud themselves in eternal silence and refuse to allow the survivors to share in their secret. At their corpses, the series of deceptions and dissimulations has solidified into a mute façade.

Given that things could have turned out differently, one is tempted to ask: why do these two lovers so passionately desire the secrecy that will ultimately undo them? And one might answer: the collective cryptomania, into which they draw their accomplices, is the symptom of the civil war reigning in Verona. It is also an oblique critique of patriarchal power, which seeks to thwart the agency of the next generation. And it is a code for the triumph of the death drive as part and parcel of an erotic desire that, overdetermined as

it is in its dependency on secrets, was never aimed towards survival in the first place.

The recovery serial secrets afford: *Cymbeline*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Twelfth Night*

If *Romeo and Juliet* puts the fatal side of love as a secret on display, *Cymbeline* offers a recycling of this thematic concern, yet the seriality at issue in this shift from tragedy to romance also brings back into play the dramatic energy of the comedy *Twelfth Night*. Innogen is endowed with the same resilient will to self-determination that allows Viola to turn her fortune in her favour. To draw this into focus is the point of serial reading. In this late romance, the dramatic action begins after the secret marriage between Innogen and Posthumus has already taken place. Having discovered this, Cymbeline banishes his foster son and imprisons his daughter in his castle. While Juliet's father wants her to marry her cousin Paris because he knows nothing of her wedding vows, Cymbeline hopes to coerce his daughter into a second marriage with his son-in-law, Cloten. Read as a serial variation of *Romeo and Juliet*, the play reposes the question raised by the tragedy: what happens when a young couple which has violated the wishes of the bride's father exposes itself to his wrath instead of choosing suicide?

Lethal suspicion on the part of the bridegroom emerges as the inversion of this young couple's cryptomania. While Romeo never loses his trust in Juliet during his brief exile in Mantua, Posthumus soon begins to doubt his wife after having arrived in his Roman exile. He accepts Iachimo's wager, who proposes to travel to England to put Innogen's fidelity to the test. As proof of her deception, Iachimo promises to bring back the bracelet which Posthumus gave her as a parting gift. The dramatic irony consists in the fact that precisely because Innogen was willing to get married to him in secret, Posthumus can imagine that she could betray him as she did her father. In Rome, their wedding vows are replaced by a second pact, in which the bride is reduced to being an object of exchange between two men. Innogen, initially the confidante of Posthumus, is now transformed into the one who is excluded from the secret between him and Iachimo. *Cymbeline* thus speaks to another aspect of the ambivalence inherent in cryptomania. The trust on which

every clandestine pact is predicated can just as quickly turn into suspicion, as joy can turn into suffering and pride into shame.

Because he comes with a letter from Posthumus, in which the latter assures his wife that she can confide in this emissary, Iachimo succeeds in convincing Innogen to keep his trunk in her bedroom for one night, claiming that it contains precious jewels. Instead, he hides himself there and waits until Innogen has fallen asleep to fulfil his mission. Along with stealing the bracelet, he will become privy to a secret which will serve as unequivocal proof that he has enjoyed carnal knowledge with her. While scrutinizing her body, he discovers 'on her left breast a mole, cinque-spotted, like the crimson drops i'th'bottom of a cowslip' (*Cym* 2.2.38–40). After hearing Iachimo's description of this telltale mark, Posthumus, convinced of his wife's infidelity, cedes to him the ring Innogen had given him in parting.[8]

Posthumus' change of heart sets a further series of secrets in motion. Filled with a desire for revenge, he confides his murder scheme to his servant, Pisano, who has remained in England. So as to lure his wife away from her father's court, Posthumus falsely informs Innogen by letter that he has secretly returned to England and hopes to meet her. Pisano, who is to go there in his stead, however, changes sides and shows Innogen the letter in which her husband not only accuses her of infidelity but also commands him to murder her. The escape which Pisano devises for Innogen recycles two plays. Like the captain in *Twelfth Night*, he helps her cross-dress as a page, calling herself Fidele. If Pisano also swears himself to silence, he adds to this pledge a further ruse, which recalls the reconciliation fantasy of the Friar in *Romeo and Juliet*. He assures her that he will write Posthumus a letter about her alleged demise: 'I'll give but notice you are dead and send him / Some bloody sign of it, for 'tis commanded / I should do so. You shall be missed at court, / And that will well confirm it' (3.4.124–7).[9]

A serial reading of the three plays prompts me to speculate: Things could have derailed in *Twelfth Night*. Sebastian might have killed Olivia's kin in the duel Sir Toby instigates. Malvolio might have undertaken bodily revenge on those who tricked him, yet this outcome is averted. In the late romance, some deaths are not averted. Cloten is killed by one of the king's sons, and in despair, the queen kills herself. There is a moment when Innogen, taking the torso she finds out in the dunes to be that of her husband (because

Cloten has dressed himself up in Posthumus' clothes), might have killed herself – as Juliet does – but she is prevented from doing so. Posthumus, in turn, could have been slain in the battle between the Roman and the English troops, but he is not. Of all the secrets, only Iachimo's perfidious slander has dangerous effects, drawing out a murderous jealousy in Posthumus, which had hitherto been hidden even from himself. When, in the final scene, Fidele's identity is revealed along with that of Belarius, whom Cymbeline banished from his court because he, too, was falsely slandered, Posthumus is in a similar position as the king – forced to acknowledge that he preferred to believe his wife to have been faithless, as the latter had preferred to believe his courtier to be disloyal. Yet the consequences of none of these misunderstandings and betrayals are final.

Instead, as at the end of *Twelfth Night*, all those who gather before the King after the victory over the invading Roman army harbour secrets whose discovery requires a narrative delay. On the battlefield, Belarius was fighting under the false name, Morgan, which he gave himself so as to cover up his past life at court. He was also assisted by Cymbeline's two sons, whom he abducted when he went into exile and whom he has kept in the dark regarding their lineage. He is not the only one who does not reveal himself, even after Cymbeline knights him in gratitude for his valour. Fidele/Innogen also does not immediately give up her dissimulation. Although Cymbeline says of the page, 'His favour is familiar to me' (*Cym* 5.5.93), he does not recognize his daughter. For his part, Pisano, delighted to find his mistress alive, is willing to wait and see how things will develop, 'Since she is living, let the time run on to good or bad' (5.5.128). To read the play serially means drawing into focus how Innogen maintains her dissimulation because she needs Iachimo, who has also returned to England with the Roman troops, to reveal the secret on which alone the rehabilitation of her honour depends. She can only become Innogen again once her reputation as a virtuous wife has been restored.

As is the case with Viola, secrecy allows her to direct this scene of revelations, making sure that everything comes together as she intends it to do. She remains silent even after Iachimo has publicly admitted to having deceived and betrayed her credulous husband. She even waits until Posthumus, still disguised as a peasant, reveals his own identity and remorsefully calls himself a villain. She does not intervene until after he has declared the woman for

whose murder he still believes he is responsible to be 'my queen, my life, my wife' (5.5.226). That fact that she does so as Fidele renders visible the danger implicitly overshadowing the happiness her reunion with her husband promises. Like her father, Posthumus does not recognize her. Because she dares to interrupt him, he calls her a scornful page and strikes her so violently that she falls to the ground. Her intervention exposes the false pathos inherent in his belated idealization of his lost wife. It also once more evokes his murderous desire, which could only turn into mourning owing to the false information he received regarding her death. Reproaching his master, 'You ne'er killed Innogen till now' (5.5.231), Pisano finally reveals his own secret and discloses to all those who have watched the scene in wonder who is hidden beneath the page's cloths. With his confession, he also brings Belarius to finally reveal the true identity of the two young men who so courageously fought by his side.

To appreciate the reunion between Cymbeline and his children means recognizing how narrowly they escaped the tragic fatality of *Romeo and Juliet*. Innogen could twice have been killed by her husband, but she was able to survive both times. Her marriage can begin again because something remains secret between her and her husband – something which each cannot disclose to the other, something they know they are not confiding in each other. The peace treaty with the Romans is also predicated on withholding something. Encrypted in Cymbeline's declaration, 'Pardon's the word to all' (5.5.421) is what he leaves out, namely the second part of the Prince's judgement at the end of *Romeo and Juliet* with which he announces what is still to come: 'some shall be pardoned and some punished' (*RJ* 5.3.308). In keeping with the genre of romance, the tragic energy that is held in check in *Twelfth Night* and that prevails in *Romeo and Juliet* is contained – overcome and yet preserved. All those who have survived may not be punished, but they are still held accountable for what they have done, or for what they intended to do.[10]

If secrets abound in all three plays, so, too, something remains unresolved through the end. In *Twelfth Night*, the question remains: How will two marriages predicated on the exchange of one twin for another turn out? The end of *Romeo and Juliet* leaves open the question: what will happen to the estate of the two newly reconciled families of Verona, now that all their children are dead?

Cymbeline also leaves the spectators or readers at a crossroads. A young shepherd, who has only just discovered his royal heritage, may soon be king of England, and his sister is beholden to a man who is only barely able to contain his violent desires. The excess of disclosures debunks the very cryptomania on which all three plays thrive. At the same time, the recycling across the plays renders visible the mutual implication between the withholding of information and serial continuation which pervades Shakespeare's oeuvre. If in the comedy calamity can be avoided while in the tragedy the obsession with secrets by necessity proves fatal, in the romance, the urge to destruction is transformed into reconciliation. At the same time, in all three plays, concealment and disguise, the refusal to share knowledge with others or to reveal oneself, as well as the pretence and dissimulation, emerge as principles of seriality. A fully revealed secret would lie outside the series. It would be empty, a kind of death. Keeping something secret keeps alive what is yet to be revealed. The desire to be released from seriality, in turn, is tantamount to seeking to be released from the responsiveness with which a spectator or reader encounters these plays over and again. The end of seriality would be a release from the responsibility of acknowledging that the insights of the characters are also those of the audience or the reader. Secrecy, in other words, sustains the play of theatricality. It keeps the spectator or the reader in the game. It allows the characters – and those partaking of the play – to resist the desire to be released from being responsive, from being implicated, over and over again.

Notes

1 See the introduction in Bronfen (2018).

2 I take the idea that the discovery of analogous thematic constellations in several texts opens up a space for interrogating the consequences of this seriality from Stanley Cavell (1984), especially his comparative reading of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Philadelphia Story*.

3 For a discussion of reading earlier texts through the lens of their recycling, see Bal (1999). For a more general discussion of secrets in Shakespeare, see the volume edited by Chalk and Johnson (2010), and the chapter in the section on secrets, in which critics discuss issues early modern culture rarely wrote about, such as infidelities,

stillborn children, contagion, gossip and spies. See also Wilson (2004), in which he discusses Shakespeare's Catholicism in terms of secrecy, as well as Floyd-Wilson (2013), who also focusses on occult knowledge in the early modern period.

4 For a psychoanalytic discussion of the psychic gain as well as harm that secrecy can have, see Dufourmantelle (2015). See also Battell (2022), who, relying on the work of Dufourmantelle, is concerned with the way secrecy in this romance can be understood as a transformational force, which not only supports but also undoes power structures. For an overview of works on secrecy in philosophy, religion, law and sociology see Bok (1984).

5 For a discussion of deception in *Twelfth Night*, see Hutson (1996). For a discussion of the connection between gossip and secrecy in this comedy see Kerrigan's chapter 'Secrecy and Gossip in *Twelfth Night*' (2001: 89–112).

6 For a discussion of cross-dressing as a way of keeping one's sexual identity secret, see Garber (1992), Gay (1994), Howard (1994), Hodgen (2002) and Lander (2008).

7 For a discussion of the riddles in *Twelfth Night*, see Embry (2020).

8 In her discussion of *Othello*, Patricia Parker (1993) draws out a similar dramatic link between Iago as informer and secret accuser, who discloses something hidden to Othello's eye, and the way this disclosure is concerned, particularly with the secrets of women and their privy place. *Cymbeline* recycles this gendered context for the act of spying out secrets and offering proof by positing Innogen's birthmark – which is not visible to the ordinary gaze and which can be only discovered in her bedroom – into a telling sign of her sexual desire.

9 For a discussion of Innogen's cross-dressing see Lander (2008).

10 Alison V. Scott argues that the anticipation of a new age of peace and prosperity is predicated on sustaining the secret of the heroine's fidelity: 'The plays closing words of grace are directly enabled by the unreadability of Innogen's secrets, by her insubstantiality, by her return from the dead – her paradoxically constant metamorphosis as it were' (2010: 137).

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2

Shakespeare's uneven ends

The first and second tetralogies as historical series

Carla Baricz

Shortly before fellow playwright Christopher Marlowe died in 1593, Shakespeare played an essential role in creating a series of plays chronicling key events in the Wars of the Roses (1455–87) and the reign of King Henry VI. This project began sometime in the late 1580s or early 1590s, with the drafting of a large-cast London play depicting the events leading up to the Battle of St. Albans (1455) as marking the beginning of the wars. Two versions of this play survive, in the form of a quarto edition entered into the Stationers' Register on 12 March 1594 as *The First Part of the Contention betwixt the Two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster* . . . and a longer version, titled *The Second Part of King Henry the Sixt*, published in John Heminge and Henry Condell's 1623 Shakespeare Folio.[1] Within a short time, due to what must have been a very good run, Shakespeare played a key role in drafting another dramatic work, which expanded the original narrative to describe events leading up to the Battle of Tewkesbury (1471). This play likewise survives in two distinct versions, a 1595 octavo edition titled *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York* and in the 1623 First Folio,

where it is titled *The Third Part of Henry the Sixt, with the Death of the Duke of York*.[2] This sequel play helped define a new mode of seriality in English chronicle plays and must have done equally well because, by 1592, a prequel to this pair of plays, which examined events from the death of Henry V in 1422 to the Battle of Rouen in 1449, was brought to the stage. It survives in the Shakespeare Folio as *The First Part of King Henry the Sixt*.[3] By the following year, Shakespeare also had penned a distinct sequel that linked the plays about the Wars of the Roses, to which he had contributed, to the rise of the Tudor dynasty by chronicling the demise of Richard III (r. 1483–5) at the Battle of Bosworth and the triumph of Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond. To understand Shakespeare's continuous adaptation of historical material in this period – and what made his historical drama so successful – is to understand his ability to envision the sequel as a malleable option for plays that had generated enough interest to make experimentation with serial structures commercially useful. More broadly, it is to understand Shakespeare's innovative ability to conceive of seriality either as a dominant or recessive feature of dramatic plots.

In scenes attributed to Shakespeare, the essential structural features of what we now know as *2 Henry VI*, the first in the long series of related plays about the Wars of the Roses, formally made tetralogical expansion possible by using seriality in a dominant manner and foregoing a traditional ending in favour of an indeterminate one.[4] Shakespeare contributed key scenes that promised to act out a contention, but did so only partially, leaving audiences unsatisfied. He created what we, today, might call a cliffhanger. He would continue to work with this narrative strategy of writing open-ended, episodic historical drama throughout the 1590s, including in his contributions to plays like *The True Tragedy/The Third Part of King Henry VI* (now often referred to as *3 Henry VI*), considering how endings could be used to generate narrative suspense and how sequels could be framed to expand on subject matter and rewrite and complicate the plots of previous works.

Unsurprisingly, in the second half of the decade, sometime between 1597 and 1599, Shakespeare returned once again to the sequel form when he rewrote a very successful play on the reign of Henry IV, in print called *The History of Henrie the Fourth*, published by Andrew Wise, who issued it in 1598 (this earlier play

itself functioned as a thematic expansion of an earlier play on the reign of Richard II, which Shakespeare had written around 1596). As he had done with his Henry VI plays, the playwright seems to have approached this more recent historical matter as an opportunity to generate related works that built on one another's success, later expanding the set into a series by adding a *Henry V* (1599) to his *1* and *2 Henry IV* and *Richard II*. However, as a sequel, *2 Henry IV* employs a very different kind of seriality than the Henry VI plays. Rather than continuing or expanding the episodic play on which it is based, *2 Henry IV* rewrites *1 Henry IV*'s episodes, offering them to playgoers a second time in a different key or mode. This backward-looking, recessive way of plotting a sequel allows *2 Henry IV* to vie with the original for narrative authority, offering another take on the same historical matter, much as period chronicle histories like Edward Hall's and Raphael Holinshed's tried to do.

To see both dominant and recessive sequel structures in action and to get a better sense of the types of serial forms Shakespeare developed throughout his career, it is helpful to first turn to *2* and *3 Henry VI*.

Dominant seriality

When in 1594 the stationer Thomas Millington brought out a quarto playbook entitled *The First Part of the Contention betwixt the Two Famous Houses of Yorke and Lancaster, with the Death of the Good Duke Humphrey: And the Banishement and Death of the Duke of Suffolke, and the Tragicall End of the Proud Cardinall of VVinchester, vvith the Notable Rebellion of Iack Cade: and the Duke of Yorkes First Claime vnto the Crowne*,[5] Millington seems to have been cautiously optimistic about the *Contention*'s prospects in print. His 12 March entry in the Stationers' Register appears to have covered not just the 'first part' – so indicated probably to differentiate it from the play that followed it in the bookstalls – but also *The True Tragedie of Richard Duke of Yorke, and the Death of Good King Henrie the Sixt, with the Whole Contention betweene The two Houses Lancaster and Yorke: As It Was Sundrie Times Acted by the Right Honourable the Earle of Pembrooke His Servants*,[6] which Millington brought out a year later, in 1595. He also seems to have picked up on the episodic, open-ended serial structure of what

he was publishing, as his 1594 quarto edition of the *Contention* demonstrates, whose title page highlights key episodes in the play's plot. As Millington's title page notes, the play incorporates scenes showing 'the deathe of the good Duke Humfrey and the banishement and Deathe of the Duke of Suffolk and the tragicall ende of the prowd Cardinall of Winchester with the notable rebellion of Jack Cade' (1594). Millington was not wrong to name the death of Duke Humphrey first in this long series of disasters or to link it directly to the 'contention betwixt the two noble houses' (1594). The stationer correctly thought that the play he was publishing was about the factionalism between York and Lancaster, which had its origins in this event, which, in turn, had paved the way for the other titular deaths and the rebellion that followed. As he tried to underscore, the play uses this central episode as a way to explain and organize the waxing and waning influence of competing groups of nobles at Henry's court. Or, to use an early modern phrase, the play writes all the events that in its source texts take place after the death of the Duke of Gloucester as a result of and 'sequel of' his death.[7]

Indeed, in *2 Henry VI*, the procession at Bury St. Edmunds in Act 3, usually attributed to Shakespeare along with Act 5,[8] leads to the scene in which the court factions join to accuse and arrest the Duke of Gloucester and divides the play into a before and an after. Gloucester is not among the members of the procession and does not enter at all until much later in Act 3. As he had remarked to his wife and the herald who had summoned him, 'my consent ne'er asked herein before [whether to attend the parliament or not] / this is close dealing' (2.4.72–3).[9] The tardy entrance underscores his doubts about the proceedings. His fears are justified. Within two lines of his entrance, Suffolk arrests him for treason. Within another hundred lines, his death is already being plotted.

In formal terms, Shakespeare seems to have been interested in Holinshed's observation that 'by the pitifull death of this noble duke and politike gouernor . . . the publike wealth of the realme came to great decaie, as by sequele here may more at large appeare' (1587: 6:627). Indeed, it is only in the second half of the play, after the plotters have successfully carried out the murder, that the action turns truly violent. Gloucester's demise paves the way for the outbreak of the war. As Gloucester had pointed out to Henry, 'but mine [death] is made the prologue to their play; / For thousands more that yet suspect no peril / Will now conclude

their plotted tragedy' (3.1.151–3). 'The metadramatic irony here', Roland Knowles notes in his edition of *2 Henry VI*, 'derives from Gloucester's unwitting anticipation of the violent deaths of those who are plotting his own tragedy' (Knowles 2014: 240, n. 152–3). Indeed, the play's chaos unfolds as a result of Gloucester's death in this crucial act. It is as a result of Gloucester's murder that Cardinal Beaufort suddenly takes ill and dies, wracked by guilt, Shakespeare taking the opportunity to compare in the two figures the idea of the just and unjust councillor. Suffolk, too, is exiled by the King and subsequently is killed by disgruntled pirates in revenge for this act.[10] Moreover, Cade's subsequent rebellion, possibly written by Marlowe, like the Suffolk's scene[11] is made possible by Gloucester's death and York's decision that the time to strike had come and leads to the demise of Lorde Saye, Lord Scales, the Clerk of Chartham and Sir Humphrey Stafford and his brother.

As characters are eliminated one by one, the struggle for control of the kingdom intensifies. None of the nobles are, in fact, for or against the King. Rather, they sense his weakness, what the Queen calls being 'cold in great affairs' (3.1.224) and attempt to exploit it for personal gain. Two camps emerge: the Yorkists, led by the Duke of York and supported by the Earls of Warwick and Salisbury, and the Lancastrian faction, led by the Queen, Buckingham and Somerset. The absence of any kind of conquest plot until Act 5, also likely written by Shakespeare, ensures that the factionalism detailed in the first two acts and kept at bay by Gloucester continues to grow as groups splinter further in the attempts to defeat their enemies and gain power. The forces of the Duke of York and of Henry VI finally meet at St. Albans, but even in this case, while the plot formally seems to resemble one of conquest – the King's forces are scattered by those of the Duke – in reality neither party gains full control or relinquishes it. The play ends in suspension. The King and his retinue flee to London, 'where this breach now in our forces made / May readily be stopped' (5.2.82–3).

As the King flees, Young Clifford's last speech sets in motion a future revenge plot. Clifford's promise, that if 'York not our old men spares / No more will I their babes' (5.2.51–2), heralds what we might call Revenge to Come. The stage direction, which notes that the actor should 'take his father's body up on his back' (5.2.61) while addressing the corpse by comparing himself to the Trojan epic hero carrying his father – 'as did Aeneas old Anchises bear, / So bear

I thee upon my manly shoulders' (5.2.62–3) – invokes the *Iliad*'s great epic sequel, Virgil's *Aeneid*. However, in also comparing his desire to slay the 'infant[s] of the house of York' (5.2.57) to what 'Medea [to] young Absyrtus did' (5.2.59), invoking for his future the tragic story popularized by Seneca and Ovid and praying to the god of war for 'hot coals of vengeance' and 'cruelty' (5.2.36, 60), Clifford combines a well-known image associated with epic beginnings – here already given a tragic cast by the fact that the father Clifford bears is dead – with the promise of deferred tragic closure. In inscribing the actor's body in the gestural register of epic while imbuing Clifford's speech with tragic overtones, Shakespeare effectively promises that more is to come by creating tension between the forward drive of the visual symbolism and the generic instability of Clifford's spoken allusions.

The play's authors, perhaps under the influence of Shakespeare's guiding hand in Acts 3 and 5, bet on a sequel. They also seem to have decided that rather than promising one in an epilogue, in the manner of Marlowe's earlier *1 Tamburlaine* and of those writers who imitated Marlowe, they would create the dramatic justification for one by denying their audience any clear sense of how the play's conflict would end. Rather, dominant seriality would be the key to plot progression. The playwright's pun in Clifford's later admonition to Henry – 'but fly you must; uncurable discomfit / Reigns in the hearts of all our present part' (5.2.86–7) – refers both to the part, or company of soldiers supporting Henry, and to the actor's role or 'part', but this type of ending, or rather non-ending, turns the play itself into a part that will require a sequel, in a way that, for example, Marlowe's *1 Tamburlaine* does not.[12] The play's plot does not fulfil the thematic promise it makes in its title but offers only a part – and a rather small one at that – of the contention. Formally, one might say that the play provides a kind of endpoint in Act 3, and that everything that follows is the sequel of that matter; if so, however, the serial nature of the plot delays narrative progression, while the episodic mode and reciprocity of the violence resist closure. To the question of what would bring audiences back for more, Shakespeare's contribution – and the play as a whole – found an answer that was much simpler than and just as effective as Marlowe's method in *Tamburlaine*. Shakespeare and his fellow playwrights would not promise a sequel. Rather, relying on seriality as a dominant feature, they would write in a sequential,

part-like manner that would continuously delay staging the full conflict it promised. In *The Contention*, playgoers are enjoined not so much to return for more opulent visual spectacles or arresting sights of power, as in Marlowe. Rather, they are simply denied the sense of an ending, and history is left hanging in suspense.

Probably before 1592, the authors of *The Contention* followed up their success with another play. However, if their first play on the Wars of the Roses had delivered less than it promised, their sequel, *The True Tragedie of Richard Duke of Yorke*, provided more than it did. The play outlined the events leading up to the ascension of Edward, the son of the Duke of York, and his coronation as England's new king. However, unexpectedly, the play also went on to describe the political factionalism of Edward's Yorkist court, returning to the Lancastrian situation of the *Contention*. In fact, in writing their sequel, the authors offered audiences the plot of the *Contention* in reverse, beginning with the full-scale war with the Lancastrians and ending with a Yorkist court rife with secret antagonisms centred around a queen deemed wholly unsuitable. In doing so, they played with audience expectations about when a play could and should end. If, for audiences, the 'whole of the contention' might have meant something like the full war, this play interpreted the term much more loosely, illustrating that war is not just what happens on battlefields. To do so, *The True Tragedie*, which in the First Folio became *The Third Part of King Henry the Sixt*., structures its plot as a series of smaller, self-contained units, each a sequel to the other, each offering its own take on a proper ending. Set in a series, these units play on audience expectations, while they demonstrate that, in fact, sequentiality is an aspect of all historical writing.

The playwrights begin their sequel with what could have been the ending to the *Contention*, the triumph of the Yorkist party. Here that ending serves as a starting point from which more catastrophe unfolds, however. In Act 1, York's supporters seize the throne from Henry, threatening to 'pluck him down' (*3H6* 1.1.59). Unsurprisingly, the King does not resist. In what is perhaps Henry's meekest of many meek moments, he fitfully agrees that 'I am content. Richard Plantagenet, / Enjoy the kingdom after my decease' (1.1.174–5). His choice of verb, 'content', puns on the earlier play's titular 'contention' and seems to indicate that, at least formally, the conflict could end here. York's comment that

'now York and Lancaster are reconciled' (1.1.204), accompanied by a 'sennet' and the triumphal procession indicated by the stage directions 'here they come down' (from a playing space above the stage; 1.1.205), suggests that a truce has been struck by the warring factions, leading to a peaceful resolution. This is confirmed when the factions disband after the formal, processional exit: York departs to his 'castle' (1.1.206), Warwick to 'keep London' (1.1.207), Norfolk to 'my followers' (1.1.208), Montague 'to the sea' (1.1.209) and Henry 'to the court' (1.1.210). For a moment, the stage seems to clear. The play gives every indication of having chronicled the end of the Wars of Roses in the first fifteen minutes of performance, an extraordinary feat.

The play does not end, however, and the start-and-stop movement of Act 1 is repeated in the acts that follow. As the action progresses, the play revisits the plot of the *Contention* with a new set of characters: the Yorkists. As soon as Henry exits, we can see the play restage the factionalism that preceded the death of the Duke of Gloucester. Upon entering, York is faced with a group of squabbling nobles. In this case, they happen to be his sons, Edward and Richard. Ironically, York demands: 'what is your quarrel? How began it first?' (1.2.5), but he makes little headway. Attempting to draw him into the conversation, Edward answers that it is 'no quarrel, but a slight contention' (1.2.6). The sons pretend to argue about whether or not York should attempt to seize the throne, trying to convince their indecisive father to act by staging a heated debate, as the scene begins to foreshadow the brothers' rather larger 'contention' after York's death. Indeed, by the crucial Act 3, attributed to Shakespeare, the brothers' quarrel regarding 'the crown of England' (1.2.8) will give way to Richard's secret plot – to 'live t'account this world but hell, / Until my misshaped trunk that bears this head / Be round impaled with a glorious crown' (3.2.169–71). The speech recalls York's meditation on the 'golden circuit' in the *Contention* and features similar dramatic ironies.

York dies relatively early, at the hands of Margaret and Clifford, after the battle of Wakefield in Act 2. With this act, Clifford's revenge, postponed since Act 5 of the *Contention*, seems to move the play formally towards another possible point of conclusion in these scenes, also attributed to Shakespeare. However, since revenge is a cycle, York's death only seems to unify his sons to a common purpose to 'venge thy death / Or die renowned by attempting it'

(2.1.87–8). Shakespeare's episode of the three suns that occurs shortly after Edward and Richard set off for Towton seems to herald their success. Richard's observation of

> Three glorious suns, each one a perfect sun,
> Not separated with the racking clouds
> But severed in a pale clear-shining sky.
> See, see, they join, embrace and seem to kiss,
> As if they vowed some league inviolable (2.1.26–30)

appears to prefigure the success of York's three sons both formally – as a vision – and by means of the homonym. The glorious ascendant sun, shaped by the union of three smaller suns, could indicate the coming together of the three York brothers to defeat their enemies, and the play does indeed entertain this idea for the space of an act to offer another possible ending.

Despite being routed in the first instance, Shakespeare has the York brothers come together and manage to defeat the Lancastrian forces on the battlefield. Clifford is mortally wounded and killed. Margaret, echoing her son, again urges her troops to fly (2.5.128–33). The Yorkists proceed to 'London with triumphant march' to crown Edward 'England's royal king' (2.6.87–8). Warwick is dispatched to France to ask Lady Bona, the sister-in-law of Louis XI, for her hand in marriage on Edward's behalf, and Edward hands out titles to his followers, creating Richard 'Duke of Gloucester, / And George, of Clarence' (2.6.103–4). The act ends with Warwick giving a traditional parting: 'Now to London, / To see these honours in possession' (2.6.109–10). The stage is cleared. Though no flourishes are sounded, the dialogue indicates that the play is coming to an end.

Of course, the play does not end in Act 2, just as it had not ended in Act 1. Beginning with Act 3, after Henry is caught by the game keepers and brought to the now Yorkist court, Shakespeare turns from a conqueror plot to domestic tragedy. The events of the *Contention* play out again in much the same episodic fashion in which seriality dominates. As in the previous play, a king is now purportedly in power, but like his Lancastrian predecessor, Edward's proclivities leave much to be desired. He is 'lustful Edward' (3.2.129), as Richard remarks, who falls in love with a commoner, Lady Jane Gray and forgoes the alliance with the

French that would have rendered the Lancastrian claim a moot point.

The marriage with Lady Jane costs Edward France, just as Henry VI's marriage with Margaret had cost him France. While in the first play the loss is of territory alone, in the sequel the consequences are graver. Edward's marriage marks the beginning of the factionalism that will lead to Clarence's death, the murder of Edward's children and Richard III's coronation. Though the play attempts to end one more time, in a comic fashion, with the birth of Edward's first son, this conclusion, too, proves inconclusive. Formally, the play seems as if it could go on indefinitely. As Richard bends to kiss the head of his new-born nephew, he compares himself to 'Judas, who cried "All hail!" when he meant all harm' (5.7.33–4). In this last scene, also likely Shakespeare's, Richard's discontent, which, like that of his father in the *Contention*, has been building and building throughout the play, finally materializes in the form of a concrete threat as he speaks his intent to betray his brother. Of course, by denying audiences the opportunity to see Richard murder Edward's son and allowing the play to end on another cliffhanger, featuring another Clifford-like figure determined to murder the youngest members of the Yorkist household, Shakespeare creates the opportunity for yet another sequel, *Richard III*.

As the discussion above has tried to suggest, even when Shakespeare is just one among a series of collaborators working together on a larger serial design, as he seems to be in *2 Henry VI* and *3 Henry VI*, he nevertheless appears to be the individual responsible for moments of formal synthesis that lead to serial repetition, moments like the murder of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, in Act 3 of *2 Henry VI* (which makes possible all the other murders to come in that play, eventually culminating in Clifford's revenge in Act 5), and *3 Henry VI*'s portrayal of the rise to power of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, who anticipates Shakespeare's own standalone sequel, *Richard III*. This latter play puts a final capstone on the wars of the Lancastrian and Yorkist factions – something that, as demonstrated above, the open-ended, serially dominant *3 Henry VI* does not do –, with the ascendance of the Tudors in the figure of Henry, the Earl of Richmond (later Henry VII), who defeats Richard at Bosworth Field and proclaims his intent to 'unite the white rose and the red / . . . / By God's fair ordinance conjoin together' (5.5.19, Burns 2000: 31).

Interestingly, at some point, Shakespeare also likely contributed the Temple Garden scene (2.4) – the single most essential scene for what we call a Wars of the Roses serial design – to *1 Henry VI*, which the First Folio calls *The First part of King Henry the Sixt*.[13] In this famous scene, Richard Plantagenet (who will eventually become Richard III) and the noblemen representing the different warring factions that will become the Lancastrians and the Yorkists pluck red and white roses in the garden of Temple Hall.[14] Because only the single 1623 Folio text of *1 Henry VI* survives, we cannot say for certain when Shakespeare wrote this scene or when the play itself was penned. What is important to note, however, is that, regardless of when the play was composed or who the other playwrights who contributed to this project might have been,[15] in writing this scene Shakespeare proved himself to be an able adapter of a serial design – what we might call the Wars of the Roses design – that spans multiple plays and that eventually would come to be incorporated into the format of the First Folio itself, where the history plays appear as a single, unified narrative. Indeed, in incorporating the Temple Garden scene into *1 Henry VI*, Shakespeare turned a play nominally about Sir John Talbot and the English struggle against Charles VII and his forces in France (about which the two contention plays, *2 Henry VI* and *3 Henry VI*, appear to know nothing) into a Wars of the Roses prequel play that could serve as a first part to *2* and *3 Henry VI*.

The commercial benefits of writing in a manner in which seriality rather than genre dominates seem obvious. Less obvious, perhaps, is what these plays tell us when placed side by side: historical matter has neither a true beginning nor a true endpoint. As the focus moves from one Roses revenge plot to the next, the loosely repetitive structure not only underscores seriality as a dominant feature but emphasizes the forward movement of time and history and the key differences that emerge between generations, which cannot be reduced to the generic forms that attempt to contain them. To write prequels and sequels promising to chronicle historical events becomes, for Shakespeare, at least in some sense, a process of interpreting and shaping such key differences into narratively compelling beginnings and ends. In his contributions to the Wars of the Roses history plays, history itself is revealed to be nothing but a long series of events, or what happens next, which, if you are a playwright with a keen sense of irony and a talent for anticipating

what audiences might like, is in some ways always a version of what has happened before with such crucial differences.

Recessive seriality

When, around 1596, Shakespeare set out to write what would be published in 1600 by Andrew Wise and William Aspley as *The Second Part of Henrie the Fourth, Continuing to His Death and Coronation of Henrie the Fifth. With the humours of sir Iohn Falsfaffe, and swaggering Pistoll*, he decided to experiment with the dramatic form of the sequel in a way he had never done before. Rather than simply providing a repetitive continuation, Shakespeare made use of the necessity of penning something in the same vein, something that would reframe the success of the play he published in 1598 – as *The History of Henrie the Fovrth with the Battel at Shrewsburie, between the King and Lord Henry Pecy, Surnamed Henrie Hotspur of the North. With the Humorous Conceits of Sir Iohn Falstalffe* – to return to that earlier play and to question what had made it successful in the first place. A careful reading of the two texts side by side shows Shakespeare re-evaluating what we now call *1 Henry IV* in what we call *2 Henry IV*. This re-evaluation rejects the formal solution that Shakespeare had offered in the sequel *The True Tragedie*, or *3 Henry VI*, a bifurcated play with sequential episodes in which seriality dominates, in favour of a revisionary structure in which seriality is a recessive feature that rewrites rather than expands the first play's original action. Indeed, one of *2 Henry IV*'s underlying points is that to produce a narrative about the past, be it a theatrical past or a historical one, implies revisiting earlier narratives about that past. At this later stage of his career, Shakespeare seems to be arguing that one cannot tell the same story that one had told before; one can only retell it. If scholars are right to claim that the greatest source for his plays is his own work, then one might say that, when it comes to *2 Henry IV*, Shakespeare seems to have self-consciously taken his own earlier play and treated it as a kind of source text that required the same kind of sceptical treatment as any other source text.

By revisiting *1 Henry IV* in *2 Henry IV*, the playwright returned to the question of beginnings and endings that the *Contention*

and *The True Tragedie* had explored through the figures of Duke Humphrey and Richard of Gloucester, as well as through the titular monarch Henry VI. Like the earlier plays, the sequel *2 Henry IV* is a history that features a rebellion instigated by nobles who in the past had helped keep a monarch in power. However, the play is a history in name more than function. As *2 Henry IV* expands to incorporate large swathes of English society – knights, tavern hostesses, soldiers, sergeants, country justices, whores, earls, archbishops and ensigns – the play simultaneously limits the stage time of its titular character and his son, reducing their lines from 338 lines for the King and 514 for Hal in *1 Henry IV* to 291 lines for the King and 293 lines for Hal in *2 Henry IV*.[16] This diminishment, resembling that of Henry VI in the *True Tragedy* – where the focus changes to the Yorkist struggle against Margaret and then to the internal factionalism of the Yorkist court – is accompanied by what at first appears to be an oversight on Shakespeare's part: the play seems to forget that its textual predecessor, which it purportedly expands, has already chronicled Hal's trajectory from prodigal son to triumphant prince at the Battle of Shrewsbury, and that in doing so it already has portrayed his reformation and reconciled him to his father. Puzzlingly, at the opening of *2 Henry IV*, Harry can again be found in the tavern of Eastcheap, while his father curses his 'headstrong riot' (4.3.2). It is as if the events of 1 *Henry IV* had never happened.

As this chapter has attempted to show, the premise of a dramatic sequel is that it should give audiences something more while also providing more of the same. One must come up with new material to bring audiences into the playhouse while also ensuring that what one comes up with is similar to the plot that had been successful previously. The difficulty inherent in meeting these demands is that they are contradictory. One cannot generate material that is truly new and different if what is expected of one is more of the same. In the Henry VI plays, Shakespeare and his fellow playwrights had solved this problem by writing a sequel as though it were a continuation. If playgoers wanted to know what happened to Clifford, Henry VI and the Yorkist and Lancastrian factions, they would have to go see another play. However, it is likely that, in *1* and *2 Henry IV*, Shakespeare discovered that he could not use this kind of dominant seriality to shape the matter of his sequel. Unlike the chronicle material dealing with the Wars of the Roses, the reign of Henry IV did not offer the possibility of describing the collapse of

one dynastic line and the birth of another. If Henry IV had defeated the rebels at Shrewsbury, he would do the same at Gaultres. Henry IV's reign had been much more stable than that of his descendant, Henry VI. Indeed, though the open-ended last scene of *1 Henry IV* allowed for a sequel – King Henry triumphantly making provision for another plot by dispatching 'John and my cousin Westmorland, / Towards York . . . / To meet Northumberland and the prelate Scroop' (5.5.35–7) and 'myself and you, son Harry, will towards Wales / To fight with Glendower and the Earl of March' (5.5.39–40) – finding a way to advance the action using chronicle material that described the reign of a strong monarch, who won all the battles he fought and was succeeded by a strong son, would have been difficult. In *1 Henry IV*, Shakespeare had already depicted an unsuccessful rebellion and had solved the problem of a strong king by recasting the story of Henry IV into a narrative about his prodigal, seemingly weak son. This kind of narrative allowed for seriality but made creating a truly new set of events difficult. The plot could continue to outline the rebellion, but eventually Hal would have to succeed his father, as history indicated he had, and the rebels would have to lose once more – a dull, repetitive affair.

Shakespeare seems to have attempted to solve this problem by making a virtue of necessity. He constructed a sequel that repeated the action of *1 Henry IV* with key differences, thus reducing the need to stress forward action, which in *2 Henry IV* becomes a kind of recessive afterthought. This is partially why *2 Henry IV* does not seem to depict a continuing dynastic story as much as to undo it, as it does Hal's reformation. It is this form of dominant repetition and recessive seriality that allows the playwright to envision a sequel that might both attempt to return to and to rewrite the success of his earlier play.

Falstaff is key to this model. As has been pointed out many times, he is an alternative father figure for Harry and represents the choice between the world of the tavern and the world of politics. It appears *1 Henry IV* had addressed Hal's choice, but *2 Henry IV* shows us the grizzled Falstaff as a sick father figure who shares many similarities with the dying King Henry of *1 Henry IV*. The choice must be made again. If Falstaff's repudiation was only a mockery in the first play ('banish plump Jack and banish all the world'; *1H4* 2.4.466–8), Falstaff must be repudiated in earnest – or at least appear to be repudiated in earnest – in *2 Henry IV* ('I know

thee not old man'; 5.5.46), when Hal has finally made the choice to become 'King Harry' (Induction, ln. 23), a version of his father King Henry.

One might say that, in fact, *2 Henry IV* re-evaluates all the successes, big and small, of the first play, undoes them and rewrites them. If Falstaff manages to escape the Sheriff in *1 Henry IV* by hiding behind the tavern arras, he is carried off to the Fleet at the end of the second play. If, in the former play, Falstaff's recruits 'have brought out their services and now my whole charge consists of . . . slaves as ragged as Lazarus' (*1H4* 4.2.23–5), in the latter play Falstaff's bribe-taking stretches out for an entire scene and unfolds in the presence of 'Justice Shallow' (3.2). If in the first play, Hal plays at kingship in the tavern, far from the seat of royal power, in the second, thinking that Henry has died, he plays at king by picking up his father's crown and declaring himself a monarch. If Worcester misleads the other rebels in *1 Henry IV*, refusing to tell Hotspur about the peace terms offered by King Henry, Prince John's betrayal, at Gaultres, is much worse. John tricks the rebels with a sort of doublespeak that Hal himself seemed very much invested in at the beginning of *1 Henry IV*. He offers the rebels peace terms, unceremoniously betrays them after they disband their troops and then executes them after they have accepted and the parties have agreed to a truce (*2H4* 5.2).

The hollow victory that John achieves is representative of the uncertainty and deep mistrust that pervade *2 Henry IV*, telling us something about the way in which Shakespeare understood this method of writing sequels. Underlying the repetitions of *2 Henry IV* is the sense that, though *1 Henry IV* may have provided a provisional ending, history plays can never, in fact, provide true endpoints. Similarly, as the relationship between *Richard II* and *1 Henry IV* indicates, such plays can only provide provisional beginnings. Perhaps Shakespeare constructs *1* and *2 Henry IV* in a recessive repetitive mode based on this realization. At the midpoint of his career, the sequel, as a narrative form, comes to enact the two conflicting conceptions of time familiar to Renaissance theorists – 'one providential and fundamentally linear, derived from the patristic and medieval historical writings; and one, exemplary and essentially cyclical, derived from the traditions of late classical historiography' (Kastan 1982: 12). In much the same way, his theatrical histories combine an insistence on the difference between generations and

reigns while returning obsessively to the idea that each generation must affirm its own place in history by re-evaluating the past.

At the same time, the desire of his history plays to return to earlier narratives seems to point to some sort of imperfection at the centre of such dramatic structures, a lack that demands supplementation. If what lies at the centre of the Henriad is Hal's own perceived lack of a self-definition that leads him to question and then to affirm his self-identity and family history, then one might say the same thing about Shakespeare's history plays: the narrative that such plays craft to replace the perceived lack of a back story to the present leads to a type of supplementation. The supplementing story (or stories) becomes the story it is meant to supplement. Shakespeare's *2 Henry IV* reads these perceived lacks (both the character's and the sequel form's) as one and the same. This is why *2 Henry IV* substitutes the narrative of the play it follows while only nominally moving it forward.

In part, this idea also helps explain the phenomenon of the printed history play series. John Heminges and Henry Condell reorganized plays like *1 Henry IV*, *The Contention* and the *True Tragedie* into a series in the 1623 First Folio catalogue, and then supplemented these narratives with the earlier narrative about the reign of Henry IV (*1* and *2 Henry IV* and *Henry V*) because these related works do not only depict a continuing, multi-generational story, but in many ways repeat, rewrite and supplement it as they go along. Placed next to one another, they become sequels and prequels to a kind of ghostly supertext. The series implies that, in itself, no text can guarantee textual identity. To understand the original text, the reader must refer to what comes after or before it, to the sequel or the prequel, both of which can be seen as standalone works when not placed in this relationship. To cite Arthur Bradley's redefinition of Jacques Derrida's idea of the supplement, 'the supplement can be an *addition*', 'a surplus that tries to generate "the fullest measure [*le comble*]" of presence', trying to mark off what it supplements as complete in itself (Bradley 2008: 102). However, in doing so, the supplement becomes 'an essential *substitute* or compensation for, something that is [shown to be] lacking, insufficient, or in need of supplementation in itself "in-the-place-of . . . as if one fills a void [*s'il comble un vide*]"' (102–3). For Derrida, then, the supplement 'reveals an essential lack, or deficiency of presence, that calls for supplementation in the first place' (Bradley 2008: 103).

Both of these definitions are at work in the terms sequel and series. The tension between the definitions – supplement as addition vs. supplement as substitute – like the tension between the dominant and recessive modes of seriality of the Henry VI and the Henry IV plays points to the idea that there is no such thing as an original text; there are only supplements that produce the text they are expanding and substituting. A printed text like the 1623 Folio underscores this idea, allowing one to define and title such plays by turning to those that succeed and supersede them, so that, for example, we understand *2 Henry IV* to be the textual-object it is because we have read *1 Henry IV* and *Richard II*. The lack at the centre of such narrative sets, the lack of an originary presence that such texts make felt when placed in relation to one another, suggests what Shakespeare seems to have known all along: there is no such thing as a 'true chronicle history'.[17]

Notes

1 As the *New Oxford Shakespeare Authorship Companion* notes, the quarto and folio versions of the play are distinct and 'whether the quarto represents the original version accurately, or is a highly corrupt memorial reconstruction, remains a matter of dispute. From the . . . 1929 to the 1987 *Textual Companion*, there was almost unanimous agreement among editors on the theory of memorial reconstruction but there is no longer such consensus' (Taylor and Egan 2017: 493–4). For the purposes of this chapter, like Taylor and Egan, I accept that 'the play was revised after the formation of the Chamberlain's Men and that the new version is represented by the Folio text' (2017: 494). It is mostly with this folio text that I work. My argument also assumes a general awareness that computational and stylometric work by Craig (2009), Tarlinskaja (2014) and Nance (2017) on the play has suggested Marlowe as a possible co-author with Shakespeare, assigning sections at the beginning of the play and the section on Cade's rebellion, to Marlowe. Taylor and Egan summarize these critics' work and assign scene authorship in this manner: 'Shakespeare – 2, 5, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16,18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27 (=1.2, 2.1, 3.1, 3.2,4.4, 3.4, 4.2, 4.4, 4.6, 4.8, 4.9, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5), and Marlowe – 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 13, 15, 17, 19 (=1.1, 1.3, 1.4, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 4.1, 4.3, 4.5, 4.7)' (496). The acts and scenes with which I work in the following pages are for the most part

attributed to Shakespeare, so Marlowe does not feature prominently in the claims I advance.

2 The authorship of this play is contested, just like the authorship of the *Contention betwixt the Two Famous Houses/Second Part of King Henry the Sixt*. Taylor and Egan (2017), following Craig and Burrows (2012), assign co-authorship of *The True Tragedie/The Third Part of Henry the Sixt*. to Shakespeare and Marlowe. As with the former play, whether the octavo is a corrupt memorial reconstruction or an earlier version is uncertain. Taylor and Egan attribute to 'Shakespeare scenes 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29 (=1.3, 1.4, 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 3.1, 3.2, 4.1, 5.1, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5., 5.6, 5.7), while Marlowe is said to have written scenes 1, 2, 7, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 and 24 (=1.1, 1.2, 2.3, 3.3, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8, 4.9, 5.2)' (2017: 497). This study focuses on the Folio text. As with the earlier play on the Wars of the Roses, most of my argument centres on sections attributed to Shakespeare, so Marlowe does not feature prominently.

3 Henslowe identified a 'ne' play performed at the Rose on 3 March 1592 as 'harey vj' (Burns 2000: 3). The authorship of the play is heavily contested, and much ink has been spilled in the last fifty years in suggesting who was possibly responsible. For a good overview of the debate see Taylor and Egan (2017: 514–15). Most editors suggest Marlowe and Nashe. Some, like Vickers, surmise Kyd's involvement (see Vickers 2008: 14–15).

4 The plays are often referred to as a 'tetralogy', though this term is not an early modern one and was coined by Schlegel, who based his work on the series of productions taking place in Berlin and Weimar in the second half of the nineteenth century. See Hortmann (1998: 95–6).

5 For the play's publishing history, see Arber (1875–1894: 2:646). See also Richardson and Wiggins (2013: 92–103).

6 Pavier bought the rights from Millington and published both plays in 1602, which suggests that Millington's Stationer's Register entry covered both *The First Part of the Contention* and *Richard Duke of York*. See Kastan (2001: 75).

7 See Holinshed (1587: 6:627). The phrase occurs often in period chronicles, like Hall's *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustrate Famelies of Lancastre [and] Yorke* (1542), where, for example, it promises to tell 'what profite, what comfort, what ioy succeeded in the realme of England by the vunion of the fornamed two noble families, you shall apparently perceiue by the sequel of this rude and unlearned history' (1809: 2).

8 Most scholars agree that Shakespeare is responsible for Act 3 and Act 5 of *2 Henry VI*.

9 This scene is attributed by some scholars to Marlowe; however, the Folio text offers a significant revision that helps create the drama of the tardy entrance in Act 3 and hence is likely Shakespearean. The earlier *Contention* text reads: 'a Parlament and our consent neuer craude / Therein before. This is sodeine' (Millington 1594: D3). By having the event be 'close dealing' rather than merely sudden, as in the quarto, the playwright is able to highlight the trap that Gloucester is walking into.

10 The Lieutenant promises to 'dam up this thy yawning mouth / For swallowing the treasure of the realm' (4.1.73–4), namely the Duke of Gloucester. For a discussion of Whitmore and the Lieutenant as extensions of the will of the commons, see Cartelli (2005: 335–6).

11 See Craig (2009) and Taylor and Egan (2017: 496).

12 For the play and sequel relationship of *1* and *2 Tamburlaine*, see Baricz (2020).

13 For attribution of this scene, see Taylor (1995: 182–3).

14 Sokol has suggested that the scene may have been inspired by the major rebuilding of the Temple Garden in 1591, in time for the original 'harey th vj' play at the Rose (for Sokol, see footnote 1 in Burns (2000: 58); for 'harey th vj', see footnote 3). Others have suggested the scene might have been added after the formation of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, perhaps in 1594–5: see Burns (2000): 1–4, Vickers (2015: E82).

15 One way or another, *1 Henry VI* is almost certainly the product of a team of writers, likely Nashe (Act 1) and some combination of others, including Shakespeare, Marlowe and possibly Kyd.

16 For a discussion of this phenomenon, see Bulman (2016: 4–5).

17 For the use of this phrase in association with Shakespeare's plays, see, for example, the title page to the first quarto edition of *King Lear*, printed in January 1607–8 by Nicholas Oakes.

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3

The Desdemona effect

Empathy, retelling and seriality in Shakespeare's *Othello*

Aleida Assmann

The term 'empathy' dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century, where it is connected to German philosophy, but it was not until the twenty-first century that it began its amazing career in the natural sciences due to the new technique of neuroimaging. Since 2000, the topic of empathy has evolved into a rapidly growing interdisciplinary research field of great radiance. Insights from neuroscience and behavioural research have identified empathy as a key driver of cognitive and social evolution. The sharing of attention and intention enabled them to understand each other's intentions and goals and to coordinate complex activities, causing a leap in evolution (Tomasello 2009). In this new context, empathy consists of the special ability of humans to think in the minds of conspecifics, to anticipate their reactions and to tune in to their intentions and activities. Without empathy, humans would not be

able to increase their brain volume, start collaborative projects or use their cultural heritage.

These new insights have spurred new fields of research that also open up important social and cultural perspectives for the future. For example, in his best-selling book on *The Empathic Civilization*, economist Jeremy Rifkin recommended that US-Americans give up their vision of the American Dream and swap it for a more social self-image in order to become an 'empathic society' (2009). Rifkin called for an end to the era of competitive individualism that fuelled an unbridled capitalism and instead presents empathy as a universal neurobiological resource that should be more valorized in the globalized world, in which humans have become entangled neighbours in an endangered ecosystem. Economist Amartya Sen also emphasized the importance of empathy as a source of motivation that goes beyond private interest. He urges that what is needed in our world are not passive consumers but empathic actors (2009).

While evolutionary theorists are interested in empathy as the basis of cognitive and social development, psychologists have discovered the importance of empathy in personal interaction as a prerequisite for building one's self-image. The leading premise is here that if people cannot understand each other, they cannot understand themselves. In such a context, literature can be considered as a school, a laboratory and training ground for the construction of self-images and images of others, which tests, promotes and empathically expands our interaction with others under protected conditions.

Empathy in Shakespeare's *Othello*

Literary studies and, in particular, the study of Shakespeare's works, have much to offer when it comes to both widening and deepening our concept of empathy. Empathy is key to understanding the shaping and channelling of emotions that organize drama, both between the characters within a play and between characters and spectators (Assmann and Detmers 2016). In this chapter, I will try to show how an informed notion of empathy can support a new reading of *Othello*, focusing thereby in particular on an aspect of seriality that is built into Desdemona's emotional economy.

Previous readings of *Othello* have focused on Iago's empathy in the light of what Fritz Breithaupt has termed 'the dark sides of empathy', in which empathy motivates and promotes malicious acts (2019). Examples are Stephen Greenblatt's influential discussion of Iago's empathy as 'the improvisation of power' (1980) up to Nicholas R. Helms' account of Iago's mind-reading (2019: 67–76) and Jessica Tooker's recent cognitive literary account of Iago's 'empathetic sadism' as a 'methodological tool' for his destructive project (2022: 136). Instead of focusing on Iago, however, I will discuss Desdemona's talent and eagerness to see herself in Othello's situation, thus feeling with him, but also displacing and absorbing him (Greenblatt 1980: 236). But rather than reading Desdemona's feeling with Othello as love, as Greenblatt does, I will explore the paradoxical process of Desdemona's empathy. As Greenblatt brilliantly puts it, '[e]mpathy, as the German *Einfühlung* suggests, may be a feeling of oneself into an object, but that object may have to be drained of its own substance before it will serve as an appropriate vessel' (236). Whether we are dealing with derogatory or venerating responses, research in critical race studies has shown that this displacement needs to be understood in the context of colonialism, exoticization and racism, and that it remains crucial until today for Shakespeare studies' response to Othello's demand to 'Speak of me as I am' (*Oth* 5.2.340). Thus, in his recent study *Black Shakespeare: Reading and Misreading Race*, Ian Smith has raised the pertinent question of what the lack of empathy for and identification with Othello means for current Shakespeare studies that are still predominantly white (2022: 160). Quoting Patricia J. Williams' argument about a potential colour-blind future, he calls for a cross-racial empathy with *Othello* that is aware of its own limits: 'The goal of an inclusive, plural society involves precisely the issue of successfully bridging the racial divide that Othello proposes: the "imaginary exercise of taking to mind and heart the investment of oneself in another, indeed the investment of oneself as that other"' (2022: 174; Williams 1997: 69; see also Marantz Cohen 2021: 85). This cross-racial empathy and the limits of what Smith calls racial literacy are also relevant for my analysis of Desdemona's addiction to Othello's serial storytelling.

Empathy is now recognized as a universal human gift, but it is not at all clear under what conditions it is promoted or constrained. This raises some general empathy questions for Shakespeare's plays:

What are the key triggers for empathy? Is empathy gender-specific? Are women more empathic than men? Are there different cultures of empathy? And what is the relation between empathy and race?

Shakespeare's *Othello* is particularly rich in its depiction and elicitation of very different forms of empathy. Empathy may be a universal human emotion, shared already by small infants and practiced in all cultures of the world, but it is by no means a reliable and predictable response in the repertoire of human interaction. The characters in *Othello* differ hugely with respect to the use they make of their empathy. This term is not limited to pity and compassion but used in a much wider sense that includes the technique of mind-reading or what Heinz Kohut called 'vicarious introspection' (1984: 82). Othello can be considered as an illiterate when it comes to the art of mind-reading, while Iago is the very opposite and obviously a world champion in this discipline. But this does in no way mean that he aims at being supportive and geared to improving the situation of his fellow human beings. On the contrary, the better he understands their intimate thoughts, the more effectively he can manipulate and destroy his fellow human beings.

My scope in this chapter, however, is more confined. I will focus on the character of Desdemona and more generally on the relation between empathy and the imagination. Literature and empathy have in common that they are both built on the imagination. Literature offers an extended archive for different contexts of creating or blocking empathy that vastly exceeds the scientific labs with their new instruments for scanning and measuring the synapses in neuronetworks. Literary narratives present the workings of empathy between fictional characters in action and shape the flow and blocking of empathy between the protagonists and the audience. In creating and maintaining an interest in the life stories of others, they offer a huge reservoir for identification and empathy, thus strengthening the bond between human beings.

Desdemona's empathic imagination

Desdemona is a fascinating character who is endowed with a large supply of empathy and a particular addiction to listening to the stories of others. Shakespeare's *Othello* begins with the conundrum of the love between the title character and Desdemona. When

her father hears that she has eloped with her lover, he is unable to imagine how his daughter could have been attracted to a black general, thus giving voice to the fact that 'Blackness had shock value' on the Jacobean stage (Vaughan 1994: 59). As he rules out the possibility of romantic love from the outset, he suspects the effect of 'arts inhibited' (1.2.79), magic and 'foul charms' (1.2.73). Othello is therefore summoned before the city council to publicly justify himself against the accusation of having used some kind of trick or magic in this relationship. His first speech in self-defence is the longest of his speeches in the play. In this formal setting, he is given the chance to introduce and defend himself, describing in detail the first intimate encounters between himself and Desdemona. In this detailed account, he asserts that it was not exactly love but rather a special form of empathy that drew Desdemona to the much older and dark-skinned Othello.

In Western tradition, the privileged channel for the spark of love is the eye. Shakespeare's plays abound with references to this popular trope of love as an infection of the eye. They also contain, however, a warning against this mode of helpless surrendering:

> Tell me where is Fancy bred,
> Or in the heart, or in the head?
> How begot? How nourished?
> It is engend'red in the eyes,
> With gazing fed, and Fancy dies
> In the cradle where it lies
>
> (*MV* 3.2.63–9)

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia uses this song to send her lover Bassanio the hidden message not to follow this popular rule in this particular case in order to resist the lure of the golden casket. A short poem by W. B. Yeats shows the long tradition of the motif into the twentieth century and its descent into irony:

> *A Drinking Song*
>
> Wine comes in at the mouth
> And love comes in at the eye;
> That's all we shall know for truth

Before we grow old and die.
I lift the glass to my mouth,
I look at you, and I sigh.

(Yeats [1919] 1966)

In his poem, Yeats mocks the romantic tradition by juxtaposing two very different sources of intoxication: love and alcohol. Desdemona's love differs considerably from the romantic trope of love at first sight. Her love and imagination are not engendered in the *eye* but reach her through the channel of the *ear*. In her case, we can even assume that the visual sensory channel was blocked for the kindling of love. Her father had already expressed the collective racist prejudice of the Venetian society and of the contemporary public in the theatre when he said: how could she 'fall in love with what she feared to look on' and make a choice 'against all rules of nature' (1.3.99, 1.3.102)?

Nature is here invoked, as it is from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, as an infallible norm for human behaviour. For this reason, Shakespeare invented for his heroine a different channel of love. Desdemona did not look at Othello; she listened to him: 'She'd come again, and with a greedy ear / Devour up my discourse' (1.3.150–1). Othello emphasizes that what captivated Desdemona were his words, not his looks. The emphasis on 'greed' and 'devouring' transforms the passive act of hearing into an active and exaggerated act of consumption.[1] The words overcame the sense of alienation; they bypassed and neutralized the external appearance and uncovered the shared humanity and the interior of the other. In Desdemona, Shakespeare has created a female character that is not just endowed with a rich supply of imagination, but steeped in colonial imagination. As Jyotsna Singh has pointed out, the stories that Desdemona falls in love with are deeply indebted to colonial fantasies: 'Desdemona's love for Othello comes to life in the stories he tells about his past. And who is Othello in these stories of slavery and adventure? He is simply a "character" in an imaginary landscape which viewers, then and now, recognize as a semi-fictional creation of colonialist travel narratives' (1994: 288).[2] When Desdemona arrives a bit later before the Council, she confirms this capacity of empathy and of imagining the other not in the racist frame of menacing otherness, but in the raving frame of heroic idolization: 'I saw Othello's visage in his mind, / And to his honours and his

valiant parts / Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate' (1.3.253–5). Stanley Cavell has argued, '[s]he saw his visage as he sees it, . . . she understands his blackness as he understands it, as the expression (or in his word, his manifestation) of his mind – which is not overlooking it' (2003: 129). I fully agree that this is a convincing comment of the first verse – but not of the second. Desdemona is fully committed to her captain, but as the play evolves, we also notice that she is often inattentive and 'overlooks' him. The contrast could not be sharper: while her father Brabantio enters the play with racial slur, Desdemona introduces herself to the council and the audience with idolizing rhetoric. No wonder the father cannot follow his daughter in her 'empathetic co-creation' (Bryson 2020: 104) into this world of glory, heroism and honour. He is a sensuous and unimaginative human being who is unable to transcend what he sees and knows: 'I never yet did hear / That the bruised heart was pierced through the ear' (1.3.219–20).

Othello's stories

What did Desdemona hear that changed her personal character beyond recognition? First of all, she had no direct contact with the source of the sensational news that she craved for. Othello told his story only to Desdemona's father, while his daughter attended to her female duties. She thus missed the continuous narration but caught bits and pieces that she overheard. These strange and sensational fragments stuck in her mind and memory, making her even more greedy to hear the full account:

> But still the house affairs would draw her thence,
> Which ever as she could with haste dispatch
> She'd come again, and with a greedy ear
> Devour up my discourse; which I, observing,
> Took once a pliant hour, and found good means
> To draw from her a prayer of earnest heart
> That I would all my pilgrimage dilate,
> Whereof by parcels she had something heard,
> But not intentively.
>
> (1.3.148–56)

Desdemona is captivated by heroic deeds, dramatic suspense, tales of woe and unbelievable events. What others read about in the popular romances of the early print age, she has the extraordinary privilege to hear directly as a tale of extraordinary adventure from the protagonist's mouth:[3]

> I spake of most disastrous chances,
> Of moving accidents by flood and field,
> Of hair-breadth scapes i' th' imminent deadly breach,
> Of being taken by the insolent foe
> And sold to slavery; of my redemption thence
> And portance in my travailous history;
> Wherein of antres vast and deserts idle,
> Rough quarries, rocks and hills whose heads touch heaven
> It was my hint to speak – such was my process –
> And of the cannibals that each other eat,
> The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads
> Do grow beneath their shoulders. These things to hear
> Would Desdemona seriously incline
>
> (1.3.135–47)

Othello does not only summarize the topics and topoi of his narration, but he also describes in detail the cumulative effect they have on his listener. Desdemona was obviously strongly affected by what she heard:

> My story being done
> She gave me for my pains a world of sighs,
> She swore in faith 'twas strange, 'twas passing
> strange,
> 'Twas pitiful, 'twas wondrous pitiful;
> She wished she had not heard it, yet she wished
> That heaven had made her such a man.
>
> (1.3.159–64)

Desdemona's way of falling in love with Othello differs considerably from the traditional model of romantic love. There is no direct spark that enters through the eye to ignite love, and thus there is no immediate reciprocal exchange. Instead, there is an indirect path of love mediated by Othello's narration and Desdemona's empathic response. Like Don Quixote and Emma Bovary, Desdemona finds

herself immersed in a strange and fascinating world that she wants to become part of. While Desdemona is listening to the narrative, she enters the stage of the imagination, and in doing so, she completely changes her role and character. Through the medium of the narrative, she herself experiences a miraculous transformation and morphs from a 'moth of peace' to a 'fair warrior' at Othello's side (1.3.257; 2.1.179). No wonder her father can no longer recognize her! Supported by a melodramatic imagination, her empathy makes huge leaps across cultural borders and barriers, but this fantasy shuns the reality test and is responsible for completely losing her ground.

The same is true for Othello: he has not fallen in love head over heels with Desdemona either. On the contrary, he hesitated at first and was reluctant to enter into such a commitment. One reason was that he did not want to give up his nomadic and 'unhoused free condition' (1.2.26). Another reason was that he was highly conscious of his weaknesses and limitations, knowing that he had neither talent nor experience for domestic happiness. The link that connects this particular couple is therefore as complicated as it is circuitous: Desdemona falls for Othello through her empathy for the protagonist of his tale, and Othello falls for Desdemona through his gratitude for this listener's empathy, as he confesses to the city council in public: 'She loved me for the dangers I had passed, / And I loved her that she did pity them. / This is the only witchcraft I have used' (1.3.168–70). As David Bevington succinctly puts it, 'Othello falls in love with a woman who wants him, and who wants to be like him' (2001: 224).

The Desdemona effect

According to Aristotle, empathy is most likely to be triggered by an underlying sense of similarity: if the other is like me, his story could also be my story (Nussbaum 2001: 316). Desdemona's empathy, on the contrary, is invoked by a sense of utter strangeness. She does not react like the others to his exotic strangeness with racist stereotypes, however, but on the contrary with the warmest sentiments and strongest possible fascination. Desdemona listens with a 'greedy ear' and, like female readers seized by a reading addiction, she displays the typical symptoms of an insatiable appetite for what she takes in:

'She thanked me / And bade me, if I had a friend that loved her, / I should but teach him how to tell my story / And that would woo her' (1.3.164–7). Desdemona has a problem: whatever she does, she overdoes it. This is the point where Desdemona's acting tilts into overacting and her behaviour verges on caricature. What exactly is happening here? In the process of listening, Desdemona's attention shifts more and more from the object of her love to the narrative as the medium of her pleasure. She literally falls for the narrative, which she cannot get enough of and wants to listen to over and over again like a record in '*excessive* aesthetic delight' (Greenblatt 1980: 254). While she is sitting close to Othello, she is already longing for an intermediary who can continuously provide her with this fascinating thrill. In the act of listening, in other words, she is transcending her world and entering that of her lover, but while she completely surrenders to the magic of her hero's story, she literally loses sight of her counterpart as a real person. As Jessica Tooker has put it, 'Desdemona demonstrates how empathy may . . . become profound misrecognition' (2022: 142).

Desdemona's addiction to Othello's stories is presented as a gradual transformation into a state of pure listening. Like all addictive readers and immersive users of digital media, she forgets everything around her in the process of reception. All she hears is a voice, and the voice tells a story, and the story inflames her imagination. In this mediated process, she loses sight of the source of her information. The source of information is disconnected from the teller and assumes an independent life of its own. What started as a communication situation between teller and listener turns into a proxy relation. Cassio, for instance, can enter this dyad of communication, stretching it and replacing Othello as the teller and wooer. Some readers might suspect that this is the weak spot of the bond of love between Othello and Desdemona, a predetermined breaking point that forebodes the end of this unusual love affair. This, however, would be a very trivial reading that imports the reader's clichés into the text and loses sight of the careful construction that is being built up in the text. The point here is serial repetition (and not the conventional logic of marital infidelity). It is not just Cassio who replaces Othello, but rather Cassio could also be replaced, for instance, by a technical device that repeats the same stories forever, such as a CD or audio cassette. The medium is becoming the message and the locus of attraction.

This is what I call the Desdemona effect: she forgets everything around her, yearns only for these stories and begs for their serial repetition. Desdemona is addicted to a medium that she wants to control herself in order to enjoy in an endless loop of iterations. In a way, this scene contains a remarkable anticipation of the lure of electronic media – centuries before their technological invention.

Seriality in early modern romance

In her response to Othello's stories, Desdemona is driven by two desires: she wants to hear the whole story in its entirety after having tasted only bits and pieces, and she wants to hear these stories over and over again. What I have called the Desdemona effect is thus linked to the principle of seriality. Seriality results in this case from a strong demand for repetition. An insatiable energy is set in motion by the simple desire of getting more of the same. This desire steers the dynamics of both pop culture and drugs; in fact, it points to a family resemblance that both share. The attractive, enticing and even intoxicating quality of pop culture is not a new phenomenon; it arose together with the invention of mass media, which goes back to early modernity and Shakespeare's time. The presentation of Desdemona as a Quixotic character who shows an insatiable appetite for sensational stories and yearns for a heroic world in which s/he can step into an outstanding role might be a hint to the contemporary genre of the romances that were popular in the early print culture of Shakespeare's time (Kesson and Smith 2013).

The genre of romances was a central part of medieval literature and culture that was transformed towards the end of the sixteenth century into a popular genre with the rise of the printing press. The new medium had the capacity to reach a much wider audience than Shakespeare's theatre. Through multiplication, publication, dissemination and translation, printed texts transcended geographic and linguistic boundaries and catered to European readers. In an age of new scientific technology, discoveries and colonial enterprises, the medium of print culture also accompanied the early modern transformation from a closed world to an open universe. Together with melodramatic chivalrous romances, stunning tales of travel and adventure were printed in a serial format that was designed to

stimulate the readers' desire for love stories, exoticism, wonder and astonishment.

When Othello defends himself before the city council in the first act of the play, his speech covers his biography, speaking 'of most disastrous chances' (1.3.135). In this situation, Othello retells the dramatic adventures that he has lived through in battles and other accidents in wild regions of the world. In most of them, he escaped imminent death, was sold into slavery and was liberated again. He also gives a description of the most exotic regions of the world that were then seen for the first time with the eyes of European travellers. With this speech, he introduces himself not only to the audience but also retells his life story to the citizens of Venice after having already told it repeatedly to Desdemona, on whom his words made such a strong impact.

In Shakespeare's time, we observe a new phase of literary production, in which popular literature reached a new stage of mass production in frequent reprints and sequels, while elite circles started to create the framework of a literary canon for a select number of authors and genres. Serial forms of popular literature that circulated as bestsellers were ostracized by a new generation of self-authorized literary critics who started to prescribe new norms for art and taste. Sir Philip Sidney and Edward Spenser were investing in print literature at Shakespeare's time and a new literary canon written in English. A social rift appeared between distinguished literature created by prestigious artists and cheap forms of entertainment that were produced as commercial popular products (Rhodes 2013).

Shakespeare's presentation of Desdemona might well contain a hint to this underlying development. Her behaviour exposes a problematic form of dealing with art, very much in the way that points to the detrimental effects of bad love poems on Romeo's mind before he is reformed by his encounter with Juliet. According to such a reading, Desdemona was hooked on the popular genre of exotic romances. The term print popularity stands for the historical recovery of and a new interest in literature that was reproduced and published in a serial format and had a wide appeal for writers and consumers. The demand for enticing narratives was general; it reached 'from the highly educated to the least literate, who had the narratives read to them' – a close parallel to Desdemona's dependence on an exterior source of telling (Wilson 2013: 213).

Serial publication went hand in hand with serial production. Desire and appetite on the side of the consumer had to be sustained by selling strategies such as narrative continuity, conflation of parts, open-endedness and translation. The narrative form of serial publication, writes Louise Wilson with respect to chivalric romance, was 'errant, episodic, and often open-ended and multi-generational' (2013: 218).

Like tales transmitted as folklore, romances often have an episodic structure and are consumed in a mode of serial production and reception. The printing press as a new mass medium created new reading publics, and the entrepreneurs of this technology were in constant demand for publishable material. The romances were a perfect supply for the printers. As this new genre was detached from contentious topics like religion and politics, it could reach a wide audience based on a perennial interest in exoticism, fantasy and adventures. Its structural looseness was welcome; the structure of romances is closer to the laws of oral mnemotechnics than to the more sophisticated plot constructions of written composition.

Shakespeare's psychological portrait of Desdemona's ardent desire for romances, her demand for serial repetition and retelling in search for continuous fuel to feed her imagination – this Quixotic desire is not so far away from the trope of the female reader as developed in the eighteenth century. The distinction romance vs. novel has been inscribed into the Western canon of critical categories and shaped the periodization of literary history (Reeve 1785). A critical revision of these concepts allows for a revaluation and rehabilitation of forms of composition that had been devalued by the standards of literary canonization and the discourse on aesthetics in the eighteenth century. The category premodern therefore enhances a new esteem for serial production, and the same is true for the category postmodern: as the introduction to this volume has explored, serial production as an art form has a come back in music, but also in electronic and digital media such as popular TV series as well as in computer games. Adventures abound in these new modes of narration and proliferate in a loose structure of episodes that are relatively self-contained. The ideal of a whole and of organic composition has been replaced by more flexible forms of composition and tradition in which authorship is collectivized and parts can easily be exchanged, deleted or placed in a different order.

Empathy and romantic imagination: Desdemona's role-playing

In his presentation of Desdemona's greedy ear, Shakespeare emphasizes both the magic quality of Othello's words and the hyperbolic quality of Desdemona's love. There are further remarkable examples of artificiality and exaggeration in Desdemona's behaviour. A recurrent feature is that she overacts whatever she does. This would be more fitting in the low mode of comedy than in a high mode of tragedy, where her character is defined by the highest norms and ideals of behaviour. But even though she exaggerates, Desdemona's character is not tainted by caricature; her motives remain pure and noble. In clear contrast to her servant Emilia, who is also portrayed as a positive female character and who also finds a tragic end by being murdered by her husband, Desdemona is presented as a noble role model for female sentiments and virtues.

But Desdemona is not only a role model; she is also a virtuoso in role-playing. She pushes her part to the limit, making her a melodramatic figure who steers the narrative according to her own inspirations. Unlike the female readers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Desdemona does not only passively engage in fictional stories with imagination and empathy; she also develops a strong sense of identification and a desire and determination to cross the border between fiction and reality to take an active part in the imagined world, to experience it herself and to change it according to her own sentiments and impulses. When I speak here of a Desdemona effect, I refer to this combination of empathy and imagination leading to a strong desire for serial role-playing.

It is therefore not sufficient for Desdemona just to watch the lives of others, particularly those who are stricken with hardships and harms, and to listen to their stories; she is also eager to enter the stage herself and assume her place in the imaginary world of these stories. One glamorous role that she designs for herself is that of a 'fair warrior' (2.1.180). This obviously transgressive role removes her radically from her upbringing in the city of Venice. It requires a leap into another world and adopting new roles, postures, habits and sentiments. She is determined not to remain watching passively from the outside as a mere viewer, but to step

bravely and radically into the fabled world and to cut all ties and connections with her background. In her own words, repeated by Othello in his introduction in the first act, we may already discover a premonition that Desdemona might lose herself in her imaginary adventure: 'She wished she had not heard it, yet she wished / That heaven had made her such a man' (1.3.163–4). Her desire involves ambiguous meanings and different stages: does she wish for a husband / a companion / a medium who can tell these stories over and over again? Or does she dream of becoming part of the narrative? Does she even dream of becoming the male hero herself? Addiction, in her case, appears in the play as a form of fantasizing: adopting grand new roles and sleepwalking in her new world of the imagination.

A lot of pity and little empathy

But this is not all. In Shakespeare's drama, Desdemona has yet another role to play. As the partner of Othello, she adopts the heroic and glamorous role of the fair warrior. But when she is speaking on behalf of the ill-fated Cassio, she adopts the determined role of a solicitor. In this role, she embodies the central Christian virtue of compassion, for which Virgin Mary is the religious and mythical model (Hunter 1976: 136–8; Milward 1987: 62 ; Hassel 2001; Maillet 2007; Espinosa 2011: 111–19). It is therefore no coincidence that Desdemona, when she accepts Cassio's plea, invokes Mary: 'By'r lady, I could do much' (3.3.74). Shakespeare shows in her case how compassion and empathy can fall apart with tragic effect. Desdemona's pity is firmly grounded in the tradition of Christian compassion, and it is this central competence and virtue that she extends to Cassio in his plight. She declares: 'he hath left part of his grief with me / I suffer with him' (3.3.53–4). In her unlimited capability of compassion, she turns into the diametrical opposite of the destructively scheming Iago. While Iago is given features of the devil, Desdemona acquires an almost religious halo by acting in the role of Mary, the divine intercessor. While Iago the devil makes it his business to put every character of the play into a worse state than that in which he or she was in the first place, it is Desdemona's ardent desire, echoing the holy Virgin, to intervene for the miserable and assist the wretched.

In this particular role and mission that she has prescribed for herself, Desdemona acts in the role of a solicitor and go-between, who is ardently engaged in restoring the destroyed relationship of trust between the general Othello and his lieutenant Cassio. In achieving this end, however, she has little regard for personal empathy in her marriage and totally neglects the psychological state of alarm in her jealous husband. Desdemona acts and conceives of herself as a model of empathy and compassion, yet she completely lacks any sense of strategic empathy in dealing with her husband Othello. In order to obtain Cassio's acquittal, she puts Othello under great stress and completely overlooks his growing jealousy. She also completely lacks the sensitivity for the right timing of this delicate issue. Her excessive theatricality is clearly expressed in this exaggerated pledge to Cassio:

> Assure thee,
> If I do vow a friendship I'll perform it
> To the last article. My lord shall never rest,
> I'll watch him tame and talk him out of patience,
> His bed shall seem a school, his board a shrift,
> I'll intermingle everything he does
> With Cassio's suit: therefore be merry, Cassio,
> For thy solicitor shall rather die
> Than give thy cause away.
>
> (3.3.20–8)

And here is an example of how inconsiderately she puts her promise into practice:

> OTHELLO
> Not now, sweet Desdemon, some other time. . . .
> DESDEMONA
> Shall't be tonight, at supper?
> OTHELLO
> No, not tonight.
> DESDEMONA
> Tomorrow dinner then?
> OTHELLO
> I shall not dine at home. . . .

DESDEMONA
Why then, tomorrow night, or Tuesday morn;
On Tuesday, noon or night; on Wednesday morn!
I prithee name the time, but let it not
Exceed three days.

(3.3.55–63)

With her importunate request, Desdemona reminds Othello that Cassio, who has simultaneously been built up as Othello's rival by Iago, was once himself a go-between for Othello's courtship.

This serial repetition is written into the play: Desdemona mediates as a go-between between Othello and Cassio, as Cassio had mediated between Othello and Desdemona. Desdemona's intervention effects the opposite of what she had intended: the trust between the spouses is completely undermined. Unlike the Virgin's pity, Desdemona's pity is ineffective, even counterproductive and tragic, because, in performing it, she unwittingly plays a role in Iago's script in which her own noble goals are perverted. Iago succeeds in recoding her pity towards Cassio into sexual lust. The collision of the spouses could not be more drastic: she wants to act as an angel of compassion but does so unwittingly in a metadrama performed on stage that is directed by Iago, who assigns her the role of a whore.

Retelling and the role of the emotions

Since the breakthrough in neuroimaging for cognitive science and empathy research, a new academic field called empirical aesthetics has been established. It is situated between literary studies, psychology, sociology and neuroscience. One of its leading scholars is Fritz Breithaupt, who works on empathy, narration and the role of emotions. He devised and conducted a large empirical investigation in order to better understand the role of the emotions in the process of storytelling and retelling. Retelling or hearing the same story over and over again is an important source of pleasure for children, as it is for Desdemona. Breithaupt's understanding of retelling also involves seriality, but it is more technical in the sense of providing one's own version of a story that one has just heard (Marsh 2007). This is what he asked his probands in the experiment to do in order

to find out: how is a story altered in the process of retelling, what do re-tellers omit, what do they change and what remains in place?

The result of the experiment was remarkable: in spite of transformations, condensation and abridgements, emotions were successfully preserved and transmitted even in changed and minimalist versions of the original story. This led Breithaupt to a number of interesting conclusions. Narratives are universally popular and valued because they are a powerful and efficient tool for encoding, preserving, amplifying and spreading emotions. They are told and retold for the sake of the emotions they carry. Breithaupt therefore describes narratives 'as "encapsulated affect," that is, as a carrier that transfers an emotional impression from a narrator to a listener or reader' (2017: 104, transl. A.A.). As we have seen, Desdemona was exceedingly susceptible to the emotional impact of stories. According to Breithaupt, 'narratives provoke affects, which a listener in turn can pass on in a relatively stable way by retelling them' (104). This emphasizes the serial character that is built into narratives. He adds that the successful retelling is not dependent on getting all the facts right but on getting the affect across. In this view, narration is for Breithaupt '*the performative medium for the production of the affect*. Accordingly, with regard to the narrative, many things, such as the facts of the narrative, can be changed or dropped, as long as the production of the affect is guaranteed' (trans. from Breithaupt 2017: 104, emphasis in the original).

Breithaupt speaks of emotions as rewards for narrative thinking and lists various forms of gratification: triumph, erotic fulfilment, satisfaction for deserved punishment, astonishment, being moved, feeling resolved, being moved to action, sublime tragedy, surprise and therapeutic effects of collective narratives such as overcoming obstacles or healing. Most of these emotions, if not all of them, are involved in the Desdemona effect. Breithaupt's conclusions can be read as a theoretical confirmation of her specific addiction: she indulges in the gratification of the affects that stories produce. This is what energizes her and sets her in motion, both when generating empathy and when revelling in role-playing.

Breithaupt's analysis of stories as carriers and transmitters of emotions is also relevant for the strategies and effects of Shakespearean seriality as discussed in this volume. Certain elements and core emotions of his art that are picked up and recycled in the history of his artistic afterlife retain their emotional charge in

spite of the artistic transformation and reframing. A term hitherto reserved only for images comes to mind to describe this particular Shakespeare effect: his texts and performances have the quality of a pathos-formula (Didi-Huberman 2010: 212–24). Art historian Aby Warburg coined this term for affect-loaded images that have an active afterlife because they are not diminished, trivialized or exhausted in the process of re-use but, like a power bank, amplified and recharged.

Notes

1 Christina Wald has analysed the sinister quality of this metaphor in another play by Shakespeare (Wald 2011).

2 See the recent *Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Race* for accounts of how the racism registered in *Othello* can be problematized in teaching (e.g. Mehdizadeh 2024).

3 See Dimmock 2018 for an account of how Shakespeare evokes and modifies the popular genre of Turk plays.

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4

Shakespeare's serial legacies

Joyce and Beckett

Claudia Olk

The epigraph of *Ulysses* 'Trieste-Zurich-Paris, 1914–1921' succinctly presents a series of geographic locations and dates (Joyce 2022 [1922]: 732). Their linear arrangement, at the same time, gives way to a vertical dimension that looms beneath the factual surface. The three places are linked to the vicissitudes of Joyce's biography, and the dates span the vast and far-reaching historical events that lie between them, many of which were to irrevocably change Europe's political and social landscape. This paratextual ending of the novel also reveals characteristics of the compositional structures pertinent to the entire work. The text presents itself as a moveable, dynamic object, which corresponds to a reading process that is equally fluid and constitutes itself as a journey through and within the text. The sequential journey of *Ulysses*, however, is unfolding a poetic world that is always already an intertextually grounded one. The novel's overall structure relies on an intertextual framework in which the protagonist's wanderings through the various locations of Dublin, modelled on Homer's *Odyssey*, intersect with and thereby align themselves to predecessors from classical antiquity onwards. This chapter will trace patterns of seriality in relation to Shakespeare as they

emerge in *Ulysses* and in Beckett's prose and early novel *Murphy*. Seriality will be taken as a poetic operation of the text and an authorial practice of inscribing one's work into literary history and engaging with one's predecessors in a way that is retrospectively reactivating, creating variants which reflect back on the sources and transform our reading of them. Among these predecessors, as I would like to argue, the dialogue with Shakespeare is central to Joyce's, Beckett's and many of their contemporaries' explorations of creative processes, which rely on seriality as a gradually evolving characteristic of fiction as work in progress.

Modernist writers, prominently James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Ezra Pound and Samuel Beckett, have emphasized their indebtedness to Shakespeare (Cohn 1972; Olk 2010: 113–14; Olk 2023). Rather than exerting influence in a unidirectional and hierarchical way, Shakespeare's texts became part of resonant configurations that also made it possible to read them in new and unprecedented ways (cf. Bronfen 2015). Interacting with the works of Shakespeare in a reciprocally transformational way, modernists reviewed their own works and reflected on their aesthetics. Writing was not merely conceived in terms of a teleological model that Woolf had dismissed as 'a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged' (Woolf 1966: 106), but it engaged with the past in a serial, regenerative movement that centres on the artistic process in a twofold dynamic of undoing and re-arranging, of return to and departure from one's sources.

Next to Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Joyce's *Ulysses* became a major modernist example of how the works of one's predecessors, and prominently Shakespeare, can be made resonant within one's own writing through one literary permutation to the next. For Joyce, this also involved ways of superseding and incorporating his predecessors both stylistically and by way of striving for an encyclopaedic wholeness that resulted in accumulating references to other works and inaugurating a reciprocal and continuous dialogue with and between them (cf. Fogarty 2023: 93). Richard Halpern summarizes the modernist reception of Shakespeare in similar terms: 'By unleashing a conflicted, dialectical interplay between past and present, they construct a Shakespeare who is at once "our contemporary" and our bracing Other' (Halpern 1997: 14). In looking at these dialectal legacies in *Ulysses* and also in Beckett's novel *Murphy*, I would like to show how Shakespeare is used to

reflect on heritage as seriality in terms of creative realignment and also of continuation.

Seriality is not only deeply embedded in modernist works and the manner in which they were published, but it also carries formal and genetic significance affecting the creative process in which writers engage with their predecessors.[1] When considering the conditions of publishing and the dynamics of the book market, one could speak of a modernist culture of serialization shaping both authorial practices and reading habits. Virginia Woolf often used her short stories to experiment with characters and themes that were later branching out into novels such as *Mrs Dalloway*. Samuel Beckett created serial continuity in his plays by translating and (self-)adapting them and thereby expanding their scope of significance. His works create mobile texts in which protagonists, like his tragicomic hero Belacqua, along with minor characters change places, appear and reappear in a variety of contexts that allow for a serial reading of them. The continuation of themes and characters is also characteristic of Joyce's works (Crispi 2015), and their ways of creating coherence by establishing internal networks of reference.

In terms of seriality as a mode of publication, Joyce, supported by Ezra Pound and the editor Harriet Shaw Weaver, early on, was able to publish *A Portrait of the Artist* in serial form in *The Egoist*. Later, also the first thirteen chapters of *Ulysses* and the first instalment of chapter 14 were serialized in the US periodical, the *Little Review*, between 1918 and 1920, before the complete text was published by Shakespeare and Company on Joyce's fortieth birthday in 1922. Joyce had instructed Pound to 'consign it serially from 1 January next, instalments of about 6000 words' (Joyce 1975: 227). The sequential publication in twenty-three instalments was taken on, however, not without problems and the continuous threat of legal proceedings, owing to the work's allegedly obscene content (Hutton 2019: 7). These difficulties notwithstanding, the publication in serial form could also rely on a readerly demand.

In *Ulysses*, Shakespeare is a serially emerging presence, marking a continuous point of return in the novel's various instalments and a vital part of its evolving internal network of references. Both Shakespeare the author and his works appear in a series of episodes and generally pervade *Ulysses* on many levels. The 'Aeolus'-episode, for instance, uses Shakespeare to reflect on the interplay of novelty

and reiteration in the publishing business. It is set in the editorial office of the *Freeman* journal and consists of fragmented narratives under seemingly random headings that formally emulate seriality. References to Shakespeare's plays are inserted into these fragments, for instance, when under the heading 'Sad' a lengthy praise of the Irish landscape is paralleled with the beginning of *Hamlet*: '. . . *the peerless panorama of Ireland's portfolio, . . . translucent glow of our mild mysterious Irish twilight* . . . – The moon, ... He forgot Hamlet' (Joyce 2022 [1922]: 121).

The reference to Horatio's description of the sunrise in the first scene of *Hamlet*: 'But look, the morn in russet mantle clad / Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill' (*Ham* 1.1.165–6), here presents the embeddedness of what is marked as an Irish narrative, referring to Yeats' *Celtic Twilight* (1893), in a long-standing English literary tradition for which Shakespeare also stands. Allusions to his works become part of an internal seriality, in which fractions of the same quotation surface in different contexts. In 'Aeolus', under the heading 'Impromptu', Irish history is, again, hypostasized by a speaker as being related to the rituals of ancient Egypt. Upon which the text ironically comments by quoting from *Cymbeline*: 'His listeners held their cigarettes poised to hear, their smokes ascending . . . *And let our crooked smokes*. Noble words coming' (Joyce 2022 [1922]: 136). The reference to ritualistic praise and the 'crooked smokes' is repeated at the end of the 'Sirens' episode in a gesture of reconciliation: 'Cease to strive. Peace of the druid priests of Cymbeline . . . *Laud we the gods / And let our crooked smokes climb to their nostrils / From our bless'd altars*' (Joyce 2022 [1922]: 209). At both instances, the text highlights the contact zones between an Irish/Celtic tradition and Shakespeare, which form a persistent concern of the novel, evolving as one of its continuous intertextual undercurrents.

More directly, Shakespeare makes a cameo appearance in the 'Circe'-episode that takes place in Dublin's underworld and records many metamorphoses of characters and objects. Shakespeare's face emerges in this pantomime setting prompted by Stephen's and Bloom's Hamlet-like gaze into the mirror: 'The mirror up to nature. . . . The face of William Shakespeare, beardless, appears there, . . . , crowned by the reflection of the reindeer antlered hatrack in the hall' (Joyce 2022 [1922]: 528). Stephen and Bloom conjure this ghostly image of Shakespeare through an unsheeted mirror, and

thereby indeed hold the mirror up to his biography, when his appearance also alludes to him as a horned husband and the son of an alleged poacher. When the paralytic image subsequently becomes alive and eventually starts to speak, Shakespeare's temper ranges from a 'dignified ventriloquy' when he expresses mock-proverbial wisdom to a 'paralytic rage' when he rants in a stance worthy of Old Hamlet's ghost and grumbles about Gertrude marrying Claudius: 'Weda seca whokilla farst' (Joyce 2022 [1922]: 529).

Apart from many single intertextual references and this dramatic *mîse-en-abyme*, the relation between the contemporary artist and Shakespeare in *Ulysses* is nowhere dealt with more intricately than in the ninth episode that Joyce in a letter to Ezra Pound in 1917 referred to as 'the Hamlet chapter' (Joyce 1957: 101). It presents itself as a creative reworking of the Shakespearean text with and through its various traditions of criticism and reception. The ninth episode of *Ulysses*, 'Scylla and Charybdis', if one adheres to the Homeric terminology, forms the middle part of the novel and indeed creates one of its culminating moments: it takes place at 2.00 pm, halfway through the novel's timeline, and in it, Stephen Dedalus' aesthetic reflections reach a climax before he as a character gradually recedes from the main plot.

The episode's dense network of references to Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy, to theology and literature, opens a vast interpretive horizon as it investigates dialectical configurations of life and art, tradition and literary creation. In Homer's *Odyssey*, 'Scylla and Charybdis', the rock and the whirlpool, demarcate a narrow strait through which Odysseus and his companions must sail, and the two equally fatal oppositions metaphorically summarize the antithetical structure of Joyce's episode. 'Scylla and Charybdis' in *Ulysses* delineates a Western tradition of thought which relies on binary oppositions as it juxtaposes and subsequently interweaves Aristotelian notions of materiality, flesh and the feminine, maternal principles of creation with male legacies and paternal ideals of immateriality mostly derived from Plato. From there, the episode rehearses theories of creation such as emanation, entelechy and transubstantiation to scholastically enquire into the interdependence of form and matter. These enquiries prominently include questions of authorship, national heritage and gendered legacies. In its dialogic form, its scenic units and its theatrical entrances and exits, the chapter fashions itself as a serialized, animated afterlife

of the tradition of afterlives that it so carefully rehearses. *Ulysses* thus seems to embrace T. S. Eliot's argument in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' that each new work, instead of merely adding to an existing canon, shapes it anew (Eliot 1975: 38–9).[2]

In the ninth episode of *Ulysses*, the august legacy of Shakespeare and particularly of *Hamlet* is the tradition with which the characters predominantly engage in their dialogues, their theories and eventually in their staging of a short play. Set in the National Library of Ireland, the chapter renders a discussion between the aspiring artist Stephen Dedalus, librarians and various members of the Irish literary revival who epitomize different approaches to the issues of biographical criticism and national tradition.[3] The library furthermore provides the space where the material presence of a literary work, its history and the virtual presence of its author encounter readers, artists and critics. As a national and cultural institution, the library selects and preserves materialized knowledge and memory and provides access to it. It therefore represents not only an enormous treasury of knowledge and heritage, but it is also a model of the cultural dynamics that determine traditions of reading and enable the discovery, reinvention and resurrection of single works and authors. The episode comments on these tendencies of continuous recuperation and appropriation when it engages with Shakespeare scholarship since the eighteenth century.

'Scylla and Charybdis' therefore begins with what is already a retrospective on an influential tradition in Shakespeare's reception. Stephen refers to it as Shakespeare 'made in Germany' (Joyce 2022 [1922]: 197), a way of reinventing and appropriating Shakespeare that stems from the hypothesis that there is an unparalleled and almost archaic affinity between Germany and Shakespeare, who became popularized by the canonical Schlegel-Tieck translation and was firmly embedded in German classicism, swiftly occupying the rank of the third German classic next to Goethe and Schiller. To illustrate Shakespeare's prominence in the German tradition and beyond it, the episode explicitly draws on Goethe's eponymous character Wilhelm Meister, who is both successor and kindred spirit to Hamlet (Plock 2015).[4]

The assistant librarian John Eglinton, who uses this example, maintains that Goethe, in fraternal attachment to Shakespeare, creates Wilhelm, the German equivalent to William (or Master Will), as a brother to the sensitive soul of Hamlet, and both characters share

similar problems related to romantic melancholia: 'The beautiful ineffectual dreamer who comes to grief against hard facts' (Joyce 2022 [1922]: 177). The universal life-likeness that Eglinton attests to Hamlet's and Wilhelm's personal issues in his view does not dampen but rather enhance the poetry of both works as well as shaping Eglinton's own vocabulary: '. . ., have we not, those priceless pages of Wilhelm Meister? A great poet on a great brother poet. A hesitating soul taking arms against a sea of troubles, . . .' (Joyce 2022 [1922]: 176). Shakespeare and Goethe become looming presences that recurrently emerge in the many discussions about the links between an author's life and his works, about processes of canonization, paternal and maternal legacies. 'Hamlet's musings about the afterlife of his princely soul' (Joyce 2022 [1922]: 178) therefore take shape in the various conceptions of the series of afterlives that Joyce reflects on, in the many dialectical oppositions that constitute 'Scylla and Charybdis' and also in the literary afterlife that the chapter itself presents as it fashions itself at the end of a series.

Stephen Dedalus adheres to an Aristotelian view, seeks to reconcile work and context, life and art, and proposes that a work of art is also an imaginative reworking of an author's life. In his view, Shakespeare casts himself into the role of Hamlet's ghost, having once allegedly impersonated Old Hamlet's ghost in the play's first performance at the Globe Theatre in 1602. Shakespeare, as Stephen holds, is thus not only the author who conceived of the play and character of Hamlet in his imagination, but is also the bodily father of his own aptly named son Hamnet. *Hamlet*, the play, and Hamlet, the character, therefore partake in a twofold nature as emanations of both 'son of his soul, . . . son of his body' (Joyce 2022 [1922]: 181). Stephen illustrates his theory and metaphorically equates both the material body and also the image of the artist with a text when he contemplates that

> we or mother Dana weave and unweave our bodies, . . . from day to day, their molecules shuttled to and fro, so does the artist weave and unweave his image. And as the mole on my right breast is where it was when I was born, though all my body has been woven of new stuff time after time, so through the ghost of the unquiet father the image of the unloving son looks forth. (Joyce 2022 [1922]: 186)

Stephen conflates mother Dana, the character in Irish mythology who symbolizes the land with the Moirai, the goddesses of fate,

who in classical mythology incessantly weave and eventually cut the threads of life. For Stephen, the serial process of 'weaving and unweaving of the artist's image' has a temporal, a spatial and an intertextual dimension. In search of a father himself, Stephen relates himself to both the orphaned Telemachus and Hamlet, the son of an unquiet ghostly father who is both present and absent from what he has created. This dialectic of presence that underlies the artist's image is configured in analogy to recurrent metabolic processes of renewal and disintegration, of familiarity and alienation and of spatial fixity and temporal flux. The comparatively static mole becomes a marker of the filial connection, in which indelible ancestry and the uneasy serial lineage of the 'unloving son' become encoded. Stephen conceives of textual and artistic heritage as a serially evolving relation of father, son and ghost. The trinitarian model of creation, intricately combining substance and insubstantiality, serves Stephen to elaborate on his theory of literary procreation as a serial 'entelechy' of forms (Joyce 2022 [1922]: 182). He uses *Hamlet* as an example to show that the ghostly father and his son, the author and his work, literary heritage and its singular manifestations in subsequent works become mutually dependent. As a consequence, also Shakespeare and God become almost interchangeable when Stephen reads the creation of the world in instalments as a Shakespearean text and refers to: 'The playwright who wrote the folio of this world and wrote it badly' (Joyce 2022 [1922]: 204). The all-pervasiveness of themes such as usurpation or banishment, Stephen argues, is a repeated occurrence in Shakespeare's works and an ongoing series of dramatic events in his life: 'protasis, epitasis, catastasis, catastrophe' (Joyce 2022 [1922]: 203).

Beckett, reader and friend of Joyce, had characterized Joyce's use of language in similar terms as a continuous dynamism of 'germination, maturation, putrefaction' (1983: 29), and an 'inner elemental vitality' that 'imparts a furious restlessness to the form' (1983: 29). In Stephen's view, the human body is comparable to such a text in motion that is subject to continuous material renewal and destruction and becomes a 'restless form'. As an apparently unchanging signifier of filial inheritance, the mole, at the same time, denotes its opposite – an identity in flux that is a work in progress and consists of the dynamic process of becoming and undoing, of dealing with the legacy and continuous return of an 'unquiet father'.

Whereas the mole, the outward sign of one's ancestry, remains unchanged to the observer and to its bearer, on the cellular level, its component molecules are in flux, in a continuous process of destruction and renewal, as Stephen further explains: 'Wait. Five months. Molecules all change' (Joyce 2022 [1922]: 182). In these processes of becoming and undoing, the mole becomes an emblem of seriality and the 'unquiet father' remains a latent presence. This kind of ghostliness hence becomes an immaterial condition of both fatherhood and authorship that remains materially present in Stephen's birthmark: 'That mole is the last to go, . . .' (Joyce 2022 [1922]: 187). Stephen's pun on 'mole-cule' illustrates this mutual pervasiveness of opposites, of the smallest unit that retains properties of a larger substance. The verticality of paternal legacy to Stephen conveys a state of simultaneous difference and sameness, in which the whole is present in its irreducible parts.

In *Ulysses* as well as in some of Shakespeare's plays, the mole becomes a synecdochal marker of a fluid identity. Like Hamlet, Stephen is a son in mourning, and the mole on his right breast is not only an allusion to the subterranean dwelling of Old Hamlet's ghost, whom Hamlet flippantly addresses as 'Well said, old mole, canst work i'th' earth so fast?' (*Ham* 1.5.161). Margreta De Grazia discusses the catachrestic nature of the mole in Hamlet that signifies the embeddedness of the subject in objective, historical as well as material conditions and refers to both Hegel and Marx, who prominently refer to this passage to describe the progress of world history (De Grazia 2008: 29).[5] In *Hamlet*, the mole, however, is ambivalent and does not only mock the ghost in comparing him to a benign creature burrowing away, but it also denotes a potentially evil flaw that remains with some men regardless of their virtues: 'So oft it chances in particular men / That, for some vicious mole of nature in them, / . . . the stamp of one defect' (*Ham* 1.4.23–31).

Other plays of Shakespeare use the mole as an indicator, however fallible. In *Twelfth Night*, the mole functions as an indelible and tenacious stamp of one's involuntary heritage and becomes a sign of identification when Sebastian and Viola are reunited as they both literally re-member their father's mole: 'Viola: My father had a mole upon his brow. / Sebastian: And so had mine' (*TN* 5.1.238–9). Contrary to this joyful reunion at the end of *Twelfth Night*, in *Cymbeline*, Imogen's 'cinque-spotted' (*Cym* 2.2.38) mole on her left breast becomes a mistaken token of

her infidelity, which separates her from her husband Posthumus. At the end of *Cymbeline*, however, Guiderius is recognized as one of her lost brothers by his 'mole, a sanguine star: / It was a mark of wonder' (*Cym* 5.5.363–4). As it does for Stephen Dedalus, the mole in *Twelfth Night* and even more so in *Cymbeline* ambiguously denotes crises of identity and their concomitant sexual tensions. Viola as Cesario is protected by her male guise until the mole reveals her true identity and reunites her with her brother. Imogen's truthfulness, by contrast, is called into question by the sight of her birthmark, and it is only at the end of the play, after having undergone a process of death and resurrection, that she is reconciled to Posthumus.

While indicating the descent and identity of a character, the mole becomes a marker of seriality within the Shakespearean œuvre as a whole as well as instrumental to the overall pattern of single plays, the resolution of their plot and the various stages of separation, recognition and reunion between father and son, brother and sister, husband and wife. 'There can be no reconciliation, Stephen said, if there has not been a sundering' (Joyce 2022 [1922]: 187), and the mole signifies both. As a *pars pro toto* that represents the textual strategies in which *Ulysses* engages with its predecessors, above all Shakespeare, it illustrates the transformative processes of the body that by analogy also constitute the artist's conception of a text that is intricately woven to be creatively undone, a molecule in which the substance of earlier narratives and future possibilities lies latent and where it is virtually present. Stephen defines this potentiality as: 'that which I was is that which I am and that which in possibility I may come to be' (Joyce 2022 [1922]: 186).

For Stephen, the mole that connects him to Shakespeare is ambivalently charged with sexual anxiety: 'Ravisher and ravished, . . . from Lucrece's bluecircled ivory globes to Imogen's breast, bare with its mole cinquespotted' (Joyce 2022 [1922]: 189). By invoking the rape of Lucrece along with Imogen's helplessness in asking why King Hamlet's ghost was made to appear at all, Stephen is positioning paternal genealogy between the roles of victim and perpetrator; he would, but would not. Hamlet has to come to terms with this problematic heritage and its concomitant conflicting impulses.[6] He is 'too much in the "son"' (*Ham* 1.2.67), struggles to fulfil his revenant father's command and has trouble in managing his affection towards his mother.

In Shakespeare and in Joyce, straightforward narratives of succession, self-replication and influence become complicated, potentially incestuous or end in betrayal. Stephen finds himself in a similar dilemma to many of Shakespeare's children. Unlike Imogen's mole, however, Stephen's is placed on his right breast, which denotes paternity, the biblical place of the son at the right hand side of the father according to the Apostolic Creed. Yet, like Hamlet, he is torn between fatherly authority and love for his mother: '*Amor matris*, . . . Paternity may be a legal fiction' (Joyce 2022 [1922]: 199). For Hamlet, *amor matris* can indeed work both ways, and paternity has undeniably become a legal fiction since, with Claudius's usurpation of the Danish throne, Hamlet's hereditary claim to kingship within a patrilineal line of succession has been irrevocably suspended, the paternal promise broken.

The 'Scylla and Charybdis' episode uses Shakespeare to reflect on models of literary creation via serial replication and variation and, in the process, creates itself. Single expressions, references and markers, like moles and molecules, become indicative of the vertical and formative processes behind them. Within the texture of 'Scylla and Charybdis', Shakespeare emerges as a generative molecular presence through word-formation and implicit characterization. The all-pervasiveness of Shakespeare manifests itself in Joyce's style that emulates Shakespeare's vocabulary and re-contextualizes it to form new syntheses, such as the composite 'Rutlandbaconsouthamptonshakespeare' (Joyce 2022 [1922]: 199), which condenses the ever-increasing number of theories of authorial ascriptions. In *Ulysses*, Shakespeare is indeed 'all in all' (Joyce 2022 [1922]: 204), including the most minute linguistic elements and the largest parts of theoretical systems.

Apart from the wealth of material that Joyce's works encompass, Beckett, along with many of his contemporaries, was fascinated and inspired by Joyce's inventive use of language. Both had met in Paris in 1928 and began a long-standing, mutually inspiring friendship. Beckett's essay 'Dante . . . Bruno.Vico..Joyce' (1929) was among the first critical studies on Joyce, and Beckett was closely familiar with all of Joyce's works. Both shared a fascination with Shakespeare. Rather than striving to equal the exuberance of Shakespeare's expressive potential, Beckett finds in Shakespeare a productive source to engage with the dialectical dynamics of reduction and fusion, of weaving and unweaving. S. E. Gontarski describes this serial process

of writing and unwriting: 'Beckett's theatre is always a theatre of becoming, a decomposition moving towards a recomposition, itself decomposing' (2014: 10).[7] Gilles Deleuze relates the dynamics of Beckett's writing to a sequential process of becoming that includes the micro-level of language and operates on the border of the imperceptible: 'Writing is inseparable from becoming: in writing, one becomes-woman, becomes-animal or vegetable, becomes-molecule to the point of becoming-imperceptible' (1998: 1). The process of becoming, created in the serial operations of the text, is not merely a recycling or repetition of explicit references, but it includes a regenerative refiguration of these references that calls for a renewed attention to the literal meaning.

Many of Beckett's experiments with language take their starting point from the quasi-molecular level of the single letter: 'In the beginning was the pun' (Beckett 1957: 65), states the narrator of *Murphy*, explicitly contradicting himself since pun always carries an element of difference and is related to multiple possibilities of meaning rather than any single origin. Among the processes of serial multiplication that both Beckett and Joyce engage in is their use of letters and names. In the 'Eumaeus' episode of *Ulysses*, Stephen Dedalus loftily states that 'Shakespeares were as common as Murphies. What's in a name?' (Joyce 2022 [1922]: 578), and yet names, such as Stephen's own name, Dedalus, do matter. With Beckett, Joyce shared a preference for character names beginning with the letter *M*, as in the three prominent women of *Ulysses*: Molly, Milly and Martha. Beckett, who liked Fritz Lang's film *M* (Knowlson and Pilling 1979: 122), links the thirteenth letter of the alphabet to his birthday on 13 April, and thereby subtly inscribes himself into the series of his characters such as Murphy, Molloy, Malone, Moran, Mercier, Mahood, Maddy or May, which was also the name of Beckett's mother, who died a year before *Molloy* was published (Ackerley and Gontarski 2004: 332).

The permutations of letters, their inversions and the ensuing semantic properties that emerge as they branch out into words fascinated Beckett. Their persistent serial occurrence in English, German and French (e.g. *Malone Meurt*) marks his texts themselves as an ongoing series of combinations and rearrangements of finite elements. Like the mole, letters become the minimal components constituting a matrix of multiplicity that is encapsulated in a single signifier. Deciphering them instigates reading as a playfully

serial process in search of variations. M tilted sideways at 90 degrees becomes E as in the character of Mr Endon in *Murphy*, or *Endgame*.[8] M stood on its head turns into W and characters such as Watt, Worm, Winnie and Willie or entire works such as *Waiting for Godot* are christened accordingly. The narrator of *Company* refers to himself as 'W' and to his 'hearer' as 'M' (1980: 59) as if they were two sides of the same coin.

W also becomes a chiffre for William. Stephen Dedalus refers to Shakespeare's habit of inserting his name 'Will' into his works, thereby creating his own afterlife: 'He has revealed it in the sonnets where there is Will in overplus. . . . What's in a name? . . . A star, a daystar, a firedrake, rose at his birth. . . . by night it shone over delta in Cassiopeia, the recumbent constellation which is the signature of his initial among the stars' (Joyce 2022 [1922]: 201). Similar to the mole, the author's initial becomes a marker of identity corresponding to the stellar constellation of Cassiopeia, the great reclining W in the northern sky.

In his early novels, such as *Murphy* and *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, Beckett engages with Shakespeare's legacy in a playful way that also links the minute to the universal. Shakespeare becomes part of the creative matrix of Beckett's works, where the very richness of his material emerges in his use of details and attention to the molecular level of languages and ideas that form the minimal components of his work.

Beckett's early novel *Murphy* was published in 1938, and from the beginning it presents itself as languidly embedded in a world created by repetition, a seriality without novelty: 'The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new' (Beckett 1957: 5). Early on, Murphy, who takes up work at the mental institution MMM (Magdalen Mental Mercyseat), refers to *Hamlet* when describing his solipsistic world: 'This system had no other mode in which to be out of joint and therefore did not need to be put right in this' (Beckett 1957: 11). Murphy's world is solipsistic, and yet shared by his quasi-celestial bride-to-be Celia. When going about his daily routines, Murphy, the pathological lover of order, other than meditating in his room, spends time in Hyde Park and organizes his assorted biscuits in 'the cockpit', a green plot in Hyde Park (Beckett 1957: 96), where he likes to recline. Murphy's little theatre, that faintly echoes the 'cockpit' in *Henry V* (*H5* Prol, 11), holds the world at large, which he speculates about: 'Murphy fell forward

on his face on the grass, beside those biscuits of which it could be said as truly as of the stars, that one differed from another' (Beckett 1957: 97).

Among the many minutely ironical instances in the novel in which Beckett subtly invokes notions of lineage in both Joyce and Shakespeare is its quasi-molecular beginning and end. In the first scene in which Murphy and Celia appear together, she is impressed by Murphy's birthmark: 'A huge pink naevus on the pinnacle of the right buttock held her spellbound' (Beckett 1957: 29). After Murphy is killed by a gas explosion, it is by this very birthmark that Celia is able to identify his remains: 'Here he had a big birthmark' (Beckett 1957: 266).

Unlike Stephen's mole on his right breast, Murphy's mole on his right buttock is not a sign of procreative or genealogical continuation. Even though it marks the last perceptible sign of his identity, it profanely vanishes like 'the body, mind and soul of Murphy [that] were freely distributed over the floor of the saloon' (Beckett 1957: 275). Instead of being both a forward and backward-pointing emblem of one's heritage, the mole in *Murphy* is part of a cyclical dynamic that is both generative and destructive: '"How beautiful in a way," said the coroner, "birthmark, deathmark, I mean rounding off life somehow, don't you think, full circle . . ."' (Beckett 1957: 267).

Beckett sometimes compares his own writing, which both performs its artistic processes and also simultaneously traces them, to the foraging of a mole. In a passage of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, he describes his anti-hero Belacqua stargazing 'like Mr Ruskin in the Sistine':

> The night firmament is abstract density of music, symphony without end, illumination without end, (yet emptier, more sparsely lit, than the most succinct constellations of genius. Now seen merely, a depthless lining of hemisphere, its crazy stippling of stars, it is the passional movements of the mind charted in light and darkness.) The tense passional intelligence, when arithmetic abates, tunnels, skymole, surely and blindly (if we only thought so!) through the interstellar coalsacks of its firmament in genesis, it twists through the stars of its creation in a network of loci that shall never be co-ordinate. The inviolable criterion of poetry and music, the non-principle of

> their punctuation, is figured in the demented perforation of the night colander. (Beckett 1992: 16)

In associating himself with a mole, Beckett's artist stresses the necessity of non-referentiality, of blindness and working in the dark, while being aware of the impossibility of finding neat patterns of significance. The passage not only recalls Stephen Dedalus' self-assertion when confronted with a vast literary heritage, but it also alludes to the productive impossibility of capturing a reliable referent. Beckett's 'skymole', by contrast, is an archaeologist of the sky and tunnels through the sky as if it were excavating geological matter. As a 'skymole' he is also at home in the heavenly spheres and creates new stellar constellations in an act of 'genesis' and finds new combinations between the stars that do not follow a pre-ordained, intelligent design. To Beckett and his character Belacqua, the mole is not only a metaphor for one's vertical heritage and its ever-changing potential, but it also describes a literal experience denoting the performative activity of the writer himself in digging through textual matter and carving out passages for himself while acknowledging his embeddedness in given structures. The mole therefore reflects on intertextuality as a serial process and becomes itself a signifier of seriality.

In *Company*, he calls the writer a 'crawling creator' (Beckett 1980: 52), and in an interview with Charles Juliet, he refers to himself as an author as 'a mole in a molehill' (Juliet 1986), a creature burrowing in the dark that carves out new passages and works through layers of age-old matter, in which the very richness of his material emerges in the use of minute details and the attention to the molecular level of language. Analogous to another creature living in tunnels underground, he describes himself as the 'insistent, invisible rat, fidgeting behind the astral incoherence of the art surface' (Beckett 1992: 17), thereby alluding to Hamlet who mistakes Polonius, hiding behind the surface of the arras, for Claudius and exclaims 'How now! A rat!' (*Ham* 3.4.22). In Beckett's works, most prominently in *How It Is*, there is no shortage of rats. Again, referring to Hamlet, who indicates that he will prevail over Laertes ('The cat will mew and dog will have his day' (*Ham* 5.1.281)), Beckett's narrator ironically states: 'every rat has its heyday I say it as I hear it' (Beckett 2009: 6).

The processes in which Joyce and Beckett practice and create seriality not only record various received paradigms of literary

lineage, authorship and national heritage, but they also demonstrate how they inscribe their works into these traditions in a stance that is both metahistorical and performative. Through their interactions and interanimating resonances Shakespeare's, Joyce's and Beckett's texts therefore become part of the literary history that they (re-)generate.

Notes

1 Sarah Hutton and others have stressed the significance of 'periodical production for the development of Modernism' (2019: 127). Hutton regards the style and nature of *Ulysses* as serial, referring to a method of writing marked by continuous return to certain themes and reviewing them in the light of their subsequent reimaginings: 'Serialization enabled Joyce to fix a number of stylistic stabilities for *Ulysses*, and to see some of the hallmarks of the work being corrupted in the process of transmission' (2019: 165).

2 '[T]he whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new' (Eliot 1975: 38–9).

3 In 1912, Joyce had delivered twelve lectures on *Hamlet*, from which, according to John McCourt Stephen, Dedalus's Hamlet theory was derived (2015: 72).

4 Plock argues that in 'Scylla and Charybdis', Joyce sought to 'challenge, surpass, and negate Goethe's Hamlet interpretation' in *Wilhelm Meister* and that 'Goethe becomes the true opponent in Joyce's literary sparring match' (2015: 92).

5 'There is, it has to be said, something catachrestic about the use of the old mole's tunnelling as a figure for the trajectory of world history and the action of Prince Hamlet' (De Grazia 2008: 29). Martin Harries, who analyses Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*, unravels some of the complexities resulting from Marx's and Hegel's focus on the mole's historical activity as 'grubbing, digging and undermining' (2000: 80–1).

6 Declan Kiberd argues that 'Stephen [who] believes that Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet* after his father's death is not so much a celebration of a son's fidelity to his father as a lament for the lost integrity of the father-son relationship' (2010: 102–3).

7 Cf. Gontarski 1985, 2015.

8 Cf. also 'The Expelled' or 'The End'.

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II

Performing Shakespeare serially

Theatrical serialization effects

5

Falstaff, again

Configurations of serial memory in early modern culture

Isabel Karremann

This chapter traces seriality as a principle in the formation and transformation of cultural memory. It will do so through the figure of Falstaff, who makes repeated appearances in several of Shakespeare's plays – the two parts of Shakespeare's *Henry IV* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* – and whose memory also haunts *Henry V*. Moreover, Falstaff was probably embodied in the plays' first performances by the same actor, William Kempe, adding an element of intertheatrical memory.[1] Each of his appearances gives rise to self-referential comments on the nature of Shakespearean drama as a medium of cultural and historical memory. Yet Falstaff is also a recurring figure in the larger text of early modern historical memory: it can be traced back to early fifteenth-century representations of Sir John Oldcastle – the medieval knight on which the theatrical character was modelled – in legal documents, chronicle histories and texts of Lollard hagiography as well as Lancastrian propaganda, and had appeared in a series of early

modern plays, poems and images long before Shakespeare took up this figure (to say nothing of the rich afterlife it enjoyed in Western literature and art). My chapter will therefore explore the historical, textual and theatrical configurations of a serial memory in early modern culture by tracing the appearances of Oldcastle/Falstaff in the changing contexts of religious controversy, historiography and popular theatre. Through raising questions such as what made Falstaff a serial figure and what were the visual, linguistic and performative features that made him memorable for audiences, it will tease out what the history of this figure can tell us about the serial nature of cultural memory.

'One word more': Falstaff/Oldcastle in the epilogue from *Henry IV, Part 2*

At the end of the second part of *Henry IV*, we have just seen Sir John Falstaff being rejected by Prince Hal, now crowned King Henry V. Henry not only expels his one-time drinking companion and fatherly friend from his presence but consigns him to oblivion: 'I know thee not, old man' (*2H4* 5.1.47). Yet only a moment later, Falstaff appears again, or at least the actor who had very likely played him, the clown Will Kempe (see Wiles 1987: 116–36), emerges on stage to speak the Epilogue. 'One word more, I beseech you', he addresses the audience: 'if you be not too much cloyed with fat meat, our humble author will continue the story with Sir John in it, and make you merry with fair Katherine of France, where, for anything I know, Falstaff shall die of a sweat, unless already a be killed with your hard opinions; for Oldcastle died martyr, and this is not the man' (Epilogue, 26–32). The Epilogue here advertises the sequel to the play we have just seen. That play will be called *Henry V*, yet the chief character announced is the immensely entertaining figure of the swaggering fat knight. What it also advertises, rather conspicuously, is a second disidentification: Falstaff is *not* Oldcastle, the medieval knight and martyr for his faith. This announcement makes only sense, of course, if spectators did identify Falstaff with Oldcastle, taking the former as a version of the latter.[2]

And Falstaff was indeed, as is well-known, called Oldcastle in an earlier version of the play.[3] Shakespeare had presumably been compelled to change the name because it had given offence to

Oldcastle's descendant, Sir William Brooke, Lord Cobham. The historical Oldcastle was habitually referred to as Lord Cobham or the good Lord Cobham in sixteenth-century chronicle histories. When the first part of *Henry IV* was performed in the summer of 1596, its comical hero still bore the name of Sir John Oldcastle.[4] By the time the second part was performed in early 1597, however, something had changed profoundly: Lord Hunsdon, the patron of Shakespeare's Lord Chamberlain's Men, had died – and the new man in office was nobody else than Sir William Brooke, Lord Cobham. While generally uninterested in the theatre, the insult on his family name did not escape him, and, apparently, he rather angrily demanded that Edmund Tilney, Master of the Revels, redress the situation. With the offended in such a position of power, the censorship was a foregone conclusion.

The final paragraph of the Epilogue, stating the exchange of one name for another, may therefore have functioned as 'an act of public contrition', as Richard Dutton surmises (1991: 103). Because it is 'so unsubtle, so unfunny, so overtly pointed, and so unrelated to the rest of the play' (Fehrenbach 1986: 97), it is often viewed as a last-minute addition made under the external pressure of censorship. Yet there is ample intertextual as well as intratextual evidence from the playtext itself to suggest that the change in name and the acts of erasure and replacement which it highlights are more than an afterthought forced upon the play.[5] In fact, I argue that it is this interplay between remembering and forgetting that is constitutive of the figure of Falstaff, not just in Shakespeare's play but throughout the rich history of its various reconfigurations. This pattern of remembering and forgetting, which is brought about and held conscious through allusions, echoes and repetitions with variations, discloses the serial character of cultural memory more generally. When we trace the figure of Oldcastle/Falstaff across a wider range of texts and contexts rather than the fairly narrow one of censorship, the serial principle of cultural memory emerges.

From serial figure to serial memory

It has long been recognized that Shakespeare's histories, presented in two sequences of four plays, operate on the principle of seriality and the figures that appear in two or more of these sequels are

often discussed as series characters. Thus Richard III, Henry IV, Prince Hal or indeed Falstaff are usually analysed as to their character development over the plays in which they feature. I am not interested in character development here, however, but rather in the structural principles of cultural memory. I therefore would like to introduce the distinction between a series character and a serial figure, which belong to two different types of seriality. The first type is that found in a TV series, for instance: a narrative which follows the linear form of serial progression, continuation and development, and which is inhabited by series characters who may develop but essentially stay the same. The second type is more complicated, and more interesting: it is a non-linear form of seriality that emerges through accumulation or a 'compounding sedimentation' (Denson 2011: 536), an uneven process which is embodied by a serial figure that can take different forms. An example would be cultural icons that exist across historical or cultural contexts, media forms and narratives, such as Robinson Crusoe, Frankenstein, the superheroes from Marvel comics or – as I will argue here – Falstaff. Shane Denson, from whose work on seriality in comic books I take this distinction, explains it as follows:

> The serial figure is a stock character of sorts, who appears again and again in significantly different forms of adaptation, contexts, and in various media. The series character exists *within* a series, where he or she develops or evolves; the serial figure, on the other hand, exists *as* a series – as the concatenation of instantiations that evolves, not within a homogenous diegetic space, but *between* or *across* such spaces of narration. And because serial figures, in contrast to series characters, lead a sort of surplus existence outside of any one given telling, they are in a perfect position to reflect on the manner – and the media – of their repeated stagings. (2011: 536)

As we will see, Falstaff – or Oldcastle – had existed in significantly different forms of adaptations and contexts, as well as in various media between the early fifteenth and the mid-seventeenth century (and would continue to do so far beyond that time). But what makes such figures properly serial, rather than being just a list of disjointed collections or remakes of themselves? The criterion is, Denson suggests, that they carry traces of previous incarnations

that accumulate on the serial figure (2011: 537). Sir John (as I will call this serial configuration of multiple Oldcastles and Falstaffs) remains recognizable, although his cultural significance changes profoundly as he appears across different narratives, contexts and media. It is these conspicuously accumulating traces, moreover, that enable the self-reflexivity of serial figures Denson mentions in the quote above: it is because they remain recognizable figures that they provoke questions about where they come from, what they are doing in this context, and how the new medium accommodates and changes them.

I would add that such traces of older incarnations invite reflections on how memory works in a serial manner. Each incarnation of a serial figure entails an act of recollection as well as an act of forgetting. Seriality is premised on repetition and variation rather than an exact replication of the same. This principle also applies to the making of memory, as Sabine Sielke states: 'Since memory is no longer conceived of as the storage and retrieval of learning processes and information, but rather as a form of continuous rewriting, updating, re-membering and re-cognizing, memory and forgetting – in both cultural practice and cognition – can be understood as serial operations' (2013: 49). Therefore, my considerations of seriality have two aims: I am interested in the processes of recontextualization and remediation, and in how these can be understood as operations in the formation and transformation of cultural memory.

Recontextualization, remediation, self-reflexivity: A serial history of Sir John

In what follows, I will trace the serial history of Sir John along several axes of inquiry. What is most noticeable is the permanent recontextualization of Sir John in the different narratives which feature him: from a medieval rebel executed for robbery and treason, over the proto-Protestant martyr of mid-sixteenth-century historiography, the hypocrite of anti-Puritan parody a generation later, to the figure of festivity on the popular stage around 1600 and more incarnations after that. What is also noteworthy is the remediation that this figure undergoes in the process. While it is

impossible to securely link one specific configuration to only one genre or medium – which would allow us to distinguish clearly between the Sir John of the trial records, Lancastrian historiography, Protestant martyrology, the early modern stage or of humorous pamphlets – we can observe multiple changes between media as well as combinations of media, and while we cannot always account for a specific choice of medium, the media changes themselves seem to initiate reflections on the mediality of a specific configuration of the serial figure. These self-reflexive moments, moreover, sometimes also provide insights into the mediality of serial memory. The printing press was, of course, the first medium which operated on the principle of seriality, and this had a huge impact on early modern memory culture. Another new medium of the early modern period, the popular theatre, likewise contributed to this serialization of memory, making and remaking it in a series of recollections and erasures. I will turn to this in the last part of my chapter, where I comment on the specific configuration of Shakespeare's Falstaff as a serial figure of theatrical remembering and forgetting.

The historical Sir John Oldcastle (1378–1417) was a member of the landed gentry who rose to privilege through two advantageous marriages and became a friend of Prince Henry, the later Henry V. Yet he was also a prominent critic of Catholic forms of worship and abuses of church privileges. Such religious dissent was often coupled in the public view with rebellion against state authority: contemporary upheavals among the lower orders of society became quickly, if not always accurately, associated with the heretical movement of the Lollards to which Oldcastle belonged. Oldcastle himself was examined for heresy in 1413, accused of a rebellion against the crown he may or may not have led in 1414, and eventually executed as heretic and traitor near St. Giles's field, London, in December 1417 (Corbin and Sedge 1991: 2–8). It was therefore primarily as a rebel that Oldcastle was remembered in the official trial records and historiographies of the fifteenth century. Thomas Hoccleve, who as clerk of the Privy Seal for over thirty years and author of a didactic poem on the virtues and vices of rulers for Henry, Prince of Wales, was close to the Lancastrian circle of power, composed an 'Address to Oldcastle' (also known as 'Remonstrance against Oldcastle') which casts the 'manly knight' as a heretical rebel: 'May your pain not tame your rebellious heart? Obey, obey in the name of Jesus! You are lame of merit and honor; conquer them and arm

yourself in virtue!' (Hoccleve 1415). This image of Oldcastle as an embodiment of vicious treachery, with valiant prowess replaced by an indolent and sinful lameness, dominated the official Lancastrian historiography, whose mnemonic strategy was partly to erase the stigma of usurpation by placing the blame of rebellion and treachery elsewhere: crushing the Oldcastle rebellion and erasing the heretical danger to political stability allowed Henry IV and Henry V to appear as legitimate rulers (see Patterson 1996; Strohm 1998).

With the coming of the Reformation to England, however, the image of the heretic had to be exorcized in turn. Now the religious dissent of the Lollards, which had manifested itself in a rejection of over-elaborate ritual and the destruction of false images, turned them into admired examples for the Reformation's own project. Oldcastle became a proto-Protestant martyr and hero. This is the role he is assigned, for example, in Bishop John Bale's biography, whose title explicitly identifies Sir John as a 'blessed martyr' and whose frontispiece depicts him as a manly Christian soldier brandishing a sword and shield (Figure 5.1). By highlighting his brawny physicality, which for Hoccleve had been diminished to lameness by treachery, this image established corporeality as an index of Oldcastle's character into the iconographic tradition of the figure, although it would change from a sign of *virtú* to a sign of sinfulness later on.

This Reformation account also turns Oldcastle from a heretical rebel into a dutiful subject who lectures the King in religious matters:

> Unto you next my eternall lyuinge God owe I my whole obedience / and submit me thereunto . . . But as touching the Pope and his spiritualitie / trulye I oew thee neyther sute nor seruyce / for so moche as I knowe him by the scriptures to be the great Antichrist. (Bale 1544: sig 14^{v})

His faith in scriptures marks Oldcastle as a proto-Reformation figure, an embodiment of 'the liberal notion that controversy in reformation should be managed by the word rather than the sword' (Patterson 1996: 11). Accordingly, Bale highlights 'books and scholarship as the proper weapons' of Oldcastle's reformatory zeal: Oldcastle now emerges also as an author of religious writings, among them a 'Christen confession or rekening' of his own faith, which he had copied and given to his accuser in the heresy

FIGURE 5.1 Frontispiece of John Bale, *a brefe chronycle conernynge the examinacyon and death of the blessed martyr of Christ syr Iohan Oldecastell the lorde Cobham* (1544). Folger Shakespeare Library Shelfmark *STC 1276, image 12957. Used by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.*

trial, the Archbishop Arundel (1996: 11). The text of Oldcastle's defence is included in Bale's *Chronycle* and is recycled by the chronicle histories of the following decades. This is an instance of how recontextualization is tied to remediation: the new image of Oldcastle, both visual and textual, was successful because it was replicated and circulated by the medium of print, rather than the manuscript records of the fifteenth century.

Following Bale's example, John Foxe's Protestant *Acts and Monuments* – like most post-Reformation historiographies – features Oldcastle as a loyal subject and a brave proto-Protestant victim of popish savagery, with the King manipulated by the clergy and dogma of the Catholic Church (Brooks 1998: 344–5). The accompanying woodcut provides a visual link to Bale's Christian hero, although he is now brought to dire straits (Figure 5.2):

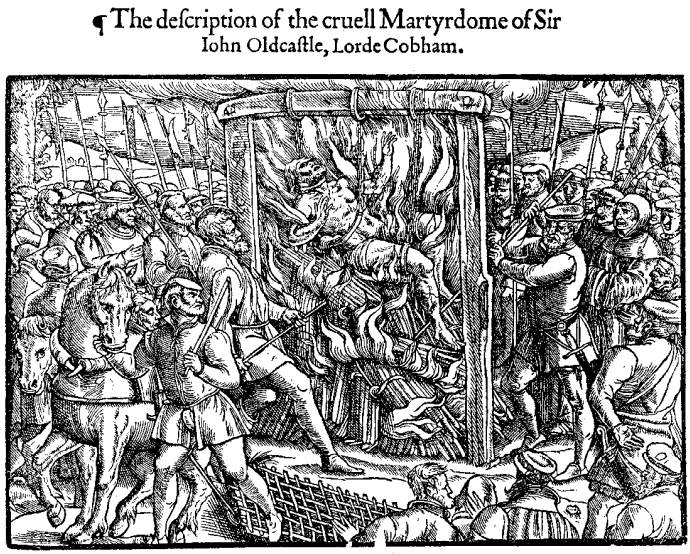


FIGURE 5.2 Woodcut accompanying 'The description of the horrible and cruell martirdome of the Lord Cobham, called Sir Ihon Old Castel' in Foxe's *Actes and Monuments* (1563). The Ohio State University Libraries *Shelfmark BR1600 .F6 1563. Used by permission of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Library.*

Foxe's Oldcastle features the same determined, bearded visage and powerful, muscular body, yet now it is contorted in pain. Together with the rather graphic descriptions of his 'horrible and cruell martirdome', the woodcut was geared towards eliciting sympathy, admiration and likely a good measure of righteous indignation in Protestant readers.

Foxe not only numbered Oldcastle among the prominent Protestant martyrs, but also preserved the very acts of erasure and re-inscription through which this image change came about. He reports how Edward Hall, when compiling *his* monumental chronicle history in 1548, hastened to change his account of Oldcastle's life upon reading a copy of Bale's *Brefe chronycle*. According to this anecdote (Patterson 1996: 14), Hall deleted the hostile account of Oldcastle's rebellion derived from Polydore Vergil's pre-Reformation *Anglia Historia* and replaced it with Bale's

account that downplayed Oldcastle's threat to official authority and highlighted the pacifism of the Lollards instead:

> At the sight whereof, when he saw the groūd & reasons in that booke contained, he turned to the authors in the foresayd booke alledged, whereupon within two nightes after . . . hee taking his pen, rased and cancelled all that he had written before, agaynst Syr Iohn Oldcastle & his fellowes, & was now ready to go to the Print, containyng neare to the quantitie of three pages . . . the said Hall with his pen, at the sight of John Bale's book, did utterly extinguish and abolish . . ., adding in the place thereof the words of Master Bale's book. (Foxe 1570: 5, 709)

This is another moment in which the entanglement of recontextualization and remediation – here from manuscript to print – is highlighted. Foxe asserts the veracity of this anecdote by promising to produce as evidence Hall's manuscript with corrections before it had gone to the press: 'the very selfe same first copy of Hall rased and crossed with his owne penne, remaineth in my handes to be shewed & seene, as need shall require' (1570: 5, 709). And he even repeats the gesture of insertion in his own text: after he has reported 'the whole matter concerning the martirdom of the good Lord Cobham, as we haue gathered it partly out of the Collectors of Ihon Bale and others', Foxe copies the text from Bale verbatim, arguing that 'for th'antiquity therof, we thought it not to be omitted' (Foxe 1563: 2, 239). The reference to 'antiquity' can be read as an attempt at establishing a venerable Protestant genealogy, turning Oldcastle into a memory figure for the reformed faith (see also Hiscock 2008). The typographical arrangement of the Oldcastle episode in Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* draws attention to this moment of serial substitution: it visually sets off Master Bale's words from the narrative of Oldcastle's condemnation as recounted by Foxe, thus preserving Bale's original text and underscoring Bale's pivotal role in Oldcastle's image change, all of which is highlighted by the anecdote of the effect reading this account had on Hall.

Towards the end of the sixteenth century, the figure of Oldcastle underwent yet another change, from a model for Protestantism to a grotesque parody of Puritanism. This 'shameless transformation' (*1H4* 1.1.44) occurred in the context of the Marprelate-controversy of the 1580s, a veritable pamphlet war that raged between a group

of young radical Puritans, who published their invectives against a degenerate clergy under the pseudonym Martin Marprelate, and another group of anti-Puritan writers, who turned their weapons against them by depicting Marprelate as a grotesque figure secretly given to gluttony, fornication and sin. Out of their texts, the figure of the hypocritical Puritan was born.[6] It fully came to life only on the popular stage, however: the recontextualization in a new narrative was reinforced by the remediation from page to stage.

Oldcastle as a stage Puritan made his first, relatively harmless appearance in the anonymous *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*, written and performed in the mid-1580s, although licensed in 1594 for the Queen's Men and published only in 1598. Oldcastle is addressed here by the somewhat silly first name of Jockey. Given the play's aim of presenting the image of a unified nation under a Christian prince, King Henry V, it chooses not to mention either Oldcastle's religious beliefs or his rebellions, which would introduce division and dissent. The play accordingly limits Oldcastle's presence to that of a minor character who, along with his companions Ned and Tom, disappears from the play after Henry dismisses them in scene nine.

It was only with Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part 1* that Oldcastle emerged as a vibrant central character, the fun-loving, mischievous fat knight. This character fuses aspects of the clown figures Shakespeare found in *The Famous Victories* and the anti-Puritan Marprelate pamphlets. The actor who probably played Shakespeare's Oldcastle was the clown William Kempe, who had also played Marprelate in stage versions (Poole 1995: 105); this casting would have reinforced the connection visually, thereby creating an instance of intertheatrical serial memory through the body of the actor. Shakespeare's version of Sir John Oldcastle needs no introduction; the speech through which Prince Hal characterizes him for the audience may suffice here: 'Thou art so fat-witted with drinking of old sack, and unbuttoning thee after supper, and sleeping upon benches after noon, that thou hast forgotten that which thou wouldst truly know' (*1H4* 1.2.2–5). The prince's teasing portrait of his roguish companion casts this Sir John as one who habitually and excessively indulges in eating meat, drinking strong wine, sleeping during the day and fornicating with whores, to the point that he forgets himself and his duties to God and society. It was likely this image of immorality that the Cobham family objected to.

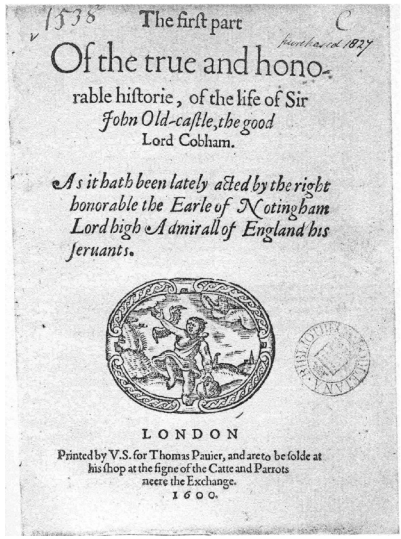
When we see Oldcastle again in the Second Part, he has become Falstaff, probably due to the intervention of the Cobhams – but the figure itself remained the same. In fact, the very name of Sir John Falstof, a late medieval landowner and knight who fought in the Hundred Years' War, only helped to reinforce some of the objectionable character traits: the substitution was likely suggested because the historical Sir Falstof, too, had a bad reputation for braggart cowardice, a signature trait of Shakespeare's figure.

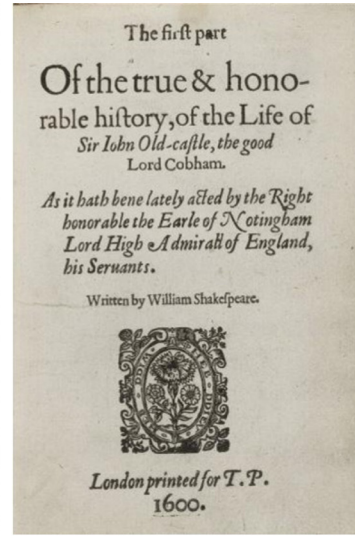
The name change, however, seems not to have been enough for some. In 1598, the rival company of the Admiral's men presented *The True and Honorable Historie, of the Life of Sir John Old-Castle, the Good Lord Cobham*. The loyal, temperate and devout Sir John which this play presents was clearly an attempt at rehabilitating the memory of the Cobham family's martyred ancestor, as the prologue makes explicit:

> PROLOGUE
> It is no pampered glutton we present,
> Nor aged counselor to youthful sin
> But one whose virtue shone above the rest
> A valiant Martyr.
>
> (1. 6–9)

The play thus resurrected an orthodox version of the Lollard leader, yet apparently it could not do so without acknowledging Shakespeare's play through directly recalling and rejecting the key character traits of Falstaff, his gluttony and sinfulness: in this moment, we can see traces of a previous incarnation accruing to the serial figure. Tellingly, when the anonymous play was reprinted in 1619, it was wrongly attributed to William Shakespeare (Kirwan 2020). The typesetting on the title page even visually replicates that of the Quarto printed in 1600, only adding the author's name and substituting a different printer's device (see Figures 5.3 and 5.4). Oldcastle was not able to shake off Falstaff, just as Shakespeare, it seems, was not able to shake off the association with Oldcastle by the simple change of names.

In another paradoxical twist, when other plays referenced the character created by Shakespeare, often it was the name of Oldcastle that was recalled. The anonymous play *Meeting of Gallants at an Ordinarie* (1604), for instance, referred to 'the fat Puritan' as Oldcastle (Gibson 2012: 120); Nathan Field's *Amends*





FIGURES 5.3 AND 5.4 Title pages of *Sir John Old-Castle* (Q1, 1600) and of the back-dated reprint of 1619, now attributing the play to Shakespeare. Folger Shakespeare Library Shelfmark *STC 18795 and 18796. Used by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.*

for Ladies (1610–11) likewise spoke of 'the fat Knight' called '*Old-castle*'; and, in 1628, another anonymous play, *The Wandering-Jew, Telling Fortunes to English-men*, identified Sir John Oldcastle as the fat forbear of its stock-figure The Glutton (Whitney 2007: 97). Commenting on the persistence with which the virtuous name of Oldcastle was conjoined with the immoral character of Falstaff, Charles Whitney comes close to identifying the principle of seriality I see at work here:

> Field was hardly alone in sticking to the original name, but it is almost never clear whether those who continue to refer to Oldcastle do so to insist on the historical dimension of Sir John as a representation of the fifteenth-century knight. A phantom character is created, usually with no clear difference from Falstaff, a festive being of indeterminate historicity, an exhilarating monster created through reception as if he were an effect of Sir John's protean subjectivity. (2007: 97)

Perhaps the most surprising recontextualization of the stage Puritan came in a recusant tract, *An Antidote against Purgatory*. It was written in 1634 by Jane Owen, a learned lady who lived near Oxford, held strong Catholic convictions and had her sons educated on the continent. Her tract exhorts Catholic readers to reduce their suffering in purgatory through good works, and in order to make her point she – incongruously, hilariously – calls on Falstaff's catechism on honour in Shakespeare's play, although she attributes him with the original name:

> *Syr John Oldcastle* being exprobated of his Cowardlynes, and thereby reputed inglorious, replyd: *If through my persuyte of Honor, I shall fortune to loose and Arme, or a Leg in the Wars, can Honour restore me my lost Arme, or legge?* In like manner I here say to you, *Catholikes*: Can your Riches, your worldly pompe and pleasures, or antiquity of your House, and Family redeeme your soules out of Purgatory? (Owen [1643] 2000: 161)

As Whitney (2007: 98–9) points out, Owen's invocation of Oldcastle, or rather of Falstaff's mock-catechism, does her a profound disservice because his cowardly plea for preserving the wholeness of the body is directed at worldly enjoyment of life and its pleasures, not at the other-worldly aim of salvation. Yet it is entirely in keeping with the image of Falstaff's physicality established in the collective memory.

Still more plays and pamphlets quoted, echoed or recalled Shakespeare's figure by the name of Falstaff. Falstaff is invoked from as early as Thomas Middleton's *A Mad World, My Masters* (1605) to James Shirley's Caroline play *The Example* (1634). He also makes appearances in other media, most notably in printed pamphlets like *Taylors Travels to Hamburgh in Germanie* (1617), which supplies a blazon of the grotesque drunken hangman of Hamburg that includes a comparison with a gluttonous Falstaff, or a pamphlet on the history of drinking by Thomas Heywood, *Philocothonista* (1635), which admiringly acknowledges Falstaff as a larger-than-life-drinker (see Whitney 2007: 92–4). A final example that involves yet another remediation is interesting again for its function in a context of religious controversy. *The Wits, or Sport upon Sport* (1662) is a collection of twenty-seven comical scenes, so-called drolls, taken from well-known plays of the Elizabethan theatre.[7]

Drolls were generally chosen for physical humour or for wit, and so it is little wonder that Sir John Falstaff should feature prominently on the frontispiece (Figure 5.5).

His signature corporeality links this Falstaff to the iconography of Oldcastle found Bale and Foxe, but with a twist: the muscular brawniness of the soldier and martyr is replaced by a paunch; the manly full beard has turned into a modishly pointed moustache; and instead of wielding sword and shield, Falstaff raises an enormous goblet in one hand and holds a staff in the other, while his rapier hangs decoratively by his side. Wiles suggests that, lexically, 'staff' and 'cudgel' or 'truncheon' were used near synonymously, and that Falstaff's 'sword' was in fact a wooden play-sword, an attribute carried over from the medieval vice figure (1987: 121). The woodcut might thus function as a visual memory trace of that tradition, while the rapier, carried more for decoration than defence, marks this Falstaff's gentrified ambitions. This is a civilized and carefully

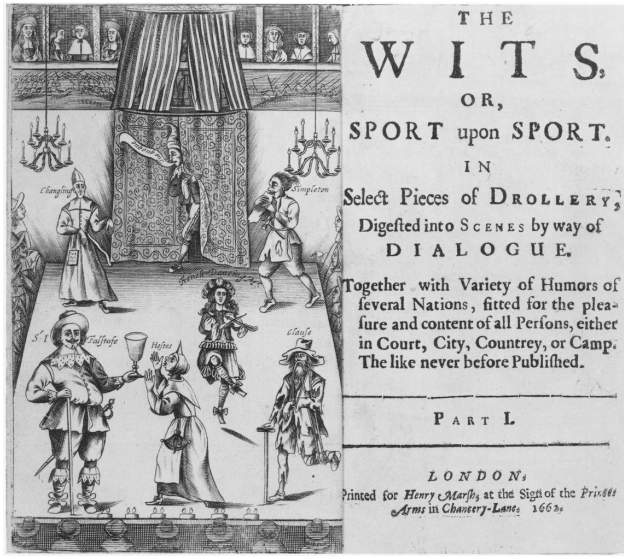


FIGURE 5.5 Frontispiece and title page of Robert Cox and Francis Kirkman, *The Wits or Sport upon Sport* (1662). Folger Shakespeare Library Shelfmark W3218. *Used by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.*

secularized Falstaff, made safe for pleasurable consumption in a context highly charged with religious tension.

As *The Wits* was published in 1662, this Falstaff might at first sight be taken as an embodiment of the return to bodily pleasures and leisure entertainments at the beginning of the Restoration. Yet in fact this is a publication of performance texts which had been staged *before* the Restoration, during the ban on acting, as Emma Depledge (2018) has shown. These short comical sketches typically originated during the civil wars and the Puritan Commonwealth when actors were left without any income due to the closing of the theatres, and therefore offered performances of such sketches, along with dancing and other entertainments, to make money. The most famous of these entertainers was Robert Cox, who often performed at the Red Bull. Allegedly Cox bribed local officials into looking the other way; nevertheless, in 1653 the Red Bull was raided by Puritan authorities, and Cox was arrested. It is more than likely that he played a Falstaff-droll at some point, since *Sports upon Sports* not only features such a droll[8] but is attributed to him and a colleague, Francis Kirkman. This raises the question of just how the anti-Puritan figure of Shakespeare's fun-loving Falstaff would have been perceived at a time when the Puritans were in power. Would Falstaff have seemed a negative figure for an audience to dislike and to condemn, or rather an embodiment of what people missed and desired? Given the lack of reception documents, this is impossible to determine. Yet the printed texts of the drolls do bear traces of the political context at the time of performance, as Emma Depledge points out: during the metatheatrical scene of 'The play *ex tempore*', for instance, Falstaff exclaims to Hal: 'A King's Son? If I do not beat thee out of thy Kingdome with a Dagger of lath, and drive all thy subjects afore thee' (qtd. Depledge 2018: 23). While the line is from Shakespeare's play, she explains, it 'will have taken on a decidedly sinister tone if delivered in the wake of the civil wars, Charles I's execution and Prince Charles' exile.' Moreover, '[t]he action of the final scene of the Falstaff droll, where he enters "as to the Wars" (plural) is reminiscent of the (then very recent) English civil wars, with Falstaff's motley crew of soldiers potentially reminding audiences of the badly trained and ill-equipped lay soldiers dragged into other men's disputes' (Depledge 2018: 23). While the frontispiece promises a peaceful, secularized and 'gentrified' (Wiles 1982: 121) Falstaff, the droll thus evokes,

at least potentially, the memory of earlier incarnations of this figure, Oldcastle the soldier and a martyr for his faith. This was likely an uncomfortable reminder of the militarized religious zeal of the civil wars and a Commonwealth dominated by Puritan religious politics.

To what extent visual and textual traces clashed, or whether the visually dominated performance of the droll served to neutralize the verbal references to the nation's violent past, must remain a matter of speculation. What we can say, however, is that the visual and textual traces which accumulated to this serial figure, across different narratives, contexts and media, render this Restoration Falstaff a complex embodied archive – an archive that can tell us something not just about the cultural meanings of Oldcastle/Falstaff at specific moments in time but also, and more instructively, about the very mechanisms of remembering and forgetting at work in its production. It is these mechanisms of serial memory that Shakespeare's plays highlight in particular.

Forgetting Falstaff, or: The seriality of memory

This history is far from complete, yet it is suggestive of the many recontextualizations and remediations that Sir John underwent between the early fifteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries. Even across the three Shakespeare plays in which Falstaff features, many scholars have noted – often to their dismay – a discrepancy between versions of Sir John. The Falstaff of *Merry Wives* is a very different figure from that of the history plays, as Harold Bloom, for instance, bemoans: he sees the Falstaff of *Merry Wives* as an illegitimate version, misremembered or betrayed by his own creator, and describes the play 'as a ghastly comedy that is an unacceptable travesty of Falstaff' (Bloom 2017: 53). And it is true, the love plot of this comedy set in a contemporary urban space engages Falstaff in scenes that bear little resemblance to the events and medieval settings of the history play. Yet in spite of the plot divergences, he remains recognizable *as* Falstaff – and this is due, I would argue in the following, to the mnemonic markers attached to this serial figure, which are activated in performance by the actor and recognized by the audience.

Falstaff's physicality, conveyed by the actor who embodies him, renders this figure 'unmistakable, both to the other characters in the

cycle and to audiences' (Tribble 2023: 246). His 'portly belly' (*MW* 1.3.45), along with his signature idleness, would have functioned as a trademark. As Evelyn Tribble has argued recently, '[i]n a repertory system, audiences were used to seeing the same actors play different parts on a daily basis; this must have been – and still is – one of the real pleasures of recognition in the theatre.' Serial figures, she points out, were thus fashioned not only by the playtext, but also in performance: by the body of the actor, the costumes and their kinaesethetic, verbal and affective signatures. Kinaesthetic signatures are 'those little ways of moving, taking a breath, pausing, walking, holding one's head, handling a weapon, moving a hand. These are all the subtle yet unmistakable movements that enable acts of recognition of the actor behind the character. So telling are they that they can be used as a form of allusion' (2023: 246–7), evoking an intertheatrical memory.

These physical signatures are closely tied to the characteristic mode of speech of a character. In *Henry V*, the soldier Fluellen recalls that 'the fat knight with the great-belly doublet . . . was full of jests and gipes and knaveries and mocks – I have forgot his name' (*H5* 4.7.44–9). The repetition of near-synonymous words both conveys the range of Falstaff's wit and mimics the *copia* that is its hallmark.[9] Interestingly, the moment of recollecting the linguistic markers of Sir John – his jesting, his insults, his disrespectful speeches – is also a moment of conspicuous forgetting: Fluellen has forgotten his name. The dramaturgic effect of this simultaneous remembering and forgetting is, I would argue, to engage the audience cognitively and affectively, to make *them* remember Falstaff as a favourite figure.[10] This is borne out by how the exchange between the characters continues: after Fluellen has recalled the physical and linguistic markers of 'the fat knight' yet confesses to 'have forgot his name', Gower supplies it seemingly without hesitation: 'Sir John Falstaff', and Fluellen eagerly concurs: 'That is he: I'll tell you there is good men porn at Monmouth' (*H5* 4.7.47–53).[11] Audiences might have chimed in with Gower, silently or loudly, in supplying the name and agreed with Fluellen that Falstaff was a good man. Similarly, in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, where Falstaff is still alive, Mistress Page has rather conveniently forgotten (or pretends she has forgotten) the name of the man who is trying to seduce her under the nose of her own husband. When Ford asks her 'Where had you this pretty weather-cock?', she replies, 'I cannot tell what the dickens his name

is my husband had him of. What do you call your knight's name, sirrah?'. Her interlocutors then provide the missing name:

ROBIN
Sir John Falstaff.
FORD
Sir John Falstaff!
MISTRESS PAIGE
He, he; I can never hit on's name.

(*MW* 3.2.15–21)

That audiences were meant to remember and supply the name of Falstaff in such moments is likely, given that such conspicuous forgetting was tied up with the figure from his first appearance on the stage. Already in *1 Henry IV*, during the play extempore in which Hal and Falstaff take turns pretending to be the king, both characters delay naming Falstaff and instead describe him through what would become the mnemonic markers of this figure, his robust physicality and irresistible wit (Wilder 2010: 88–9). He is, in Falstaff's self-complimenting rendition, a 'goodly, portly man, i'faith, and a corpulent [one]; of a cheerful look, a pleasing eye and a most noble carriage; and, as I think, his age some fifty, or, by'r Lady, inclining to threescore. And now I remember me: his name is Falstaff' (*1H4* 2.4.410–14); in Hal's more cynical assessment, he is 'a devil . . . in the likeness of an old fat man', and it is only after a series of unflattering epithets – giving audiences ample time to enjoy and maybe join the guessing game – that he discloses his identity: 'That villainous, abominable misleader of youth, Falstaff, that old white-bearded Satan' (2.4.435, 2.4.450–1).

However, Falstaff's rotund physicality, while contributing to his 'innate memorability' (Wilder 2010: 92), would, for an early modern audience, have been a distinct marker of forgetfulness. Hal's first words to him – 'Thou art so fat-witted with drinking of old sack, and unbuttoning thee after supper, and sleeping upon benches after noon, that thou hast forgotten that which thou wouldst truly know' (1.2.2–5) – are more than just a mocking description of idle behaviour. In terms of early modern medical knowledge, this would have amounted to a diagnosis: Falstaff suffers from (and embodies) a pathological form of forgetting – lethargy.[12] His gluttonous appetite, his constant consumption of wine, his sleeping during the

day and his promiscuous sexuality all contribute to an imbalance of humours that weaken the memory. This is the standard view conveyed in a contemporary tract on the arts of memory, John Willis' *Mnemonica* (1618). Willis lists various sources of lethargy, among them, tellingly:

> IV. *All repletion of Drink or food* is hurtfull, chiefly of Bread; too much *Repletion dulleth wit*, and is a great enemy to the *Memorative faculty*. . . . Fly therefore *Drunkennesse* and *Gluttony*, as the mortallest enemies of a good *Memory*.
>
> V. *Sleep* offendeth *Memory*. If it be First, overmuch. Secondly, if taken in a windy place, or under *Lunar raises*. Thirdly, in the day, most of all with shows on, or being miry.
>
> XI. Filthy desires, as avarice, envy, thirst of revenge, lust, love of harlots, and the ardent Passion, *Love*.
>
> XII. Rash answers. (1618; Engl. 1661: 139–41)

Willis' treatise captures so precisely what Falstaff does and what he stands for that one might wonder whether the description was modelled on its most famous patient: physical excess, corporeal pleasures and an irresistible urge to witty repartees. That Falstaff takes diurnal naps, no doubt with his shoes on, is even presented on stage when Falstaff is discovered sleeping behind the arras in Act 2, Scene 4.[13] Paradoxically, it is these markers of forgetfulness that become Falstaff's mnemonic markers – a pattern that points to the insistent interplay of remembering and forgetting which brings about this figure.

What are we to make of these moments of conspicuous forgetting and remembering? I would like to argue that Shakespeare's insistent playing with the names of Falstaff and Oldcastle, as well as the mnemonic markers accruing to the figure, indicate the existence of an intertheatrical memory: because for 'the joke between actors and audience' (Craik 1995: 60) to work, Shakespeare must have been able to count on at least some audience members having seen the prequels and remembering the substitution of names. Such moments highlight seriality as a principle of theatrical dramaturgy as well as of cultural memory, and the disclaimer that 'this [Falstaff] is not the man' with which I began this chapter is a case in point. This pattern

of seriality, effected by erasure and substitution, may even have been reinforced by the fact that the actor who had probably embodied Falstaff in the two *Henry IV* plays as well as *Merry Wives*, the famous clown Will Kempe, had left the company in disagreement late in 1598. Kempe possibly compensated himself for the exclusion from the Chamberlain's Men by selling the pirated Quarto of the *Merry Wives* to the printer (Wiles 1987: 117; Biester 2001: 238). When *Henry V* was staged at the company's new Globe Theatre in 1599, Kempe did not make an appearance – and neither did Falstaff. Yet by this time, the fat knight had already become a serial figure and would make repeated appearances in other narratives, contexts and media: again and again, and again. . .

Notes

1 I use the term as introduced by West 2013: 151–72.

2 Wilder (2010: 92–3) too reads this as a moment of deliberate disidentification that serves to separate historical from theatrical memory.

3 This was commented on already by the earliest editors of Shakespeare, Nicholas Rowe, Lewis Theobald, Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson. Critical scholarship on the name change has become a minor subfield in Shakespeare studies; for the most recent overview of the debate, see Choate (2019).

4 *Henry IV, Part 1* was first performed in 1596 by the Lord Hunsdon's Men (who became the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1597) at The Theatre in Shoreditch before July, on tour during summer when theatres were closed, and again at The Swan in Bankside during November and December, as well as possibly during the 1596–97 Christmas and Shrovetide festivities at court. When the play was published in 1598, its title page displayed the name of Falstaff, rather than the Oldcastle of the first performances. On the chronology of performance, revision and publication, see Gibson (2012).

5 For a detailed discussion of this evidence, see Karremann (2015: 118–22). Choate (2019) likewise rejects the censorship narrative and instead sees the confusions around the name Oldcastle/Falstaff as a series of deliberate textual remediations which the play uses to stage the conditions of historical knowledge.

6 On the Marprelate-controversy and its implications for Shakespeare's play, see Poole (1995).

7 Drolls were 'unified pieces, usually lifted verbatim from scenes or plot-strands of pre-exitisting plays', Depledge notes; they were always farcical, though not often comic in nature – among Shakespeare's plays, for instance, the grave-digger scene from *Hamlet* was made into a droll called *The Grave-Makers* (2018: 19).

8 The droll dedicated to Falstaff, 'The Bouncing Knight', is an abbreviated adaptation of the plot strand from *Henry VI, Part 1* in which he is present, beginning with Hal 'trick [ing] Falstaff into thinking that he has been robbed', then performing the play extempore (3.2.) and concluding with 'the battle scenes in which Falstaff plays dead before pretending to have killed Hotspur' (Depledge 2018: 19–21).

9 'Jests' are 'mocking or jeering speeches' (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2023b); 'gibes' denotes a 'scoffing or sneering speech', paronomastically rendering a mode of speaking (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2023a); 'mocks' are 'derisive or contemptuous actions or utterances' (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2023c). On the various forms and functions of humour in early modern England, see Ghose (2021); on Falstaff's jesting as a form of *inventio* and as such linked to the memory arts, see Wilder (2010: 86–92).

10 On the mnemonic cues through which 'Shakespeare managed, handled, and shaped audience responses to Falstaff', see Engel (2018: 165–79, quote 170).

11 Of course, there is no knowing just how these lines had been delivered by the actors or received by Elizabethan audiences, nor can we determine why Shakespeare wanted Falstaff to be 'not not-remembered at this point', as Holland rightly points out (2021: 21–7). What remains, however, is the 'forgettability of Falstaff's name' (ibid.: 22), which I take, together with Baldo, to mark Falstaff as 'a figure of forgetfulness' *tout court* (Baldo 2012: 128).

12 As Sullivan Jr. (2005) has shown, lethargy as a disordered state of the body as well as of the soul was habitually linked to immoderate eating and drinking in early modern medical discourse.

13 For a more detailed reading of Falstaff's lethargy, see Karremann (2015: 104–5).

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6

‘Play it again, Antony (or Cleopatra)!’

Performing *Antony and Cleopatra* as *Julius Caesar*’s sequel on stage and screen

Sarah Hatchuel

Taking Shakespeare’s plays of *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* as a case in point, this chapter explores how their serial performance has taken three forms, each with specific consequences in terms of gender dynamics: sequelization, when the two plays are presented independently during the same theatre season or are released as film adaptations one after the other; serialization, when the two plays are performed together as parts of one long, continuous show; conflation, when the stories are merged into a single fiction containing additional plot points such as Cleopatra’s early affair with Caesar. If the first two forms logically give prominence to the Roman white man, Antony, as the main link between the plays, the third emphasizes the Oriental woman, Cleopatra. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the construction of Shakespeare’s

Antony and Cleopatra as *Julius Caesar*'s sequel has created a site for ideological negotiations, generating spaces at once for conservatism and dissidence (Hatchuel 2011: xx).[1] 'Faultlines', to quote Alan Sinfield (1992), may appear through the very attempt to smooth out discrepancies into a coherent whole. Richard Madelaine has considered that 'the grouped staging of Shakespeare's Roman plays' may be reflecting 'periods of political transition in which ideologies are questioned and patterns of international relations radically altered' (1998: 90). The 'enforced' lined-up refigurations of *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* certainly give rise to situations which may put the dominant discourses under pressure as they strive to re-establish plausibility in the face of disturbance, notably through the construction of consistent characters. The analysis of prominent examples of stage and film productions will document an era of *serial conceptualization* in the reading and performing of the two plays. Seriality can be found at the core of the stage and the screen's mutual influence: showrunners have been inspired by Shakespeare (as evidenced in the third part of this volume), while theatre practitioners' experiences and audiences' receptions have been shaped by film franchises and television series. Televisual seriality has definitely stamped its mark on Shakespearean theatre productions. For instance, in April 2013, the Patio Playhouse theatre company's poster for *The Tempest* was based on one of *Lost*'s (ABC, 2004–10) promotional visuals (Hatchuel and Laist 2016); a stage production of *The Taming of the Shrew* directed by Aaron Posner for the Folger Shakespeare Theatre in 2012 was openly inspired by *Deadwood* (HBO, 2004–6), setting the action in the Wild West of the nineteenth century (Posner 2012); David Bobée drew inspiration from *Six Feet Under* (HBO, 2001–5) for his 2013 French production of *Hamlet* (Beaudry 2013). The fact that *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* have been serially performed more or less steadily throughout the twentieth century, with an acceleration of the phenomenon at the beginning of the twenty-first century, thus says more about the cultural and media environments in which these performances took place than about the two plays themselves.

Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, written around 1607, may be read as the sequel to *Julius Caesar*, a play written in 1599, in that it is a chronological extension with recognizable characters from one play to the next within the same historical context. *Antony and*

Cleopatra follows the destinies of Marcus Antonius, Octavius Caesar and Lepidus, the triumvirs who ruled over the Roman world after the assassination of Julius Caesar. But there is no reason to believe that, in Shakespeare's time, *Antony and Cleopatra* was presented as *Julius Caesar*'s consistent sequel, with Antony as the returning hero. If Shakespearean scholars agree that the Antony from *Antony and Cleopatra* was originally played by Richard Burbage, they still argue about the identity of the actor who played Antony in *Julius Caesar*. Andrew Gurr has argued convincingly that Burbage was not cast as Antony, but as Brutus (2004: 15–16). Continuous casting only became a practice at the very end of the nineteenth century, as can be inferred by comparing the stage histories of the two plays in John Ripley's and Margaret Lamb's 1980 volumes and in Andrew James Hartley's and Carol Chillington Rutter's more recent books in the 'Shakespeare in Performance' series. In 1900, actor-manager Herbert Beerbohm Tree revived *Julius Caesar* very much influenced by the visually striking London staging of the Meiningen Court Company's German production in 1881 (Ripley 1980: 147–75). The Meiningen production viewed the play as an ensemble drama. This actually persuaded Beerbohm Tree that Antony, and not Brutus, was the real hero of *Julius Caesar*. As soon as this shift took place, *Antony and Cleopatra* started to be considered as a potential sequel to *Julius Caesar*. Directors and producers could secure an audience for two productions instead of one, with the same actors generally hired to play the triumvirs in the two plays, bringing stability to the parts. Since sequelization turns Antony into the pivotal link between the two plays, it constructs a character who, whether absolutely spotless or eminently cunning, becomes a heroic figure with a coherent psyche from one play to the next.

The practice of constructing sequels out of Shakespeare's autonomous Roman tragedies calls for an investigation of its cultural consequences. For instance, what becomes of the Egyptian queen in a sequence of plays that is male-oriented through the very focus on Antony as a returning hero? Performances of *Antony and Cleopatra* as sequels are more likely, I argue, to represent Cleopatra as appropriated by the West and deny her any political edge or any empowering form of blackness or Otherness (Karim-Cooper 2024), propagating an imperialist and teleological ideology (Hatchuel 2011: xxi). If *Antony and Cleopatra* is constructed as *Julius Caesar*'s sequel, does it turn *Antony and Cleopatra* into a 'secondary' play?

As we witness, after Antony's triumph in *Julius Caesar*, his loss of masculinity and his military fall for the sake of his love for an Egyptian woman might not *Antony and Cleopatra* be then viewed as the play that *fails* – both Antony and the spectators? After the male show of *Julius Caesar*, might it not also assert that the 'female' play always has to 'come next'– that femininity is always second?

The year 1972 appears as a beacon year in the sequelization of Shakespeare's Roman plays. On the British stage, Trevor Nunn directed a Roman cycle for the Royal Shakespeare Company (including *Coriolanus*, *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Titus*), while on the American stage Michael Kahn directed joint productions of *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* in Stratford (Connecticut). On the silver screen, Charlton Heston's film of *Antony and Cleopatra* was released, with echoes of Heston's part as Antony in Stuart Burge's earlier 1970 *Julius Caesar*. These stage and film ventures arose in a period marked by the dire consequences of national imperialisms and political ambitions – the intensifying Troubles in Ireland leading to the Bloody Sunday carnage in January 1972, and, in the United States, mounting political disenchantment in the wake of the Watergate scandal in June as well as increasing numbers of demonstrations against the war in Vietnam. The 1972 joint productions may be viewed as a denunciation of war politics, but also as a longing for some restoration of order and harmony, stressing, as they did, logical continuities and values of national heroism. The productions also reflected the growing fascination with Egyptian treasures: the astonishing Tutankhamun exhibition had opened in March 1972 at the British Museum in London, exciting curiosity for the Egyptian empire but also recalling Britain's own imperialism.

In Nunn's 1972 RSC combined performances, the actors playing the triumvirs reprised their parts in the second play. Richard Johnson was Antony; Corin Redgrave, Octavius Caesar; and Raymond Westwell, Lepidus. This gave Octavius the opportunity to prove cold and powerful from *Julius Caesar* onwards, while Antony could show how he matured (his black beard in *Julius Caesar* became grizzled in *Antony and Cleopatra*). The consequences of sequelization can be felt in the presentation of Antony as noble, honest and trustworthy. When looking at the various press reviews of the two productions, what is striking today is to see how much the characters' psychological evolution from one play to the

next was the major concern of the reviewers, as if psychological coherence across the plays was the standard according to which the success of the Roman series could be assessed. If continuity failed to be noticed, expectations were frustrated and the productions were criticized. In an economic context that required a certain return on investment, especially in view of the RSC's need to finance the building of a brand new stage in the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, the director chose not to focus on the various textual discrepancies that arise when *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* are put together. Since the two plays are closer to each other than any of the other Roman plays, they were used to justify the whole four-Roman-play 'saga' – a recurring word in press reviews of the cycle. In an interview with Margaret Tierney (1972: 23–7), Trevor Nunn said that he felt compelled to linger more than usual on the political scenes involving Antony, Lepidus and Octavius so as to build up stronger connections with the previous play. As a consequence, Antony's relationship with Cleopatra was no longer experienced by some reviewers as the central point in the drama. Possibly in order to compensate for Cleopatra's lack of centrality in this whole Roman cycle, the Egyptian queen was played by Janet Suzman as anything but a docile character. Suzman stressed the queen's impulsive voluptuousness and great strength. She constructed a free, histrionic, witty and gender-bending character whom the reviewers were prompt to associate with the feminist movements of the time (Young 1972). But on the rare occasions her strength was acknowledged, it was viewed as a defect preventing the audience from identifying with her ('Miss Suzman is, if anything, too strong a personality to arouse pity as well as admiration' (Lewis 1972: 119)). It was as though Nunn's male-centred, Roman saga contributed to twisting the perception of the Egyptian queen as a character that neither threatened the Romans politically nor deeply stirred sensibilities. In Shakespeare's play, Carol Rutter claims, Cleopatra appears as the dark threat to the Roman males who try to protect their whiteness from being tainted by miscegenation and foreign influences, but, through her unexplored and mysterious 'darkness', she also symbolizes the object that allows the Romans to prove masculine and sexually conquering (Rutter 2001: 67). The Egyptian world of Nunn's production was filled with attendants, musicians and messengers that were tawny or black, except for Cleopatra, who was played by a white actress. This 'dark' surrounding created

a racially threatening Egypt, but the Egyptian queen herself was denied the racial embodiment of a political threat. As Nunn's Roman cycle drowned Antony's affair with an Egyptian woman within the bigger picture of the political hostilities between white men, crucial issues of race were side-stepped.

The start of the 1970s also saw the consecutive release of Stuart Burge's 1970 *Julius Caesar* and Charlton Heston's 1972 *Antony and Cleopatra*. Both films use Shakespeare's text and feature the same actor (Charlton Heston) as Antony. During the shooting of Burge's *Julius Caesar*, Heston started to imagine himself in the part of Antony again, but this time in a film of *Antony and Cleopatra* which he wanted to control and direct on the heels of *Julius Caesar* (Crowther 1986: 123; Heston 1995: 420–8). To create links between Burge's *Caesar* and his own subsequent film, Heston suggested ideas of *mise-en-scène*, such as setting the proscription scene of *Caesar* in a Roman steaming bath with slave girls so that he could already embody the lascivious and epicurean Antony he imagined for his *Antony and Cleopatra*. Heston's attempt to create a coherent vision of his character from the first film onwards was probably intended to persuade the producers of Burge's *Julius Caesar* to back up his project for *Antony and Cleopatra*. Heston's autobiography reveals how investors first considered Heston's venture to film *Antony* in a favourable light because they considered that a sequel was less risky and more profitable, before withdrawing from the project as soon as Burge's *Caesar* did not reach its expected public (1995: 435). Heston had to raise money elsewhere.

In his autobiography, he also explains how he chose Hildegard Neil for the part of Cleopatra: 'I liked one of the tests very much: a South African actress, whom I'd seen a month or so earlier as Lady Macbeth. She had the right kind of beauty, with a classical face and a contralto voice. The camera liked her, I'd found her directable in the scenes we did' (Heston 1995: 441). The choice of Neil by Heston reveals the search for a normative form of female beauty, which has to be 'classical' and, therefore, white. But Heston's discovery of Neil also betrays a 'darker', more dangerous edge – conveyed by the South African origins (just like Janet Suzman who played in the Nunn 1972 production), the association with Lady Macbeth and the 'masculine' deep vocal range. Cleopatra has to be 'other' but still tameable and 'directable' by Heston, as both Antony and the film director, all the more so since this Antony brings the glorious

echoes of his political and military victories from the earlier *Julius Caesar* film.

Another beacon period for sequelization is 2008 to 2009, which was marked by a severe financial crisis that destabilized the world's economic order. In terms of media history, television series were now established as a legitimate and powerful art form, creating new expectations in terms of narrative complexity and story length. At the start of the twenty-first century, television seriality gathered momentum in introducing 'narrative experimentations' into 'the mass medium of commercial network television' (Mittell 2010: 265). Series such as *24* or *Lost* regularly disclosed narrative information that made us 'rethink the plots of previous episodes and revise our ongoing assumptions, [reveling] in such plot twists [and] revealing characters to be duplicitous at the end of a season, forcing viewers to rethink everything presented throughout the series' (Mittell 2010: 220). Those series were based on continuing storylines, but the very idea of continuity was constantly mixed with, and qualified by, revision and doubt. Through reflexive narratives, showrunners began to recognize or pre-empt the actions of an audience that is increasingly aware of the conditions under which fiction is created and the contexts in which it is produced and broadcast.

While a TV series generates a discontinuous narrative with frequent occurrences, unfolding its fictional world over several years and establishing its own signature in the balance it manages to strike between serial (long-term) and episodic (short-term) writing (Hatchuel and Cornillon 2020), the cinematic medium tends to favour singular narrative events. While the fictional universe can sometimes be developed over the long term (if one thinks of the *James Bond*, *Star Wars, Terminator* or *Harry Potter* franchises), costs involved in producing and directing a film necessarily limit the number of times a franchise can be repeated: it will be difficult to match even the number of episodes in a miniseries. What's more, the films will be separated by many months, if not several years. Cinema therefore plays on a different kind of serial repetition. The tension between the serial and the episodic writing forms appears instead in that between sequels and remakes. Because a relatively long period of time elapses between two occurrences in a film franchise, the public's memory often has to be refreshed: the sequel may therefore include many aspects of the remake, while films that officially present themselves as remakes may contain

elements of a sequel or prequel. It is these increasingly complex and evolving interactions that imply processes of repetition and variation, in which scriptwriters and viewers seek to surprise each other, that have nourished the audiovisual landscape and made it so productive. These new viewing contracts have had repercussions on the way joint stage performances have been produced and received.

From April to July 2008, *Julius Caesar* (directed by David Muse) and *Antony and Cleopatra* (by Michael Kahn, who had already directed the two plays jointly in 1972) were presented by the Shakespeare Theatre Company, in what was called a 'Roman Repertory' at Sidney Harman Hall in Washington, D.C. Although the productions did not share the same director, the actors played the same parts in both. The plays were performed on alternating nights, and could even be seen one after the other on the same day, at matinee and evening shows. If the ghost of Julius Caesar continued to haunt the first play after the assassination, appearing not only on the eve of the battle of Philippi but also during it, he also invaded the end of *Antony and Cleopatra*: as Cleopatra was dying on her throne, he drifted above the stage, sending the audience back to the finale of *Julius Caesar* and recalling how the murder of Caesar had triggered this whole chain of events. The emphasis on the characters' consistency was welcomed by reviewers: 'watching the plays on consecutive nights . . ., the continuities in Shakespeare's writing of Antony became clear' (Hamlin 2008: 441). The sequelization was thus projected as a *revelation* of Shakespeare's 'true' composition instead of a narrative and ideological *construct*. The perception of continuity and consistency went hand in hand with approval and praise: what the reviewers always agreed upon was the achievement and relevance of the joint presentation. *The Shakespeare Newsletter* even encouraged future directors to take it as a model: 'Its success suggests that more theatre companies should consider presenting the two plays in just this fashion' (Macleod Mahon 2008: 22). *The Washington Post* was impressed by what the joint presentation was able to bring out from the individual shows ('The pairing of the plays makes a lot of dramatic sense' (Marks 2008)). Hannibal Hamlin, in the journal *Shakespeare*, acknowledged that staging the two plays together seemed 'more strategic in terms of marketing than artistic considerations' but was quick to agree with this choice by conjuring Shakespeare himself: 'Yet Shakespeare, as a professional man of the theatre, would have understood the practical necessity of marketing,

and in fact the pairing works surprisingly well in practice' (2008: 440). The notes to the theatre programme, written by scholar Paul A. Cantor, compared the productions with the *Star Wars* films: 'It's an epic saga of noble heroes fighting to uphold their ancestral honor, of corruption in the body politic, of conspiracy in the Senate, of a venerable Republic turning into an Empire. No, I'm not talking about George Lucas' *Star Wars* but about William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*' (Cantor 2008). These references to popular culture found their way into the titles of some reviews (Chris Klimek's 'Shakespeare Theatre's *Antony and Cleopatra*: A Long Time Ago, in a Galaxy Far, Far Away . . .' on 23 May 2008), as well as in the description of Suzanne Bertish's Cleopatra receiving the news of Antony's wedding to Octavia: a reviewer saw her as going 'into the kind of tailspin of incredulity we have come to associate with telegenic desperate housewives of the modern day' (Marks 2008). Programme notes by Akiva Fox also stressed how Suzanne Bertish's experience as having played in TV series *Rome* (HBO-BBC, 2005–7) made her feel 'very comfortable in the world of *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*' (2008). Bertish had, indeed, acted in fourteen episodes of the HBO series as the character of Eleni (the servant of Brutus's mother) before embarking on this theatrical journey. The emphasis on this fact added to the blurring between the stage productions and a TV series, further validating the concept of sequelization.

Director Ivo van Hove contributed to endorse further the idea that *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* compose one single, coherent story to be serialized. In his *Roman Tragedies*, he directed the plays (starting with *Coriolanus*) as a six-hour show, much in the way Roman history had been dramatized in BBC's 1963 *The Spread of the Eagle* (which presented the three plays in nine fifty-minute episodes), as well as in *Rome*, which may have influenced van Hove's back-to-back presentation of the Roman plays. In a vast, modernly furbished hall that could belong to an airport, a conference centre, an international hotel, a press centre or a TV set hosting talk-shows, the emphasis was on the politicians, their speeches and their debates, placing the historical events in a media-dominated and globalized world. The stage was packed with television screens broadcasting real-life news channels such as CNN, clocks displaying different times, computers, microphones and telephones. Some of the screens broadcasted relevant newsreels

throughout the play, accompanying war campaigns with footage of the Afghan or Iraq wars. The 'ticking clock' effect (heightened by the use of captions on LED screens proclaiming 'Five minutes to Cassius's death' or '15 minutes to Brutus's death'), the Big-Brother voice-overs, the multiple screens, the state-of-the-art technologies, the saturation of upcoming news and the hyper-mediatization on the stage spurred French reviewers (Bély 2008; Josse 2008) at the Avignon festival to compare the production with the American TV series *24* (Fox, 2001–10). A common feature appeared through split-screen effects on stage as well as on screen. In *Julius Caesar*, several scenes were played simultaneously rather than successively. As the dialogue between Brutus and his wife Portia took place, Caesar was arguing with his wife Calphurnia regarding his leaving for the Senate; the scenes featuring the concerned wives were thus performed side by side, turning the play into 'a television soap opera', in Josée Nuyts-Giornal's words (2008: 79). It is as if van Hove assembled, or switched between, different genres of television seriality according to the scenes themselves, from political machinations to lovers' quarrels, thus stressing Shakespeare's own blending of genres in his plays.

Staging the three Roman plays as a six-hour marathon certainly bore similarities to viewing a news channel or watching many episodes of a TV series in a row. Having Octavius and Cassius played by women was part of van Hove's intention to anchor the story in our contemporary world and acknowledge, as well as mirror, the fact that women now hold high political office and run a certain number of governments (Perrier 2008). But, paradoxically, feminizing Rome and giving power to a female Octavius also diluted Cleopatra's own female authority, making it less exceptional and, therefore, less threatening for Rome. If Rome is ruled by a woman, just as Egypt is, the opposition between a masculine western world and a feminine eastern world is blurred, and Cleopatra's edge becomes blunted. If the representation of Egypt avoided the Orientalist stereotypes, it erased any trace of confrontation with a strong foreign culture, as if Cleopatra's country had already been assimilated into the Empire. In such a serialized show, the male narrative arc of Mark Antony is made even more pivotal, in a highly globalized and mediatized world which seems to have already swallowed any form of Otherness.

Ivo van Hove's serialized production had an effect on what audiences started to expect when *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* were performed in repertory. The critically acclaimed Bristol-based theatre company Shakespeare at the Tobacco Factory presented the two plays together in 2009. The plays were performed by the same ensemble of actors, but they were staged neither back-to-back nor during the same period of time, so that the spectators could not watch the two shows without having to wait for a few days or weeks. *Julius Caesar* was performed from 12 February to 21 March 2009, while *Antony and Cleopatra* started a few days after the end of *Caesar*'s run, on 26 March, and was presented until 2 May. This created frustration among spectators. On his review blog on 2 April 2009, Peter Kirwan admitted that his 'only disappointment' was that 'it wasn't possible to watch the two productions in rep with each other, as it would have drawn out the links more clearly and potentially to richer effect' (2009). This reveals how spectators now expect to follow intricate narrative arcs spanning over several instalments. This desire for watching the plays as if they were the episodes of a TV series or parts of a filmic saga is also disclosed through references to film sequels or television fiction in the reviews: 'Taken together, this sprawling epic evoked modern crime epics from *The Godfather* to *The Wire*, particularly in scenes such as the Triumvirate sitting down together in a circle to negotiate territory' (Kirwan 2009). This sentence is symptomatic of the prism of references through which the theatre productions are now received – a prism which is shaping artistic creation itself. Lucy Black's Cleopatra was said to succeed in being regal, erotic and histrionic at the same time in an environment where no trace of Orientalism could be found while still emphasizing Cleopatra's unsettling distinctiveness. The feminist stance of the production was firmly set by granting all the women at the Egyptian court unusual power. Although Cleopatra was played by a white actress, the power conferred to her by her Otherness was apparent on stage as well as off stage, through the actress' very name, 'Black'.

When the RSC mounted a new Roman Season in 2017, spectators expected continuity and were very disappointed not to find it. Most of the actors in Caesar reappeared in *Antony and Cleopatra*, but

none continued their roles from the previous play. Marcia Eppich-Harris thus remarked in *Early Modern Culture*:

> In contemplating what would come next in *Antony and Cleopatra*, I anticipated that there would not be continuity in casting because I had seen the promotion pictures for the next play. Yet, as the play began, I was disappointed nonetheless. Corrigan's Antony became so spectacular by Act 3 in *Caesar* that I missed his presence in the role and was distracted with wondering how he might have interacted with Josette Simon's Cleopatra. I think this was an incredible mistake. Having such a unique opportunity to develop these characters across two plays would have been an astonishing feat for Corrigan as Antony, as well as Marcello Walton (Lepidus) and Jon Tacy (Octavius Caesar). (2018: 231)

Over 120 years, *Antony and Cleopatra* has appeared as *Julius Caesar*'s sequel in various contexts. The two plays have sometimes been played alternatively in repertory in the same period of time, allowing spectators to see the productions in any order and construct their own joint show. *Caesar* can thus be attended as *Antony*'s prequel, and no show appears clearly at the end of the narrative line. However, paratextual elements such as reviews, programmes or lectures have guided the audience into seeing the plays in the order of historical events by regularly identifying *Antony* as *Caesar*'s sequel. The two plays have sometimes been performed during the same season but in succession during that season, imposing a clear order of viewing to the spectators, but also frustrating their desire to see the follow-up immediately after the first play. In this configuration, *Antony and Cleopatra* is identified as the play imposing a new ending on the spectators' memory of *Julius Caesar*'s own end, which may present the play featuring the Egyptian queen as the disappointing second play. The two plays have also been *serialized*, which is presented back-to-back in the same protracted, uninterrupted show, unfolding in the chronological order of historical events.

The sequelization and serialization of the two Shakespearean plays certainly elevates Antony as the pivotal link between the two plays. But a third form of seriality is possible – one that connects Cleopatra's affair with Julius Caesar and her subsequent passion

for Antony. In this new narrative, Cleopatra becomes the pivotal link, sometimes on the stage but mostly in filmic endeavours. A large number of plays, from the Renaissance onwards (such as the anonymous *Caesar's Revenge* in 1607, Samuel Daniel's 1611 *The Tragedie of Cleopatra*, John Fletcher and Philip Massinger's 1647 *The False One*, John Dryden's 1678 *All for Love*, or George Bernard Shaw's 1898 *Caesar and Cleopatra*), have dealt with the love affair between Julius Caesar and Cleopatra, antedating the period dramatized in Shakespeare's works. What Shakespeare only implies about Cleopatra's past, many plays have developed extensively by supplementing story points never broached in *Julius Caesar* or *Antony and Cleopatra*. By revealing what Shakespeare has chosen to hide, the other dramatic texts have generated a common ground for the two Shakespearean plays and have encouraged the conflation of three plots – the affair between Caesar and Cleopatra (never dramatized by Shakespeare), the events leading to Caesar's murder and the love story between Antony and Cleopatra. The consequence is to challenge the Shakespearean plays while bringing them closer together and encouraging artistic conflations such as J. Gordon Edwards' 1917, Cecil B. DeMille's 1934 and Joseph Mankiewicz's 1963 films of *Cleopatra*. These works have merged the plots of the two Shakespearean plays while adding, among other things, the love affair between Julius Caesar and Cleopatra. In the process, the films have constructed the Egyptian queen as the heroic figure instead of Antony. Contrary to, say, the titles of Shakespeare's and George Bernard Shaw's respective plays (*Antony and Cleopatra*, *Caesar and Cleopatra*), the names of the men have been suppressed from the titles of the 1917, 1934 and 1963 films, simply leaving the name of the Egyptian queen. Spectators are now invited to consider Caesar and Antony through Cleopatra's eyes.

In 1917, Theda Bara (an anagram of 'Arab Death') played Cleopatra in a film directed by J. Gordon Edwards. Bara was publicized as the ultimate Oriental *femme fatale*, embodying all the fears linked to the mysterious and dangerous otherness of Egypt and womanhood (Hughes-Hallet 2006: 330–1). No prints of the film seem to have survived but it is known that the first part was devoted to the affair between Julius Caesar and Cleopatra, and ended with the murder of Caesar and civil war; the second part moved on to the affair with Antony until the couple's suicide (Ball 1968: 253).

A similar structure is to be found in the subsequent conflated films.

DeMille's 1934 *Cleopatra* shows the Egyptian queen as a figure of economic and sexual independence. Claudette Colbert, who plays the enticing queen, brings the echoes of her previous roles as energetic, witty, modern women in control of their lives, while Elizabeth Taylor's 1963 performance took part in a trend that presented women as even more autonomous and sexually liberated. The 1934 and 1963 *Cleopatra*s, moreover, present the queen as a double of the film director within the films' diegeses. For Francesca T. Royster, Claudette Colbert in the 1934 film becomes a kind of 'surrogate for DeMille's powers of discipline and direction' (2003: 86). She is seen giving orders to her many slaves and courtiers, and controlling the orgiastic spectacle that she has choreographed for Antony. Cleopatra's manipulative skills as well as her distance from the pageant shows she organizes are also particularly emphasized in Mankiewicz's film. At the end of her colossal, spectacular entrance into Rome, Cleopatra descends from her majestic throne pulled by hundreds of slaves, only to wink at Caesar and let him know that the show has been a carefully planned illusion to please the masses. Through this wink, Elizabeth Taylor metafilmically discloses the construction of this highly theatrical situation, partly deconstructing its imperialistic and Orientalist connotations. It is as if, in this film, Cleopatra was astute enough to know that she was acting in a Hollywood epic.

The films have, therefore, taken part in the elevation of the Cleopatra icon within a patriarchal world, asserting the combination of public authority and active female sexuality. But, at the same time, through the stigmatization of the Oriental woman, notably when she visits Julius Caesar in Rome and is rejected as a dangerous outsider, the films have destabilized the idea of female power. The *Cleopatra* films have participated in a Western, commercial trend in which the Cleopatra icon is generally produced by male stage directors or film producers while encouraging women to consume this male-constructed icon. Moreover, denied a black skin in the films, the Egyptian queen loses any ability to darken and erase Roman whiteness even if she were to be dominated. Far from a powerful black figure, Cleopatra is depicted on screen as an exotic, powerless, 'black' woman in her

representation as a slave or an immigrant, whose body is always made available or containable within exotic *mises-en-scène*. The different cinematic presentations of Cleopatra oscillate between the controller and the controlled, the majestic conqueror and the unwanted immigrant, the gorgeous vamp and the threatening vampire. The image of the mighty woman becomes blurred and contained, as if power bestowed on women could only have disastrous consequences or, at least, could only be considered as a threat to harmony. Nevertheless, the films have made Cleopatra the unmovable star of the show, continually resurrecting the idea of female power, while men gravitate around her before disappearing and being replaced. Neither totally subversive nor contained in their ideologies, the *Cleopatra* conflated films appear as sites where female power is, in fact, continually repeated and re-negotiated (Hatchuel 2012).

The sequelization, serialization or conflation of *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, if it is to continue as I believe it will, may benefit from viewing contracts in which unsettling narrative elements are not only allowed but are expected, and even wished for. This desire, in all media, to see a story continue with its conclusion forever postponed but also forever announced, this ambivalent wish to reach the end but to see the twists renewed, may be part of our need to process personal, social and cultural issues through the identification/distance allowed by fiction. The regular remaking of serial stories, whether on stage, on screen or on television, is an even clearer mark of the need to hark on unfinished cultural, and therefore political, matters.

Note

1 This chapter draws on, revises and expands material previously published in Hatchuel (2011).

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7

‘And they dance’

Queering Shakespeare through balletic seriality

Jonas Kellermann

This chapter discusses the complex relationship between seriality and choreographic adaptations of Shakespearean drama. Ballet, although not apparent on first glance, marks an inherently serial art form, from a centuries-old movement language that has been passed on and modulated across generations of practitioners to canonical story ballets that continue to be revived decades after their premiere.[1] This is especially the case for Shakespearean ballet, which has seen both classical productions that have been running almost unchanged for hundreds of performances and more avant-gardist experiments; these latter adaptations have reflected the aesthetic emergence of counter-balletic dance forms in the twentieth century, such as modern and postmodern dance, and have sought to reimagine the ways in which Shakespeare is being represented choreographically to contemporary audiences (Kellermann 2021: 187–94). Mirroring the larger tension in the dance world between preserving and reforming aesthetic tradition, Shakespearean ballet encapsulates the concept of seriality as a phenomenon caught between the divergent pulls of repetition and

variation. Which analytical affordances, then, does seriality offer for Shakespeare-inspired ballet, an art form that has only recently assumed a more central position within the field of Shakespeare and adaptation studies?[2] And to what extent do serial discussions of Shakespearean ballet in return reveal new perspectives on seriality as an adaptational and interpretative concept?

These theoretical questions are framed by a recent case study that self-reflectively highlights and interrogates its own serialized aesthetics: Benjamin Millepied's staging of Sergei Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* at La Seine Musicale (2022).[3] Through the use of cinematic techniques as well as racially and gender diverse casting, the production strove to queer performative conventions in Shakespearean ballet and showcased that we can only ever engage with the iconic story through serialized imagery. This imagery, I argue, exposes and radicalizes the seriality of desire and violence within the play, which is (not) broken by the lovers' suicides, and exemplifies contemporary tendencies to challenge the classical iconography of canonical Shakespeare ballets like *Romeo and Juliet*. In the following, therefore, I first outline my understanding of seriality, especially regarding its relevance to queer studies and story-driven ballets more generally. Based on that, I then read Millepied's *Romeo and Juliet* as a queer adaptation which, much like its protagonists, finds itself trapped in an irresolvable serial conflict between yearning to break free from tradition while also being irrevocably bound to those very traditions at the same time. By creating a serial aesthetic in order to queer *Romeo and Juliet*, Millepied's balletic adaptation reconfigures Shakespeare's iconic play as a tragedy of seriality.

Queer seriality

As this collection amply demonstrates, seriality has gained particular scholarly traction since the 2010s as a concept of cultural analysis and critique, especially within the broadening fields of television studies and popular culture, but also in contemporary reimaginings of Shakespeare's works. Common to most scholarly engagements with the concept is the innate tension adhering to seriality between repetition and continuation on the one hand and alteration and

variation on the other. As Maria Sulimma observes in her account of seriality and gender in contemporary TV:

> A central interest of seriality studies is the paradox at the core of serial storytelling: the constraint to repeat in order to provide recognisability (of a plot, character, brand of a show or network, genre, media format) while at the same time creating suspense through new, unforeseen elements. (2020: 13)

While Sulimma's study focusses on televisual works, ballet, at least so far, has received hardly any attention in this turn to seriality, and unsurprisingly so. Most ballet performances, particularly narrative pieces, constitute cohesive, self-contained entities that do not aim for dramaturgical open-endedness in order to (repetitively) continue a story line potentially *ad infinitum* in the way that, for instance, a great number of televisual series do. Indeed, finality and closure arguably contribute to the recognizability of any ballet to the audience – so much so that objections from Soviet officials against the original happy ending of his *Romeo and Juliet* score from 1935 forced Prokofiev to revert back to Shakespeare's tragic version by the time it was fully staged in 1940 (Homans 2010: 358–9). Nevertheless, each individual performance is also part of multiple larger frameworks, each of which can be considered its own serial continuum. These frameworks encompass not only the run of an individual production over a number of seasons and at a particular institution – which can amount to several hundred performances, as in the case of Kenneth MacMillan's *Romeo and Juliet* which premiered in 1965 at the Royal Ballet – but also the broader reception history of a specific ballet at large. In the unparalleled case of *Romeo and Juliet*, that reception history includes more than 150 choreographic adaptations as of 2019 (Brissenden 2019: ix). Understanding these frameworks as serial constructs helps us grasp the dynamics of preservation and innovation that are at play not just in any kind of choreographic performance or in the ways that one adaptation of the same piece may influence another, but especially in choreographic adaptations of iconic literary works at large, all of which bring with them their own significant serial baggage of adaptational afterlives.

In the repertoire of most ballet companies, productions of (neo) classical story ballets like *Swan Lake*, *Giselle* or *Romeo and Juliet*

have been returning to the programmes season after season for years on end, fulfilling their canonical functions as audience favourites and supposedly timeless classics and thereby ensuring satisfying box office receipts.[4] In the sense that the ballet canon forms part of the infrastructure of the ballet world at large, these pieces have over time become indelible pillars, without which said infrastructure might ultimately collapse. From a serial perspective, then, these masterpieces on first glance seem to be defined by repetitiveness, rather than variation, seeking to fulfil expectations instead of subverting and potentially disappointing them. This serial demand for consistency particularly concerns the expectations of more conservative audiences and private donors, whose contributions often make up substantial budget parts even of esteemed houses like the Metropolitan Opera, coupling artistic risks with financial stakes. Yet, it is this apparent emphasis on repetition and sameness which makes it so noteworthy and striking when changes do occur within the machinery of classical ballet and thereby cause that seemingly smooth machinery to glitch. When Misty Copeland, for example, was promoted to principal dancer at the American Ballet Theatre in June 2015, she simultaneously became the first African-American woman to achieve that feat in the then seventy-five-year history of the prestigious company. The same month of her promotion, Copeland had already made history by debuting in the lead roles of both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Swan Lake*, two of the most coveted female roles in the ballet canon. More so than just an individual accomplishment, however, Copeland's promotion and casting laid bare the racially oppressive infrastructures and aesthetics within the ballet world that have gone unmarked and unquestioned for a long time. As the recent controversy surrounding John Neumeier's *Othello* at the Royal Danish Ballet has shown, the balletic reckoning with sensitive social issues such as race as well as the colonial legacy of the art form at large is far from over.[5] Seriality, or in these cases, serial deviations from long-held unreflective repetition, offers the potential for artistic self-examination, not just in the context of serial storytelling on TV but also in the uniquely repetitive world of ballet.

Yet, as Sulimma has demonstrated, the concept of seriality not only bears significant analytical affordances towards forms of serial storytelling, but also to discussions of gender and sexuality, especially in the wake of Judith Butler's post-structuralist critique

of gender identity as a ceaseless series of repetitive performative acts:

> on the one hand, seriality refers to the potentials of naturalising gendered conventions through their repetitions, making gender performances invisible as norms. On the other, seriality also has the potential to refer back consciously, to deviate, and to make this deviation comprehensible as such – because serial repetitions have created a repertoire through which gender has become accountable. (2020: 18)

Just as serial storytelling is defined by a constant '"feedback loop" between reception, series, and production' (Sulimma 2020: 15), a serial understanding of gender highlights how each performative act has the potential to serve as a self-reflective commentary on its very discursive foundations. Approaching gender from a serial perspective does not just showcase how 'gender performances balance competing demands towards closure and continuity' (Sulimma 2020: 15); it allows to re-negotiate those competing demands in the first place. This is particularly the case for gender performances that deviate from the heteronormative mainstream. As Brian Glavey has observed in his study of queer ekphrasis, '[g]ay men and lesbians have long been subject to a homophobic association with imitation, treated as failed copies of the ideals of masculinity and femininity' (2015: 7). Arguably, this normatively oppressive demand to pass under a certain ideal affects trans and non-binary people even more strongly. At the same time, though, queer theorists like Eve Sedgwick have shown that the apparent need for certain social hierarchies – for example, the hierarchy between hetero- and homosexuality or, we may add, between original and copy – only brings to light the inherent instability and constructedness of those very hierarchies ([1990] 2008: 9–10; see also Butler 1990: 41).[6] In that sense, gender marks perhaps the most innate form of serial storytelling, namely the serial telling and retelling of the story of oneself and of the performative fluidity of one's own identity. Choreographic performance with its inherent equivocality of corporeal semiosis marks a particularly powerful mode of such self-narration, highlighting that '[b]odies never do one thing or mean one thing' (Croft 2017: 10) but instead always mean a multitude of things all at once.[7] Thinking questions of

gender and sexuality serially thus reinforces Judith Butler's claim that 'gay is to straight *not* as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy' (1990: 41, emphasis in the original), casting the very idea of originality into serious doubt.

This dismantling of originality arguably constitutes the strongest connecting tissue between the discourses on seriality and queerness. In a cultural context, acts of queer readings and queer reimaginings of seemingly heteronormative works, such as Millepied's *Romeo and Juliet*, do more than just offer a change of perspective or uncover hidden – or rather 'closeted' – codes and subtexts; in fact, they inscribe themselves into the canonical series of gendered iterations of a particular story and, in doing so, open up new, unforeseen pathways for the continuation of that series. These new serial pathways lead, among other things, to a re-evaluation of the much-contested concept of fidelity within adaptation studies. 'The value of fidelity', according to Pamela Demory, 'is rooted in deeply held cultural assumptions about the masculine/feminine gender roles and the "normality" of the heterosexual romance plot' (2019: 4), assumptions that queer studies have been trying to unsettle ever since their inception in the late 1980s and early 90s. At the same time, fidelity has been making somewhat of a 'comeback' in more recent adaptational criticism. Douglas Lanier, for example, has expressed 'the need for a more thoroughgoing, nuanced theorizing of fidelity as an aesthetic effect' and the necessity 'to reconceptualize fidelity as a non-prescriptive critical category' (2022: 50).

Seriality, I argue, holds the potential to reconceptualize fidelity in such a way that it allows us to challenge, rather than to perpetuate, the heterosexual romance plot that holds such a sway over texts like *Romeo and Juliet*. Fidelity and its 'relation of similarity to some quality of the source that the adaptation identifies as essentially or distinctively Shakespearean' (Lanier 2022: 50) become an adaptational playground for serial imaginings and for strategies of 'resisting normative ideologies and of revealing the fissures, absences or silences of canonical texts' (Demory 2019: 4) that define queer adaptations. Awareness of the original does not inhibit these adaptations but rather sheds light on what makes them truly innovative and original in their own right. In that sense, it is unsurprising that *Romeo and Juliet* has received far more choreographic adaptations than any other Shakespeare play. If familiarity with the source material, both on the side of production

and reception, enables more daring adaptations, then arguably few narratives enjoy a greater degree of transcultural familiarity than the tragic love story of Romeo and Juliet. The rest of this chapter therefore pursues one such possible pathway in Benjamin Millepied's balletic staging of *Romeo and Juliet* at La Seine Musicale and discusses to what extent the demonstrable self-awareness of its own seriality that the production exhibited offered an escape out of the 'ancient grudge' (*RJ* Prologue 3) of the iconic play and its overbearing reception history.

What's in a gender?

Benjamin Millepied's staging of *Romeo and Juliet* had been scheduled to open at Paris's La Seine Musicale in May 2020. Yet due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the premiere had to be postponed multiple times until it finally reached the stage in September 2022. The production featured dancers from Millepied's L.A. Dance Project, which he had founded and directed from 2011 to 2014, prior to his short-lived and controversial appointment as director of the Paris Opera Ballet from 2014 to 2016 (Sulcas 2016). Scaled down to fewer than eighty minutes, only sixteen dancers and a mostly bare stage, Millepied's return to Paris presented as much a cinematically abstract rendering of the 'the Shakespearean story ballet par excellence' (Campana 2016: 164) as it did a balletic one. During the majority of scenes, a Steadicam operator (Sebastien Marcovici) kept filming the performances of the dancers, which took place both on the stage and in the backstage area at La Seine Musicale. The Steadicam feed was simultaneously transmitted onto a massive screen, which covered almost the entire back-hand stage frame, making the cameraman as much a performer of the piece as the ensemble themselves. This blending of theatrical performance and cinematic technique informed the dramaturgy of Millepied's staging in a profound way. Entire scenes of the ballet, which had already been stripped down to its narrative essence and omitted several minor characters such as Paris or Juliet's father, took place completely offstage.[8] These scenes included such iconic moments as the balcony duet, the march of the knights, as well as portions of the fight scene between Romeo and Tybalt and the final tomb scene. Millepied also used static stage cameras to create other

perspectives not available to the frontal audience, for example by filming the performance momentarily from the flies of the stage above the dancers. Cinematic perspectives that are often used in theatre broadcasts and recordings, such as close-ups or wide shots, thus became part of the performance itself.

The effects of this use of onstage filming within the performance were manifold. On the one hand, inside the expansive auditorium of La Grande Seine, the largest venue at La Seine Musicale, which can accommodate several thousand people, the screen gave spectators a much larger and thus closer view of the dancers and their facial expressions than is usually the case in most ballet performances. The camera feed, as Adeline Chevrier-Bosseau has pointed out, produced an atmosphere of increased intimacy and even an 'impression of the audience's trespassing on a private moment between lovers' (2023: 105). At the same time, the live capture of offstage dancing also created a spatial distance between performers and spectators, subverting one of the conventional premises of theatre and performance studies, namely that 'the specific mediality of performance consists of the bodily co-presence of actors and spectators' (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 38). In actuality, the dancers may have only been a few meters away from the audience, but the massive screen brought forth a sense of spatial divide between the two factions, underlining that they were *not* physically co-present. That spatial divide further spoke to the interplay of spatial and affective proximity and distance that also informs Shakespeare's play (see Kellermann 2021: 22–65). It also reflected more recent practices in contemporary theatre, where cinematic techniques like onstage filming are increasingly employed to negotiate theatrical liveness and performative corporeality (see Sidiropoulou 2018). Erin Sullivan's observation that 'liveness as a temporal and spatial entity, and aliveness as an experiential and affective quality, have begun to uncouple' (2018: 62) thus not only applies to (live) theatre broadcasts, but to the productions themselves, too. Dutch director Ivo van Hove is especially known for reimagining canonical classics like Shakespeare as 'cold and spartan spaces where video screens replace naturalist set design, and camera operators regularly move among the performers' (Kunze 2022). Van Hove's use of onstage camera operators seems particularly anticipatory of Millepied's *Romeo and Juliet* in that regard: 'We watch the camera move into place and what we see on screen is a blend of theatre and film that

refuses to fully merge, that through its gaps and cuts and shifts reminds us of the realities of our lives' (Kunze 2022). In Millepied's production, these gaps and shifts remind us not only of our own lives as spectators – especially after two years of a pandemic marked by social distancing and digital communication (Chevrier-Bosseau 2023: 97) – but also of the characters' lives, most of all the affectively precarious lives of the protagonists. Like the trajectory of affective removal in Shakespeare's drama, their love assumes larger-than-life gestures in the magnifying projections of the screen while also taking place in secrecy and hiding, both from the other characters and the audience.

In addition to this interplay of spatial and affective proximity and distance, Millepied's use of live filming also created instances of visual seriality. At multiple points throughout the performance, the dancers on stage were filmed with the massive background screen that enlarged their movements being captured within the camera frame. This constellation effectively created infinite loops of images within images on the screen, a series of interlocked identical visuals that continued on into (in)visible infinitude. A striking example of this occurred early on in the piece when Romeo and Juliet met during the Capulet masquerade. As Romeo and Juliet encountered each other behind the main stage platform, the Steadicam operator filmed the two dancers and the screen behind them, inverting the relation between on and offstage and creating an endless loop of ever-shrinking Romeos and Juliets on the screen. What this creation of visual loops encapsulates is the idea that a story as iconic and well known as *Romeo and Juliet* has been and will always continue to be wrapped up in its own seemingly all-encompassing iconicity. The fatal meeting of the star-crossed lovers, for instance, with their hands touching to the conceit of saint and pilgrim in Shakespeare's text, has evolved into an image that has been engrained into our collective cultural imaginary through endless repetitions and variations – so much so that we can no longer approach this story *without* the formative lens of these serialized images. Millepied's staging thus exposes the extent to which *Romeo and Juliet* has become what Marvin Carlson calls a 'haunted text' – a form of ghosting that occurs when 'audiences . . . bring an acquaintance with this preexisting text with them to the theatre' (2001: 16). Arguably, few dramatic texts are more haunted than Shakespeare's, particularly *Romeo and Juliet*.[9] To go one step

further, in a non-verbal art form like ballet, which communicates through choreography, music and stage design rather than through spoken dialogue, the visual iconicity of a story like *Romeo and Juliet* exudes an even more haunting effect than in the highly verbal domain of early modern theatre.[10] Not only does the medial serialization of onstage filming turn the characters into '"ghosted" selves' (Sidiropoulou 2018) who – along with the spectators watching them – come face to face with their own essential repeatability. As such, the visual repeatability of the protagonists foregrounds the infinite adaptational repeatability of *Romeo and Juliet* as a Shakespearean story ballet more generally, a ballet so iconic that it might never shed its own state of hauntedness. By visualizing this haunting in its serial images, Millepied demonstrates that any exorcizing, or rather accommodating to, these visual and adaptational ghosts can only ever succeed at the serial intersection of repetition and variation.

Aside from the onstage camera work, Millepied's other great innovation to *Romeo and Juliet* as a canonical story ballet was to use two mixed-race heterosexual pairs and two mixed-race same-sex pairs – one of them male-male, the other female-female – for the title roles. Notably, the company deliberately withheld advance information from spectators on cast distributions. Instead, audiences at La Seine Musicale only found out which couple they would see perform upon entering the auditorium at the venue, producing a degree of suspense and unpredictability that lasted until shortly before the start of the performance. This suspense was furthered by the fact that Millepied's idiosyncratic casting of the title roles had been heavily promoted in the press prior to the opening in September 2022. The performance itself then began with the two leads standing in front of a black wall stage-left, while two other dancers wrote the names Romeo and Juliet above the heads of the leads, singling out the respective pair of star-crossed lovers and thus adding a new dimension to Juliet's famous quote, 'What's in a name' (*RJ* 2.2.43): in Millepied's *Romeo and Juliet*, one could have easily added gender and race to Juliet's exclamation and asked, 'What's in a gender?'. All lead couples, regardless of gender constellation, performed the exact same choreography. In Millepied's Verona, the genders of the star-crossed lovers apparently bore as little significance to the tragedy of the central love story as the lovers' randomized names bore to (anyone but) themselves.

On the one hand, this striving for gender and racial diversification and for normalizing queerness in the ballet world is to be applauded, especially considering 'ballet's sluggish progress when it comes to old-fashioned *pas de deux* protocols' and the sometimes frustrating insistence on the 'heterosexual duet as one of its most enduring aspects' (Fisher 2021: 337). Even though dance history has been subject to 'one of the most remarkably open closets of any profession' and has witnessed a variety of queer practitioners and queer aesthetics (Foster 2001: 199; see also Stoneley 2007 and Desmond 2001: 4), narrative ballets that explicitly focus on non-heteronormative love stories still remain rarities, overall. The same holds true for racial diversification of the ballet stage. Thus, 'the choice to be a sensual, even sexy, Black woman on the concert dance stage', such as Nayomi Van Brunt as Juliet falling in love with Daphne Fernberger as Romeo, marks a queer act not only because it depicts romantic desire between two racially diverse women but because it 'asks us to attend to the strictures in which we move and to claim public space for sexuality using the body' (Croft 2017: 16). The dancing body on the balletic stage is no longer taken for granted, but is made available for interrogation and reflection in all its facets, including its gender and ethnicity. On the other hand, though, the universalizing of gender and race in Millepied's piece also begs some theoretical questions about authorship and cultural specificity. In her review of the piece, Adeline Chevrier-Bosseau points out how the relative demureness of the all-female duets paled in comparison to the more passionate intensity of the all-male casts and how, despite diversifying the protagonists, Juliet's friends in all cast iterations remained female, 'impl[ying] a feminisation of the gay Juliet' (2023: 106n3).[11] In spite of the shared choreography, a certain affective imbalance between the gay and the lesbian couples did remain. These observations attest to a certain friction between Millepied's self-proclaimed agenda of diversifying and even universalizing the love story at the heart of *Romeo and Juliet* and his own innate perspective as a hetero cis man choreographing an all-female duet. Furthermore, this universalizing impetus arguably clashes with the attention that queer theorists have long since paid to queerness as a negative relationality towards normativity, rather than as an expressive affirmation of identity. According to David Halperin, '"Queer," then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative' (1995: 62; see also Sanchez 2019: 6),

defining itself by that which it is *not* rather than by what it is (see also Menon 2011: 7).

This tension between essentializing and subverting notions of identity pertains in particular to queer theorizations of romantic love. In rather serial terms, Laurent Berlant, for example, has stressed the inherently repetitive nature of modern conceptions of romantic love, suggesting that '[r]epetition and uniqueness are the antithetical qualities that make up the experience of love' (2001: 434). These repetitive qualities of romantic love have been formalized not only through conventional romance plots in literature and culture more generally, but also through ideologically oppressive social structures and institutions like marriage. Unsurprisingly then, activism that has fought for equal rights to queer people, such as the gay marriage movement, has often met scepticism from queer theorists who have criticized assimilationist strategies as the erasure rather than the foregrounding of queer difference. Halperin has thus called out universalizing stratagems such as 'love is love' as 'seemingly bland, inoffensive notion[s] with truly sinister, far-reaching implications' (2019: 397) that go against the emphasis on indefinability in large parts of queer theory. In spite of its admirable intentions, Millepied's *Romeo and Juliet* cannot be fully acquitted of such charges. In articulating a uniform choreography for all titular couples, regardless of the dancers' ethnicities and genders, Millepied may rightfully seek to elevate certain relations of desire that have hitherto been sidelined on the ballet stage. Yet in doing so, he also substantiates Berlant's claim that 'to be in a love plot is to be made particular and generic at the same time' (2001: 443). Without intention, Millepied highlights the generic ordinariness of each of his Romeos and Juliets and their imbalances rather than showcasing their individual uniqueness. Serializing the choreographic representation of love among the different gender constellations, his staging also risks eradicating any distinct differences and idiosyncrasies between the diverse pairs of star-crossed lovers.

To give credit to Millepied's premise, though, the serial tension between sameness and difference that his adaptation puts on display also lies at the heart of his Shakespearean source, especially in its concern with issues of desire and sexuality. In her seminal reading of *Romeo and Juliet*, Dympna Callaghan argues that the play laid the repetitive groundwork for an ideology of heterosexual

romantic love and has been used to perpetuate that very ideology ever since:

> The play's initial ideological project – the valorization of romantic love between the young couple – thus becomes consolidated and intensified with subsequent re-narrations. Indeed, the affective power of the story and of romantic love itself . . . occurs not in spite of its repetition but rather depends precisely on reiteration. (1994: 61)

Seriality, in Callaghan's view, has proven crucial in consolidating that ideology both within the play itself and throughout its reception history. Others, instead, have emphasized that the play's 'capacity for self-replication' (Callaghan 1994: 62), both intra- and extra-textually, also facilitates those very forms of desire that Callaghan reads as marginalized and oppressed by the play's heterosexual ideology of love. Jonathan Goldberg, in a similarly influential study, has claimed that 'the coupling of Romeo and Juliet is not a unique moment of heterosexual perfection and privacy but part of a series whose substitutions do not respect either the uniqueness of individuals or the boundaries of gender difference' (1994: 222). Carla Freccero has even identified a queer repudiation of reproductive futurism in the lover's suicides – a repudiation which, paradoxically, opens up a previously unimaginable future that is void of any deadly conflict between Capulets and Montagues (2011: 305–7). In her reading, the lovers' queer self-denial of the future becomes the foundation upon which the future of society that the lovers tragically abandoned is built. The continuance of one future rests on the queer forsaking of another, just as queer alteration in the form of the lovers is sacrificed for the sake of sustaining their families. Shakespeare's first and most famous tragedy of love is thus also a tragedy of seriality, something that Millepied clearly recognized and gave choreographic and theatrical shape to.

Consequently, then, at the end of that tragedy, continuation still prevails over alteration, even in Millepied's rendition of it. His ballet still concludes in a fairly conventional manner, with the lovers alone on stage and no cinematic replicas serving as their ghosts. As much as the performance tried to challenge the balletic tradition of *Romeo and Juliet*, its final moment seemed to repeat rather than renew the series of canonical adaptations into which

Millepied inscribed himself. In that sense, Millepied's production fell somewhat short of recognizing what Halperin calls the inherent queerness of love. This queerness stands apart from the genders and sexualities of two loving individuals and instead defines itself by its relationality towards society at large:

> The queerness of love . . . repositions it as something that belongs neither within the canon of norms nor within the canon of perversions, something that remains unassimilable to the standard romantic plot and the social institution of marriage even while proving irreducible to sexuality. (Halperin 2019: 419)[12]

The conclusion of Millepied's ballet still returned to the canonical norms of the ballet stage and the standard romantic plot. However, that struggle to break free from serial loops of aesthetic convention aptly reflects the dramatic struggle of Shakespeare's protagonists to break free from the serial loops of violence in which the lovers themselves and their families have been trapped since before the play even began. Fidelity, as seen above, entails an adaptation singling out 'some quality of the source . . . as essentially or distinctively Shakespearean' (Lanier 2022: 50). If anything, Millepied's balletic adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* singles out the seriality inhering to Shakespeare's play, with all its promises and disappointments, and brings it centre stage.

Conclusion: Formless forms

Placing the seriality in Millepied's balletic *Romeo and Juliet* in dialogue with the seriality in Shakespeare's dramatic *Romeo and Juliet*, it becomes obvious that the queer force in Millepied's adaptation resides less in the gendered implications of its diverse casting; instead, the production amounts to what Stephen Guy-Bray has recently called forms of queer representation in Shakespeare's works:

> My interest is in representation that is extra and excessive, that calls attention to itself, that impedes the smooth functioning of the narrative. These kinds of representations I call queer: they

> do not contribute to teleological narratives and they suggest that pleasure may be found in verbal display rather than in the relentless motion of the plot. (2021: 19)

Such queer representation does not pursue a trajectory towards any teleological goals or narrative progression but instead 'lingers over the process of representation and often fails to lead to anything' (Guy-Bray 2021: 7). Following this definition, Millepied's production, with its elaborately visual display, indeed presented the tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* in a distinctly queer way. He exposed the extent to which the romantic iconicity of the ballet is built upon a foundation of infinitely serial images. We may never reach the end of this serial loop of images or experience the iconic love story without any preconceived haunting images, just as in a Foucauldian sense Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet may never experience the utopian rose without its name as long as they remain trapped in the discursive confines of the signifier with its inescapable cycles of desire and violence (see Belsey 1993). As a tragedy of seriality, *Romeo and Juliet* highlights the poignant difficulty to break out of the compulsory loops of seriality, and as this contribution has shown, this tragedy plays out both within the story itself and throughout its larger adaptational afterlife, especially on the balletic stage. Still, the endlessness of those serial images also means that there is boundless potential for transforming these very images in return. Thus, when a female Romeo mourns over the dead body of a male Mercutio, the iconic resemblance to the more familiar constellation of a female Juliet mourning over a dead male Romeo at the end of the ballet indeed speaks to the queer circulation of transgressive desire even beyond the titular pairing, as pointed out by Goldberg.

From a queer perspective, therefore, seriality does not simply constitute a perpetuation of reproductive futurism along the lines of the antisocial thesis, just as queerness itself can be more than just an irrevocable rupture from reproductive futurism.[13] Instead, it can be a tool to negotiate between the various competing pulls that define queer experiences and queer desire, including the aforementioned simultaneity of being unique and generic within the romantic plot. After all, the question remaining, in Butler's terms, 'is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or, indeed, to repeat and . . . *to displace* the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself' (1990: 189, emphasis in the original). Nowhere

is this conflict between repetition and displacement more overt than in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Through serial means of repetition and variation, then, Millepied's balletic adaptation of the play lays bare the ideological constructedness of the most famous of all love stories and, in doing so, makes it available for more inclusive de- and re-constructions. These re-constructions might still be caught within the restrictive serial legacies that any balletic retelling of *Romeo and Juliet* must contend with. Yet, as Jennifer Fisher has suggested, 'it will always be possible to see Romeo partner another Romeo and, as a Juliet, still understand what love is' (2021: 338). Millepied's production takes a profound step in pushing these processes of seeing and understanding forward, creating a serial aesthetic to queer *Romeo and Juliet* and thereby showcasing the (queer) affordances of seriality to revitalize the relationship between Shakespearean drama and Shakespearean ballet. Berlant reminds us that 'form forces us to think about repetition' (2001: 433). This holds true especially for a play like *Romeo and Juliet* which dramatizes the vulnerable emergence of what Michel Foucault would call 'a relation that is still formless' (1997: 136; see also Halperin 2019: 405). For Shakespeare's star-crossed lovers, the repeatable patterns through which their relation can be formalized and serialized have yet to be invented, a process that will far outlast their own brief lives. The queer seriality of Millepied's ballet gives us an example of what these forms may look like.

Notes

1 According to dance historian Jennifer Homans, the five positions of the feet that were first codified by Pierre Beauchamps towards the end of the seventeenth century became 'the primary colors from which all other constructions in ballet arise' (2010: 23).

2 See for example Kellermann (2021) as well as the special issues of *Cahiers Élisabéthains* edited by Adeline Chevrier-Bosseau (2020), and *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, edited by Sabine Schülting (2021).

3 The description of Millepied's *Romeo and Juliet* in this paper is based upon Adeline Chevrier-Bosseau's review for *Cahiers Élisabéthains* (Chevrier-Bosseau 2023) as well as my own attendance of the performance on 24 September 2022 which starred the all-female lead

couple of Daphne Fernberger as Romeo and Nayomi Van Brunt as Juliet.

4 Neoclassical ballet refers to the emergent style of ballet in the twentieth century that built upon and expanded classical nineteenth-century technique outside of the context of story-driven ballet. This style, which eventually found its way onto the narrative stage, is visible in Millepied's work, too, through his stylistic indebtedness to choreographers like George Balanchine and Jerome Robbins (Chevrier-Bosseau 2023: 99).

5 In November 2022, the Royal Danish Ballet terminated their collaboration with Neumeier, the decade-long director of the Hamburg Ballet, over a conflict about Neumeier's adaptation of *Othello* (1985). Dancers in the Copenhagen-based company felt that a dream sequence which depicts Othello in dark blue colour eliciting animalistic noises was perpetuating racist stereotypes. When Neumeier refused to change the choreography, the Royal Danish Ballet decided – in apparent agreement with Neumeier – to replace *Othello* with Neumeier's adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1977). Yet the conflict between the company and the choreographer reignited during dress rehearsals for the revival of *Dream*, causing the long-standing collaboration to take an abrupt end (see Borchert 2022). In 2020, dancer Chloé Lopes Gomes similarly spoke up about racially discriminatory practices at the Berlin State Ballet, reigniting debates about racism in the ballet world (Sulcas 2021).

6 In the framework of Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*, this means that there can only be an outside-the-closet as long as there is also an inside-the-closet from which to differentiate it, thus stripping any sense of naturalness from the presumed standard of heterosexuality.

7 In the case of dance, the creation of these often-restrictive meanings does not begin on stage, but in training: 'When people assume, for instance, that men lift and women are lifted, they forget it is training, not genitalia, that creates physiques in all their strengths and weaknesses' (Croft 2017: 6).

8 Aside from Romeo and Juliet, the only other named characters in the programme were Tybalt (Vinicius Silva) and Mercutio (Peter Mazurowski), a tendency towards abstraction that can be seen in other contemporary adaptations of the play, too, such as Sasha Waltz's *Roméo et Juliette* at Opéra National de Paris (see Kellermann 2021: 115–75 and 187–94).

9 Similarly, *Hamlet*, according to Carlson, marks 'the most haunted of all Western dramas' (2001: 4).

10 Throughout its reception history, this visual iconicity has come to infuse at least parts of Shakespeare's text too. The fact that the encounter between Romeo and Juliet in act two scene two is commonly referred to as the balcony scene, even though the word balcony is never used once in the text, is a good example of this.

11 Indeed, according to Jane Desmond, 'the meanings of dancing male bodies, or of males who dance, are shaped by the history of theatrical dance as well as the positioning of theatrical dance as a predominately female, and feminizing, occupation and spectacle' (2001: 16).

12 This queer a-sociality aligns with my earlier account of amorous community in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (see Kellermann 2021: 22–65).

13 On the antisocial thesis and its relevance for queer theory, see the roundtable discussion by Caserio et al. (2006) in *PMLA*.

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III

Televising Shakespeare serially

Shakespeare and complex TV series

8

‘Is this the promised end?’

Afterwards, airflows and Shakespearean dissonant repetitions in HBO’s *Succession* (2018–23)

Stephen O’Neill

In the opening episode of its final season, *Succession* makes a serial return to its adaptational ur-text, Shakespeare’s *King Lear*. Logan Roy, sitting with his driver Colin in an NYC diner having abruptly left his own birthday party, ruminates on life: ‘Everything I try to do, people turn against me. Nothing tastes like it used to, does it? Nothing is the same as it was’ (*Succession* S04E01, 00:35). Colin is the Fool to Brian Cox’s Logan here, but he does not get to say very much and lacks the Fool’s licence to pierce his interlocutor’s self-regard with a ‘thou art nothing’ (*KL* 1.4.185). Logan’s ruminations continue:

> You think there’s anything after all this? Afterwards?
> Colin: I don’t know.

> Logan: I don't think so. I think this is it, right?
> Colin: Maybe. My dad is . . . is very religious.
> Logan: But – Yeah, but realistically though?
> Colin: I don't know.
> Logan: And that's it. We don't know. We can't know. But I've got my suspicions. I've got my fucking suspicions. (S04E01, 00:35–6)

This exchange, 35 minutes into episode one, establishes a foreboding sense of Logan's death that the show has teased its audience with since its opening season, and that comes abruptly in episode 3, thus killing off the show's linchpin. With characteristic expletives, Logan contemplates what might await. His language is self-distancing, with the generalizing 'We don't know. We can't know', and only becomes self-referential as he registers his suspicion. It is, alongside his outbursts against his children, his most Lear-like moment in the series, one that distils *King Lear*'s own exploration of eschatology (Kott 1964: 147). The scene expresses Logan's hubris as well as his tacit recognition of a loss of control. Where moments before he has asked Colin rhetorically, 'what are people?' (S04E01, 00:34), answering his own question by dismissing his fellow diners, 'I'm a hundred feet tall. These people are pygmies' (S04E01, 00:34), a belittling, bestial discourse that elsewhere in the series he applies to his own family, he now feels small. The show will repeat this Roy family fear of the uncontrollable again when Logan's daughter Shiv, says 'No, no, em, I can't have that' (S04E03, 00:24) in response to news of his death.

In the shock of human mortality that these characters suddenly come face to face with, *Succession* can be understood as adapting and compressing several scenes from *King Lear*. There is the blind Gloucester at Dover, wilfully leaping to his death but merely falling, who Edgar lets believe that the 'clearest gods, who made their honours / Of men's impossibilities, have preserved thee' (*KL* 4.6.72–4). There are Lear and Gloucester's own ruminations on life, leading to Lear's 'When we are born we cry that we are come / To this great stage of fools' (4.6.178–9). And there is Lear's pathetic hope at the end of the play as he holds Cordelia in his arms that breath might emanate from her lifeless body, 'a chance which does redeem all sorrows' (5.3.263). *Succession*'s Logan Roy is denied such a parting moment in which the human is temporarily

re-centred in a play that has so relentlessly thought about its undoing into an animal-like state and even a nothingness: 'Is man no more than this?' (3.4.101). Logan's death happens remotely, in a bathroom on his executive jet, his children receiving the news over the phone. Mark Mylod, who directed episode 3, remarks that showrunner Jesse Armstrong 'liked the idea of a kind of anti-Shakespearean death, the modern-day death, the death that many of us experience in families. That's by separation, is learned by email or phone call or text even' (2023). That the showrunners should refer to Shakespeare in relation to the show's final season brings *Succession* and its audience full circle in the serial repetition of a relation to Shakespeare. Armstrong's sales pitch to HBO executives of a '*Dallas* meets *Festen*' (qtd. in Davies 2021) suggests a combination of high-gloss American 1980s' serial drama with Thomas Vinterberg's film (1998) but *King Lear* and Shakespeare also emerge as reference points in the show's origin story. *Festen* itself employs *Hamlet* as a ghostly presence in its Dogme style film about a dysfunctional Danish family (Griggs 2009: 109–19). From the outset, the casting of Brian Cox created extra-diegetic associations with Shakespeare, considering Cox's performer identity as a Shakespearean actor, with roles that included Titus and Lear. Moreover, Cox himself, alongside the show runners, invited connections to be inferred, noting of Logan, '[t]he thing that's so hard for him is that, like Lear, he loves his children, and he would hope to see some of that love reciprocated, as opposed to them just seeing him as a chequebook' (qtd. in Kermode 2021).

I have deliberately focused in on what seems a condensed Shakespearean-like scene in the show's final season and the production context of Shakespearean comparisons as bookends that invite us to interpret the show's 'Shakespeareanisms' backwards, that is, to read serially. In thinking serially, this chapter asks: What types of Shakespeare emerge in *Succession*? To what extent are these reflective of contemporary media Shakespeares and even repetitions of these? Does *Succession* repeat with a difference, generating its own Shakespeare aesthetics via serial drama – taking its own writing and its audience beyond journalistic headlines claiming that it is just like a Shakespearean tragedy? Exploring such questions, I argue that *Succession* is not only a serial engagement with *King Lear* but a dissonant engagement with Shakespeare. *Succession* is serial Shakespeare in the most obvious sense of the

term through the 'revisitation of Shakespeare . . . as a resurfacing, a resuscitation . . . and a recasting' (Bronfen 2020: 198). The show returns to aspects of *King Lear* through a Shakespeare repetition compulsion, repeating and dispersing a set of connections to Shakespeare's works that it first invokes in its opening season. In what follows, I examine these connections to argue that the show presents a series of overlapping – and sometimes contradictory – interpretative approaches to Shakespeare as cipher, as ideology and value, and as ontology. I further suggest that as an example of complex TV, *Succession*'s Shakespeare hermeneutics extend beyond the show's broadcast contexts into online cultures in ways similar to contemporary Shakespeares, which are mediated through digital platforms. Connecting these hermeneutics, I argue that *Succession* adapts *King Lear* but also, as the show's seriality develops, resonates with recent critical understandings of *Lear* that find in that play's ontological uncertainties a crisis of the Anthropocene. If, as one of the show's directors and executive producers claims, 'it's a perfect show for right now' (McKay 2023), it may well be so because it explores endings – that of its protagonist, the show itself and its much-vaunted Shakespearean intertextuality – to leave audiences wondering 'Is this the promised end?' (*KL* 5.3.262).

The word 'succession' is, surprisingly, never used in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, but it is the story of Lear's dissolution of his kingdom and the ensuing battle between his offspring for power and control that forms a spectral and recurrent presence in HBO's show. Beyond the boardroom struggles, the title resonates with an emphasis in adaptation studies on the interrelation of adapted to adapting text: in TV trope terms, *Succession* is the 'spiritual successor' of *Lear*/Shakespeare that it repeats, but with a difference. Season 1 was received as a *King Lear* adaptation, with Christina Wald noting how it 'dramaturgically lingers on the starting point of Shakespeare's play' (2020: 86). Logan Roy is the hubristic white patriarch revisiting his planned divestment of authority and Lear's pelican daughters reimagined as the three sons and one daughter vying for daddy's attention as they each plot their ascent in the corporate world that the show positions as the epitome of white privilege even as it reveals its 'own gaps in racial awareness' through its predominantly white cast (Votava 2023: 433). Subsequent seasons dispersed the *Lear* plot in favour of a set of Shakespearean echoes, quotes and misquotes. Not only do the characters quote

and misquote Shakespeare, but they seem to operate within the parameters of a Shakespearean tragedy, albeit with the tragic ending and fall deferred again and again. The show has been '[r]eplaying the succession moment in varying constellations' that in turn backlight 'the serialised dramaturgy' of *King Lear* itself as a play that reads as 'a serial variation of [its] stunning opening scene' (Wald 2020: 93) and only departs from that repetition with the final season, and the death of the main protagonist Logan Roy. Yet, while the show's borrowings from Shakespeare have been well-documented in reviews and blogs, one might struggle to find a coherent or even purposeful deployment of Shakespeare and *King Lear* across this series. Rather, *Succession* is itself a serial negotiation of Shakespeare in which it exhibits a repetition compulsion, repeating Shakespeare references across seasons and even among characters.

The much-vaunted Shakespearean connotations elevate a TV show focused on the power play among a media mogul family out of the open secret of it being loosely based on Rupert Murdoch's NewsCorp. *Succession* does more than repeat Murdoch family/corporate dynamics but, as a serial drama with a range of cultural references that include Shakespeare, explores such dynamics with a difference. As such, if in reality Murdoch or a Murdoch type has not quoted Shakespeare in public, *Succession* imagines a scenario where such a corporate figure might do so: 'Eh, would you like to hear my favorite passage from Shakespeare?', asks Cox's Logan, 'Take the fucking money' (S02E05, 01:02). The quip 'invites the viewer to acknowledge the series' rewriting of *King Lear* while simultaneously invoking irreverence towards the high culture elitism represented by Shakespeare' (Greenhalgh 2022: 259). Subverting the pathos traditionally associated with Shakespearean verse and replacing it with an expletive, this media mogul who regards himself as a man 'more sinned against than sinning' (*KL* 3.2.58–9) is made to wear his Lear fabric lightly and ironically, especially considering Cox's extra-diegetic Shakespeare resonances. Like father, so too the son Roman, who similarly (mis)quotes Shakespeare. Genre and form are all: *Succession* satirizes the 1 per cent, with 'the satire's signature serious-silly dialogue' (Li 2021) peppered with Shakespeareanisms. The Roy family quotes Shakespeare as if they are out of a series of *New Yorker* cartoons, invoking and repeating Shakespearean references as a kind of familect. Armstrong and his writing team invite audiences to imagine that for the Roys, Shakespeare is a

polysemous, pliable signifier of an affect and a residue of a world before post-truth. That affect is broad, but it brings me to my first instance of how *Succession* selectively essentializes Shakespeare as fetishized cipher.

Shakespeare as cipher

As an adaptation, *Succession* can be examined through Douglas Lanier's theory of adapted Shakespeare and his reintroduction of a principle of fidelity. The latter has long been a controversial term in adaptation studies, with much work on adaptation concerned with the difference of adapting to adapted text, but Lanier invites the field to reconsider similarity, arguing that 'the privileging of differences between source and adaptation risks losing the dialectical interplay that is fundamental to adaptation as a mode' (2022: 50). More directly, Lanier asserts that 'Without some element or principle of fidelity at work, there can be no adaptation' (2022: 50). In contrast to Linda Hutcheon's theorization of adaptation as 'repetition with variation' (2013: 4), Lanier emphasizes resemblance:

> Fidelity always involves some element of selectivity – in the case of Shakespeare, fidelity to some quality of his language, some quality of the plots, the characters, the modes of characterization, the distinctive settings (balcony, graveyard), modes of address (soliloquy), motifs, characteristic metaphors, tone, evocation of the theatrical medium, social register, or something else – while at the same time adaptors discard or change what they regard as inessential in the source, what is peripheral, accidental, unimportant. Fidelity, then, is . . . a selective, strategic act, an implicit identification of the essential 'spirit' of the Shakespearean source. (2022: 50)

What does *Succession* identify as this spirit? The spectrum of selectivity Lanier imagines here is very generous, providing a capacious understanding of adaptation as fidelity. Applied to *Succession*, there is the opening season's aforementioned adapting of *Lear*, but also the later seasons where tonally Logan continues to sound Lear-like, his treatment of his children equal in disdain save for the sexism he directs at his would-be heir Shiv, and thematically

too, as the series continues to play out its father-sibling dynamic. In Season 3, Logan's health is an issue, with a UTI preventing his appearance before the shareholders at Waystar's AGM. Tom, nominated as Logan's handler, offers to guide him to the bathroom: 'You don't need me to hold the scepter?' (S03E05, 00:39). This corporeal vulnerability sets the scene for the children's escalating power play. 'Oh fuck, he's piss mad', comments Shiv (S03E05, 00:41). With sovereignty-redux, the adult children awkwardly laugh at Logan's predicament, but having received treatment, he is back to form, 'I'm trying to talk to Gerri about something important', he barks to Shiv, 'Stop buzzing in my fucking ear' (S03E05, 01:04). This is Lear's language selected and stripped of its image-making misogyny, as in his perversion of the lover's complaint when he claims how Goneril 'struck me with her tongue / Most serpent-like upon the very heart' (*KL* 2.2.349–50).

In part, then, the show's selective essentialization of Shakespeare, that is, the use and identification of something about *King Lear* and other texts, is attributable to a set of archetypes. Logan is the patriarch, his children and the women in his life cast into a gender-binary logic that, for example, applies to Gerri, the company's legal secretary. In Season 1, as Roman and Kendall prepare for the board's no confidence vote against Logan, Gerri suggests that they 'stoke the old resentments' (S01E06, 00:09) with Logan's estranged brother, Ewan, to ensure his yea vote. Roman's retort – 'Lady Macbeth. Getting your little fuckin' screwdriver in' (S01E06, 00:09) – is a recognizably modern post-language, post-poetry Shakespeare. The indexical citation works by analogy, renaming Gerri as the archetype of a threatening and disruptive femininity and reducing Shakespeare to character profile rather than any actual Shakespearean lines.

Succession's Shakespeare thus foregrounds not only how essentializing may be part of the adaptational process but also the risks inherent in transposing Lear's patriarchy – and indeed whiteness – into new storylines and settings. The third season, continuing the arc of early seasons with Kendall's intended usurpation of his father, finds him appropriating the #MeToo movement, just as he also appropriates markers of Black identity (Votava 2023: 434), with his media-ready slogan, 'Fuck the Patriarchy', in ways that can be interpreted as the show's negotiation of its source text's patriarchal unconscious. Some

of that negotiation may further reveal itself through tonal dissonance, with *The Atlantic* noting that 'Tonally . . . *Succession* often feels less like *King Lear* than *The Office* or *Veep*, with a crew of inept, profane, and poisonously ambitious individuals jostling to claw their way up the greasy pole of power' (Gilbert 2018). But *Succession* may be more akin to *Lear* than this allows; its tonal dissonance is another aspect of selective engagement with its source text, which itself oscillates from tragic pathos to clownish humour and the absurd, aspects that have made it modernity's go-to play, resonating with modern catastrophe. In a play that, Richard Ashby argues, 'insistently dramatizes "the disasters of the world" (1.1.175) and a vision of "dark and deadly" (5.3.288) devastation, with no sign that restitution is anywhere to be found on a blasted vista', its 'theatre of catastrophe' has become the story of modernity itself (2020: 3). *Succession* augments its tonal dissonance through Adam McKay's documentary aesthetic, with shaky cam and 'zoom pops', which Director of Photography Andrij Parekh describes as 'emotional exclamation points' that give the impression the camera is alive (McKay 2023). These effects structure viewers into a satiric, comedic relation to the characters. However, Nicholas Britell's score brings 'a sonorous, somber score . . . that counteracts the comedy' (Gilbert 2018). The atmosphere is quasi-comic and quasi-tragic – once again, we are proximate to the world of *King Lear* – and the show's Shakespeare is reflective of its wider aesthetic. As such, I would argue that viewers are structured into interpreting Shakespeare references as pointed and, in a sense, pointless.

Exemplary here is Roman's Hamletian analogy that occurs in the episode titled 'Hunting' (S02, E03), where Logan draws the assembled guests into a humiliating 'boar on the floor' game:

> Tabitha: So, what, you wanna use Naomi to broker a deal?
> Roman: Bingo. And I think it's a good plan. I land the deal,
> I kill Kendall. I'm crowned the king. Just like in Hamlet . . .
> If that happens in *Hamlet*. I don't care.
> Tabitha: Just like *Hamlet*. (S02E03, 00:15–16)

The failed Hamlet analogy involves a meme-like parody of accuracy and provenance. But, as with that media form, there is a seriousness and a ridiculousness in what is being said. Roman

invokes Shakespeare in much the same way as he is used in modern culture, as a pliable signifier: we have moved on from selective essentializing of Shakespeare to something more diffuse. This scene reverberates with a concern expressed in another context by Thomas Healy that '[i]f Shakespeare is credited with a capacity to play all roles, in another sense he is capable of playing no role but that of a fetishized cipher through which varying groups claim authenticity or legitimacy for particular social or cultural platforms' (1997: 214). Viewed in such terms, Roman is one of the 'participants in the Shakespeare enterprise' who reveal themselves as 'consumers of a cultural resource which offers the fantasy of cross-cultural participations or understandings' (Healy 1997: 213). Shakespeare is then a kind of metalanguage through which Roman and the other Roys verbalize their corporate-family dynamic. But for Roman, that metalanguage, while available to him, has no real veracity or depth, as suggested by his 'I don't care'. His nonchalance renders Shakespeare as mere cipher, or misfiring signifier, but even though Roman may not care about what happens in *Hamlet*, in terms of the show's extra-diegetic consciousness about its own Shakespearean-ness, it is as if he has somehow encountered the hermeneutics of Shakespeare's cultural currency. He is curiously fluent in Shakespeare as *not* Shakespeare, as floating signifier, as cipher. Of course, such moments of misidentification and the character's parodic use of a canonical text of Western literature work off an audience identification – that viewers get what Roman wilfully refuses to, or to care about. Recalling Roman's earlier *Macbeth* reference, which he has selected and essentialized as an archetypal femme fatale story, viewers might be prompted to think of it as a better source text for this moment where he thinks about overthrowing the presumptive heir. He repeats Shakespeare but with a difference, moving on to another play. Yet, the Hamlet analogy works too, inviting viewers to think of Kendall as Hamlet, and echoing his frustrations that 'he is too much . . . his father's son' (Edelman 2011: 166), weighed down as he is by paternal demands from beyond the grave.

In such intertextual moments, as adapted text reverberates with adapting text, I would argue that we see *Succession*'s adaptational process close-up: quotations come into the foreground to indexically suggest a serial repetition of Shakespearean themes so that, in addition to Hamlet's father–son dyad, additional potential

Shakespearean resonances and applications emerge. Austin Tichenor identifies the father–son pairing of King Henry IV and Hal, the latter found wanting, as the 'shadow of succession' (*1H4*, 3.2.99). Whereas in Shakespeare's '*Succession*-ish scene' the father still wants his son to prove capable – to succeed in both senses of the word – Logan demeans and infantilizes his adult son and children; he 'has no desire to relinquish his throne, and his children are so damaged and unworthy that it's genuinely hard to know who to root for' (Tichenor 2021). However, essentialist and masculinist, the Henrician code reveals that Logan has given his children nothing to subscribe to apart from his ego and money. Through these potential resonances, Shakespeare functions as a signifier of an affect – in this instance, generational angst, the father honoured but never fully exorcized. Like father, so the son: both simultaneously invoke and also refuse Shakespearean references. Even as Roman declares a refusal of Shakespeare, his parroting of Shakespeareanisms like his father discloses a serial repetition of the law of the father. The refusal to care about the plot of *Hamlet* reveals his failure to refuse the father.

Shakespeare as ideology and value

If *King Lear* strips its tragic hero bare – 'Off, off, you lendings: come, unbutton here' (*KL* 3.4.106–7) – *Succession* strips its patriarch rhetorically into a less than loquacious entity: often monosyllabic, his signature 'Fuck offfff' indicates a refusal to communicate or give anything more of himself to others and to the world than is absolutely necessary. Regan's assessment of her father – 'he hath ever but slenderly known himself' (1.1.294–5) – resonates with Logan's behaviour. In the episode 'Tern Haven' (S02E05), as the Roys gather for what proves a tense social gathering at the Pierce family retreat ahead of the planned takeover of Pierce Global Media, Logan chides his children to do better but fails himself when invited by Nan Pierce to give a speech: 'As my family knows only too well, I am, I ain't no master of the speechifying, but I would, uh I would just like to thank the Pierces for their hospitality. Um Like Romans amongst you Greeks, I'm sure you find us all rather, you know, big, vulgar, and boisterous. We, We appreciate your forbearance' (S02E05, 00:19). As the Roys struggle to compete with the more

cultured Pierces, the collapse of polite conversation revealing their different values and ideologies and prefiguring the collapse of the deal, it is unsurprising that the intra-diegetic Shakespeare quotation should come from the other side. Nan Pierce introduces grace before dinner, 'I'm afraid we've gone so Unitarian out here that we've given up on poor Jesus, and we have started worshipping Shakespeare!' (S02E5, 00:25), the source of the quotation pre-established for guests: 'The purest treasure mortal time affords / Is spotless reputation; that away, / Men are but gilded loam, or painted clay. / Mine honour is my life; both grow in one. / Take honour from me, and my life is done' (S02E05, 00:25–26). Naomi's proper Shakespearean quotation, which elicits from Kendall a 'So, uh, are you, like, a . . . an actress or like a poetess? Or something? Because that was pretty legit' (S02E05, 00:26), contrasts with Roman's Hamlet analogy two episodes before, indicating how *Succession* plays with 'Shakespearean comebacks' (Wald 2020: 14). Within this general Shakespearean return is a selection from *Richard II* and Mowbray's defence of his honour. Without it, he asserts, men are no more than the 'loam' (*R2*, 1.1.179) or 'silt' and clay from which, in biblical tradition, God created them. Naomi's use of these particular Shakespeare lines places her into the long history of common-placing: Charles Forker's Arden edition reminds us that Mowbray's lines are excerpted in *England's Parnassus: or The Choysest Flowers of Our Moderne Poets* (1600), under the heading 'Good name' (2005: 196). Commonplace books of this sort, as Ann Moss explains, provided 'a memory store of quotations, which could be activated to verbalize present experience in the language of familiar moral paradigms and with reference to a cultural history shared by the writer and reader' (1996: v). Naomi deploys Shakespeare to articulate Pierce family honour in contrast to the Roys' superficiality. As with the early modern practice of quotation, *Succession* regards Shakespeare as an intrinsically adaptive thing that is remade through its new container or medium. It explores binaries of old/new media, high/low culture and considers taste as something relative and pliable, the Pierce's Shakespeare embedded in literary culture while the Roys and indeed *Succession*'s own is more recognizable, I would argue, as derived from internet culture. In particular, Logan's departing line to his prospective business partner that I mentioned above, 'Would you like to hear my favorite passage from Shakespeare?' (S02E05, 00:62), is structured as a

meme, a vocalization of its top/bottom text format and comparable to meme culture's parodic Shakespearean mis- or unlikely quotation, as in the debunking of *Hamlet*'s quotability and association with aesthetic achievement: 'To Quote Hamlet, Act III, Scene III, line 87, "NO"' (Tenor 2017).

With Shakespeare quotes and analogies floating through characters and their speech acts almost involuntarily, *Succession* simultaneously reflects how the 'quotation of Shakespeare is (almost) everywhere' (Maxwell and Rumbold 2018: 2), but also the disaggregated and fragmented quality of this long established practice as it is experienced in popular media and digital cultures. The Shakespeare that *Succession* selectively essentializes is, therefore, no longer the kind of singular Shakespearean text that Lanier's fidelity principle would have us postulate but rather an assemblage – *Succession*'s showrunners create Shakespeare references and tropes out of the same mediascape available to the rest of us. The show does not ask its audience to imagine that Logan Roy quotes a digitally available and mixed Shakespeare, but, at the level of its richly allusive, citational world-building that satirizes a media mogul, it identifies and reflects how Shakespeare can no longer be understood simply as a set of plays, characters and genres but is rather a set of dynamic afterlives and mediatized texts that become entangled with the text they succeed.

Although the Shakespeare references are working at the level of the show world, they contribute to characterization. Through Logan's parodic, dismissive Shakespeare reference, *Succession* insinuates how far from the Lear archetype its serial repetition of Shakespeare's tragic hero he is; if Lear signals an archetype of a distinctly masculine hubris, the show reveals that Logan lacks the King's poetry and Mowbray's sense of honour. Logan's ideology is capitalism and the self, but he is also a contradiction, needing his family despite himself and thus, like Lear, even if he cannot recognize it or bother quoting Shakespeare. The interweaving of allusion and characterization that I am suggesting is at work here reveals how *Succession* draws on Shakespeare in a contradictory fashion, as a floating signifier and also some imagined repository of values and ideologies. These contradictions are less about anything intrinsic to Shakespeare than a function of how his works and words have long been appropriated and repurposed, revealing more about the user than the words themselves.

To extract such possibilities from a set of allusive lines in one episode is to behave as a viewer of what Jason Mittell terms 'complex TV' (2015: 1–7). *Succession* creates a network of meanings that viewers can identify and participate in; they have, for example, actively engaged in tracking the show's Shakespearean references. Complex TV involves a 'poetics of storytelling' (Mittell 2015: 7) that brings a defined televisual aesthetic based around narrative complexity rather than conventional episodic storytelling and uses serial plotting that facilitates an immersive viewer engagement in the fictional world presented. This type of viewing experience entails a production-reception contract whereby the viewer is primed to notice the Shakespeare cues and to see them as significant to plot and the larger world, or aesthetic and experience, of the show. As Wald explains, '[t]he fact that *Succession* was promoted as a version of *King Lear* even though the series itself never explicitly refers to the play encourages audiences to actively look out for reverberations of *King Lear* in the leadership crises of a twenty-first-century media conglomerate' (2020: 7). She further draws on Frank Kelleter's observation that complex TV prompts and develops viewer agency, with practices of hyperviewing and hyperwatching creating loop effects as the showrunners respond to fan and viewer reactions: 'Series observe their own effects', writes Kelleter, 'they watch their audiences watching them – and react accordingly' (qtd. in Wald 2020: 7).

If, as I am arguing, the Roys quote Shakespeare sporadically and parodically, moving from talking *New Yorker* cartoons to Shakespeare memes, then viewers and fans of the show have, in turn, demonstrated an active looking in reproducing through digital cultures something of the show's Shakespeare effects. A meme on Reddit explores this viewer engagement, triangulating show, viewer and Shakespeare by using a picture of Shiv, with the text 'Me: omg did you watch succession last night?', Steve from the US *Office* going, 'Also me: I'm telling you it was basically Shakes-', and Shakespeare, with the text, '-F-ck Off!' (ReadEnoch 2021; Figure 8.1).

In the playful meme world of repetition and parody, Shakespeare repudiates the similarity of *Succession* to his works while at the same time quoting Logan Roy. This kind of serial repetition brings us into the online reception contexts of *Succession* and the significance of online and fan platforms that offer episode summaries, reaction

FIGURE 8.1 Succession Shakespeare meme posted on Reddit Succession thread (2022). *Reproduced with permission of creator, ReadEnoch.*

videos, memes and fanfic about the show, including fan archives of the show's Shakespeare quotations on Reddit that provide useful research resources for exploring its Shakespearean intertexts. In turning to these reception contexts, I am influenced by Mittell's understanding of fans as 'participatory television viewers' (2015: 8), as well as Michael Newman's argument about GIFS as modes of 'vernacular criticism', where online creators 'captur[e] and recycle[e] favourite moments that audiences love or worship, or that express a particular feeling or experience' (2016). Through these practices of selection and curation, fans exhibit habits associated with scholarly communities given their identification of shared interests and their dedication 'to the analysis, critique, and appreciation of media' (Newman 2016). In this way, complex TV is not a bounded text but 'is suffused within and constituted by an intertextual web that pushes textual boundaries outward, blurring the experiential borders between watching a program and engaging with its paratexts' (Mittell 2015: 7). *Succession*'s

hermeneutics thus extend beyond the show's broadcast contexts into online cultures in ways similar to contemporary Shakespeares, which are also mediated through digital that dominate the modern mediascape.

Among *Succession*'s paratexts are memes and GIFs that reframe Shakespeare's plays and their archetypal characters through the lens of contemporary intersectional politics. For example, the meme *omfg hamlet* (Pinterest. n.d.) adapts Sir John Everett Millais's *Ophelia* (1852) in ways that, I would argue, resonate with the discourses of *Succession*. The overlay of lower-case text 'omfg' onto this iconic pre-Raphaelite Ophelia in repose brings in the irony of urban slang, with the abbreviated version of 'oh my fucking god' (Jones 2002) inviting the viewer to imagine this meme as Ophelia's speech act. As her sardonic response to Hamlet's verbosity, the meme prioritizes Ophelia's emotions and state of being in a play so relentlessly about his. But it also reaches beyond its immediate Shakespeare source text as a form of 'feminist digilantism' (Jane 2016), that is digital texts that address gendered cyber-hate. This Ophelia entails a rejection of online gendered harassment and challenges gendered humour and essentializing tropes about women and femininity in memes themselves (Drakett et al. 2018). *Hamlet*'s legacies are similarly debunked in a GIF featuring Laurence Olivier in Yorick pose, skull to his face, with all-cap text reading, 'LETS TALK ABOUT ME' (Stewart 2016). Text and image interact to offer a critique of a traditional Shakespeare associated with white cultural privilege. While *Succession* may appear uninterested in critiquing the forms of patriarchy Shakespeare-as-tradition facilitates, we can look again and notice how the language and visual codes of these digital texts are that of *Succession* too. It repeats a meme aesthetic and attitude. As such, while Shiv, for instance, does not bother quoting Shakespeare as her father and brother Roman do, or rather fail to do, she shares a symbolic affinity with the memetic-Ophelia's rebuttal of patriarchy. However, while the character's Shakespearean silence itself suggests a rejection of the Shakespearean archetypes the men around her try – and often fail – to invoke, ultimately the season finale casts her as frustrated Lady Macbeth type who accepts patriarchal logics.

Shakespeare as ontology

What the memes and *Succession* reveal is how adaptations can reinscribe and also deconstruct the ideological biases of Shakespearean drama. *Succession* invokes white, cis male (Shakespearean) fathers with the potential to critique them but finds that it cannot escape this mode of (Shakespearean) masculinity: the would-be successor will turn out to be more of the same. Kendall's Season 3 mantra 'Fuck the Patriarchy' is, as noted earlier, a cynical appropriation of a term and movement, a symptom of his and other characters' relation to language that initially sets them apart from *King Lear*, where Lear, Gloucester and Edgar especially use language as if it is the human's final distinguishing feature. The turn to idiomatic and aphoristic expressions suggests survival mode in an increasingly chaotic world, with characters making recourse to the familiar as if accessing some older version of themselves or of the world (Dionne 2016: 77–8). The Roys' vicious, familect one-liners, among the show's major audience pleasures, function in an analogous way: however paradoxically they dismiss language – 'words are just, what, nothing, complicated airflow' as Kendall puts it (S01E02, 00:14) – they cling on to it. Even as they espouse an arbitrary relation of signifier and signified, the Roys share Lear's hubris but appear to lack his recognition. Kendall later declares, 'We're at the end of a long American century' (S03E02, 00:34), announcing the death of the very business models he wants to rule, a pronouncement all the more hollow for its neglect of the bigger picture, just as his mention of 'airflow' is not just a figure of speech but a meteorological and biological condition. Here too, *Succession* may approach Shakespeare as an access mode into questions of ontology, and of the human. Can we see in Kendall's 'airflow' a tacit recognition of being part of an ecosystem? Lear's exposure to the harshest of airflows, the storm Shakespeare places at the centre of his play, finds him throwing words at the elements, battling the 'all-shaking thunder' that might 'Strike flat the thick rotundity o'theworld' (*KL* 3.2.7). He undergoes what Karen Raber, borrowing a term from Timothy Morton's object-oriented ontology, describes as a 'being-quake, a fundamental recalibration of his sensory and intellectual existence' (2018: 40), whereby he is confronted with the story of the earth and its agency.

If the Roys, by contrast, cling to a state of denial, *Succession* may well be the show for an end of times and use its serial repetition of Shakespeare and Lear to address the Anthropocene and climate emergency. In the serial drama's fetishization of one-percenters, in which globalized TV audiences watch the Roy's corporate-familial machinations, *Succession* structures its viewers as voyeurs of excess, as this dramatic satire has its morally redundant characters serially outdo each other in 'prophetic profanities' in a *mise-en-scène* marked by designer clothes and stunning locations from Manhattan to the Amalfi coast. It is possible to discern in all of this a critique of capitalism, or more precisely, the Capitalocene, and its logic of extraction and consumption that has accelerated humanity's endangerment of the planet. Climate change as subject matter is relegated to the show's subplot of Cousin Greg being disinherited by his Uncle Ewan, who decides to give his money to Greenpeace (S03E05) and in an earlier season has condemned his brother as worse than Hitler in terms of lives lost for his support of climate emergency deniers (S02E08). However, a persuasive argument that *Succession* is about climate change is advanced in a fan video (SkipIntro 2021) that identifies the show's recurring emphasis on Logan's corporeal vulnerability as an allegory of capitalism's great reckoning in climate change. Indeed, the corporate and the corporeal map onto each other as signals of decline, from pronouncements of Waystar's business model in Season 3 with Logan on the cusp of selling the business to bodily damage (Kendall's addiction) and disease (Greg's toenail fungus). The show's 'insistent physicality' (Garber 2019) around bodies suggests an end of times for the Roys – and humanity – as something in free fall into another state. Characters speak of family members as human animals in a combination of insult and complement (Garber 2019; Wald 2020: 113), but such rhetorical bestiality is visualized through images of waste and dead animals. In the Season 2 episode 'Hunting', Logan presides over a humiliating game of 'boar on the floor', where the animal is 'nature and food and sport all at the same time – game, in every sense' (Garber 2019) for an iteration of toxic masculinity that the show satirizes. A few episodes later, Tom engages in similar humiliation tactics, using his employee Jonah as a human footstool, apparently due to a bet the latter lost, and inviting Greg to avail of the 'human furniture' (S02E4, 00:17). On all fours, human bipedalism transformed into quadrupedalism, this man becomes Tom and Greg's 'bare fork'd

animal' and undergoes a type of symbolic castration that Tom later associates Greg with (S03E5, 00:38) as he queers his colleague in the interests of his own performative masculinity (Beattie 2023: 70–2). These humans, the show suggests, may deserve to come to an end more than the wild boar they kill for their sport.

Viewed through the lens of adaptation and of the selective essentializing of the source text, such species imagery are *King Lear* tropes that, through this intertext, signal the show's assertion that the seemingly inviolable Logan Roy will turn to dust. The game is up for this old man, Anthropos; he just has not realized it yet. 'Is man no more than this?' (*KL* 3.4.101) asks Lear, in what is arguably the play's most humanist, anthropocentric moment and also its undoing, as the character comes to identify troubling proximities between the human and other life forms. As scholars brilliantly help us to unlock the play's posthumanist and ecocritical potentiality, *King Lear* increasingly reads as a narrative about the Anthropocene, its weather matters asserting their importance alongside, not figurative background to, the human drama. 'For all Lear's howling at the storm', Raber reminds us, 'it neither advances nor retreats because of him, and it does not acknowledge his vocalizations' (2018: 50). *King Lear* thus becomes a story about Anthropos in decline and a recognition of the more-than-human through nature's agency, an epistemological shift that unfolds through the play's tragic arc to imagine a new ontology of the human.

This interpretation of *King Lear* brings to the character of Logan Roy a subtextual critique of anthropocentrism. But, in the context of earth-shattering reckoning of climate crisis, the ultimate target of *Succession*'s satire may not be the 1 per cent, but the show's audience and the bourgeois complacency of HBO's complex TV that reveals how our engagement with the world is largely confined within an acceptance of late capitalism. As Bruno Latour argues, 'It is up to us to change our ways of changing' (2012: 145). *King Lear*, in contrast, identifying capitalism's emergence and its displacement of feudalism, intuits this crisis effectively: system collapse and how one might go on, observing and obeying the 'weight of this sad time' (*KL* 5.3.322), are the play's epistemological and ontological revelations. Noting this imperative in the play and the historical forces the drama encodes is thus part of what Daniel Vitkus argues is a scholarly 'ethical mandate' to apply 'expertise and knowledge of texts and histories in a way that reveals and relies on a long-term

historical narrative, the tale of how capitalism arose and became a powerful force that changed human society and sacrificed the ecological balance for the sake of profit and the interests of the 1 percent' (2019: 179). While *Succession*'s use of Shakespeare is not coherent and therefore cannot be said to embrace this ecocritical *King Lear* that I have been briefly sketching, an awareness nonetheless of the play's capacity to critique 'the superflux' (*KL* 3.4.35) and to unfold nature's animism is available background to the show's satire.

Indeed, something of this critique may already be happening on a micro-level: the costume detail of Logan's cardigans, him being buttoned up, indexically pointing to Lear's unbuttoning – 'Come, unbutton here' (*KL* 3.4.107) – in the storm scene, and his dying lines, 'Pray you, undo this button' (*KL* 5.3.110). An object spanning times, connecting adapting and adapted text, telling a story of Lear and perhaps of Logan Roy too, in the button we can locate *Succession*'s selective and contradictory essentializing of its spiritual precursor. Coming after *King Lear*, the show is both a continuation of his story as one of privilege with the possibility of posthuman awakening – to such an epistemological and ontological reorienting Logan Roy is likely to say 'Fuck offffff' – and also its serial repetition, holding over the character the threat of his undoing into the grave that the show's final season delivers on. But even with the death of the patriarch, *Succession* repeats its own Shakespearean repetitions, inviting audiences to interpret Tom's ascent to Waystar CEO, with wife Shiv now supporting him, as the Macbeths (S04E10). In this move, *Succession* disperses the potential for more deep-seated and consistent engagement with *King Lear* to ultimately reveal that it never really knows what to do with all those Shakespearean signifiers – they may have been mere 'airflow'.

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9

The poacher poached, or a serial repurposing of the bard in *Shakespeare & Hathaway: Private Investigators*

Kinga Földváry

Contemporary serial television uses a variety of strategies when including Shakespearean elements in its plot or character design, and even the seemingly straightforward act of embedding Shakespearean text in a television script may take countless forms. Some shows use direct quotations in order to identify their connection to a source text; others insert textual fragments in their script without any apparent relation to the new plot, and most often they do so without even an attempt at recreating the source text's interpretive context, the words' original meaning or the play's structure in any consistent manner. While several complex television series use such references with the intention of gaining prestige by association with canonical literary texts and their cultural capital, it is more typical for the Shakespearean inspiration to appear as no more than a starting point, an exposition with an iconic group of characters and a conflict – ambitious leader aiming for a higher position assisted

by his ruthless wife or ageing patriarch sharing his empire among his contentious offspring – but the subsequent developments of the series have more to do with the new setting than the old dramatic text. This type of fragmented, seemingly superficial, often not even explicit engagement with Shakespeare has been at the forefront of adaptation studies in recent years (see e.g. Desmet, Loper and Casey 2017; Fazel and Geddes 2017; Mallin 2019; Henderson and O'Neill 2022). The critical attention afforded to works that may have fallen below the radar in earlier decades has clearly shaped our understanding of what does and does not constitute Shakespeare in contemporary culture.

The crosspollination of the serial form, the flagship format of contemporary visual culture, with Shakespearean content keeps producing new offspring, among them a British comedy crime series, broadcast on BBC One under the title *Shakespeare & Hathaway: Private Investigators* (since 2018–, created by Paul Matthew Thompson and Jude Tindall), advertised with the tagline 'Much ado about murder'. The series mixes a wide range of strategies, from easily recognizable visual and verbal clues to more subtle references and broad critical comments on the state of the Shakespeare phenomenon, and I believe it is precisely this mixed method that makes the series characteristic of the contemporary mediascape and therefore worthy of our attention. The dominant genre framework of the series is the small-town murder mystery, and the setting of Stratford-upon-Avon is granted the role of key space in the narrative, functioning as a *lieu de mémoire*, a place 'where memory crystallizes and secretes itself' (Nora 1989: 7). What is being remembered, however, is not so much the Shakespearean text as an earlier era of Shakespeare's appreciation that may or may not have been a true golden age. The overall concept of the series is not entirely innovative, yet I believe it can serve as a useful – not to mention entertaining – reminder of cultural practices, both Shakespearean and contemporary, testifying to the productivity of the serial format and the enduring, though fast-changing, attraction offered by the Shakespeare cult.

Lisa Hopkins points out in her monograph that 'Shakespeare is a pervasive presence in detective fiction' (2016: 1), and that some authors 'and detective series show a sustained pattern of Shakespearean allusion, which may come from a wide range of plays' (2016: 2), a strategy similar to the one employed by *Shakespeare &*

Hathaway. She also presents an impressive array of examples from fiction and even from television series, including *Inspector Morse* and its spin-offs *Lewis* and *Endeavour* (2016: 5), a franchise whose Shakespearean connections are also analysed by Sarah Olive (2013). In fact, as the detective's sidekick in *Lewis* is called Sergeant Hathaway, *Shakespeare & Hathaway* may also represent a nod to the successful ITV series by naming the male protagonist, a former police officer after Shakespeare's wife and even partnering him with a female Shakespeare. Nonetheless, as I intend to point out in what follows, *Shakespeare & Hathaway* does not only use Shakespearean allusions for characterization, or for accruing cultural capital through such references. The quotations and diverse allusions serve just as much the purpose of offering the viewer a challenge, both of recognizing the presence of intertextuality and of its absence in the setting of a semi-fictional contemporary Stratford-upon-Avon. Yet these are more than the 'incidental associations' defined by Olive as references to Shakespeare that are not central to the narratives of the television episodes, let alone the complete series (2013). Here the complex network of allusions ends up creating a sense of nostalgia for a truly Shakespearean past that is now lost, and invoking an imaginary community of like-minded viewers intent on preserving the cultural heritage of a golden age.

While *Shakespeare & Hathaway* cannot be classified as a complex television series, its multifaceted serial engagements with the Shakespearean oeuvre, together with its creative combination of early modern and contemporary texts, genres and adaptive practices, make it a characteristic example of contemporary serial television's attitude to repurposing Shakespeare. At the same time, these practices also position the series within contemporary 'cultures of commemoration', defined by Ton Hoenselaars and Clara Calvo as 'a series of more or less conscious or active attempts to rehearse Shakespeare in the present, as well as efforts to guarantee the remembrance of Shakespearean things past and present in the future' (2010: 1). In this sense, seriality is a key: even though the structure is episodic, the regular revisiting of the Shakespearean elements is what offers the viewer the pleasure of familiarity, a pleasure that audiences seem to experience even when confronted by the same narrative over and over again. This is what Anne Ubersfeld describes as a '[p]leasure of the repetition of well-known stories, similar to the pleasure experienced by a child who, for the twentieth time,

asks for a story that he knows by heart but whose most minute details must be respected' (1982: 128). Particularly when it comes to a conservative agenda in terms of cultural politics, it is easy to see the connection between the pleasure of repetition and the desire for a reassurance of the continued existence of certain cultural values one feels endangered. Serial repetition here has a reassuring quality, in particular when the contexts of serial activation are felt to be changing; therefore, even though an exact repetition may be wished for, each serial reactivation also involves variation, as it happens in altered circumstances.

Serial adaptations of Shakespeare

In a sense, every single series based on adapted source materials is engaged in a dual form of seriality, as every adaptation is by its very nature always already a continuation. Even if it is a standalone, rather than a serial adaptation, it starts an – albeit very short – series, following something that came before it. This secondary nature in itself suggests that any and every adaptation acknowledges by its very existence the possibility of a continuation, an addition of another, subsequent interpretation to any narrative. That is why it is no surprise that plenty of adapted narratives display an explicit sense of metafictionality, a self-conscious awareness that their own existence is proof of their being a shadow of, and on the way to becoming overshadowed by, something else. This self-referentiality often takes the form of an emphasis on the series' embeddedness in literary and/or popular culture, as these cultural products are associated through a variety of networks with other works, through shared themes, genres or even performers.

Serial television thrives on adapted scripts, and many complex television series rely on Shakespearean drama for their inspiration (for a more in-depth discussion, see e.g. Bronfen 2020, O'Neill 2021, Wald 2020, Wilson 2021). The strategy followed by the majority of contemporary adaptations of classical texts into complex television series is to maintain a very loose connection to their source text (*House of Cards* making references to *Macbeth*, *Sons of Anarchy* working with a premise reminiscent of *Hamlet*, *Boss* or *Succession* replaying a scenario inspired by *King Lear* and so on). What is more, these series tend to rely on visual rather than textual echoes

for identification, particularly in their paratextual material, an example followed by *Shakespeare & Hathaway* as well. Just as the poster of *House of Cards* echoes *Macbeth*, with protagonist Frank Underwood holding on to his throne-like seat with bloody hands, the poster for the third season of *Shakespeare & Hathaway* uses an equally obvious visual clue, with detective Frank Hathaway looking intently at a skull he is holding in his hand. But while the above-mentioned complex TV series tend to leave their Shakespearean origins behind or acknowledge them only in subtle metaphorical references, *Shakespeare & Hathaway* chooses the opposite route, and overwhelms the discerning viewer with references to a variety of works from the Shakespearean oeuvre. These references are, however, turned into occasions for comic relief when it becomes apparent that hardly any character recognizes them – a sharp contrast with the setting which reminds the viewer of the endemic presence of Shakespeare, even if in a commercialized form, catering to the tourist industry. This failure of (most) characters to recognize their cultural heritage in turn imbues the series with a sense of nostalgia for the lost golden age of a good old English cultural hegemony, and the intended viewer (predominantly conservative retirees watching daytime broadcast television) may recognize the critical edge behind the entertainment.

In many ways, of course, *Shakespeare & Hathaway* may be the odd one out in this section of the collection, as it is not an example of complex television *per se*, at least not in the sense of a serial narrative displaying 'complex and innovative storytelling' or 'cinematic' qualities (Mittell 2015: 2). In this quirky comic series, we cannot find experimental narration techniques, and neither the method of storytelling nor the series' overall attitude towards its Shakespearean core show any noticeable variation over the course of the four seasons. But the episodic series, characteristic of daytime broadcast television, combined with the sustained allusions to a canonical author and presented in a setting that invites nostalgia for an earlier time of British cultural hegemony, has proved to be a surprisingly successful format both at home and abroad. Although the episodic format typical of crime series is much looser than the narrative structures of complex TV, television studies emphasize that even in the digital era, 'the social structures and needs to which broadcasting as a social and cultural form has been tied' continue to play a significant role (Gripsrud 2004: 211). As Jostein

Gripsrud argues, 'broadcast TV and the temporal structures of everyday life are intertwined' (2004: 216), and particularly for the demographic that is the target audience of public service daytime broadcast television, loyalty to a favoured programme, viewed at the regular, scheduled time, is still the norm. At the same time, it is important to observe that the series' availability on BBC iPlayer and BritBox, besides international streaming platforms including Amazon, Google Play, AppleTV and more, allows the series to reach considerable international audiences who can watch the series via on-demand streaming services. This in turn means that the consumption patterns may not be as significantly different from complex television or made-for-streaming shows as its original medium would imply.

Textual clues: Namedropping and repurposed quotes

The comic premise of the show is clear right from the start, already in the title, which juxtaposes the most famous names in English literary history with the down-to-earth occupation of the flatfooted sleuth. An important source of comic tension throughout the series is the absence of any justification for the use of these names, as there is no connection whatsoever established between the titular characters and the early modern playwright or his wife. The series' protagonists are disgraced cop turned private detective Frank Hathaway, paired up with Luella Shakespeare, former hairdresser, who joins Frank's small and financially challenged PI agency in the first episode after her wedding fiasco. They are assisted in their endeavours by Sebastian Brudenell, receptionist and general dogsbody. Trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art but currently unemployed as actor, his acting skills come in handy when an undercover operation is called for. As typical of crime series, each and every episode deals with a single crime investigation, cases often starting as private requests for surveillance or background checks, but invariably turning into murder investigations, which are tidily resolved by the end. Equally unsurprising in the genre is the PIs' constant rivalry with local police – aptly called Arden Constabulary – represented by DI Christina Marlowe in the first

two seasons, replaced by arrogant but hapless DS James Keeler, assisted by PC Viola Deacon in the third and fourth.

The Shakespearean element in the series is thus partly manifested in names of characters, venues and enterprises; as the above short sample indicates, certain character pairings are meant to remind the viewer of the most obvious Shakespeare-related trivia. Shakespeare and Hathaway refer to the author's biography; Marlowe's rival presence reminds the viewer of the early modern theatrical context, while Sebastian and Viola call to mind Shakespeare's dramatic characters, particularly the recurring themes of disguise and unrequited love. An unfailing Shakespearean element is the title of each episode – using quotations for titles is not uncommon in contemporary series inspired by Shakespeare's work (for a more detailed discussion of the textual fragments used in *Star-Crossed*, see Földváry 2016). Yet, as it is equally typical of many Shakespeare-inspired series, these episode titles have little (or nothing) to do with the plot of the source texts, beyond a literal interpretation of some of the words picked out for a contemporary meaning. Besides characters' names and episode titles, the crime plots are also inspired by Shakespearean dramas, although with varying degrees of fidelity to and consequent recognizability of their source texts – gender-swapping is not uncommon, as exemplified by the protagonists' names, and most episodes pick and choose from several plays rather than follow the plot of a single drama. Nonetheless, these sustained allusions and quotations are more than 'incidental allusions' (Olive 2013), and the referential network they create is very much in line with the BBC's entertaining mission, responsible for the creation of 'a body of programs where the Shakespeare presence was always supposed to be part of the fun', but where 'aspiration and derision, appreciation and assumptions of incomprehension alternate . . . in bewildering succession' (Greenhalgh 2007: 665).

For instance, in S02E07 ('Nothing will come of nothing'), there is a reference to a pound of flesh – and there is even a bloody heart (of a pig) involved – but apart from a character called Lorenzo and the theme of (gambling) debt, the episode has little to do with *The Merchant of Venice* and even less with *King Lear*. Likewise, in S02E09 ('The Envious Court'), the titular quotation is used for the simple reference to a tennis court where the crime is committed, but no exiled second court is providing a safe haven for anyone. The episode's title and several characters' names (Frederick Greenwood,

with a daughter called Celia Greenwood, in rivalry with Rose Lin for the attention of a young man called Orlan Rowlands) all evoke *As You Like It*, but we may also note further references; among other things, the hospital's wards are named after Shakespearean characters, and a character with aconite poisoning through his hand is aptly placed in the Lavinia ward. Examples such as these abound throughout the series, but none of the characters recognize or reflect on the Shakespearean references, with the exception of Sebastian, the unemployed actor, whose puns, quotations and pseudonyms taken from Shakespeare, often completely unrelated to the events, are never picked up by anyone else.

In fact, the only time the Shakespearean reference in the detective's name is noticed is in the final episode (S04E09), where Frank participates in a Shakespeare-themed nature walk, only to find himself mixed up in yet another murder investigation, this time as suspect and almost as victim. A Shakespeare enthusiast who turns up in Elizabethan garb for the walk is the only one who remarks on the topicality of Frank's name, to which he responds with his characteristic 'Come again?' (00:06:01), making it abundantly clear that the name's Shakespearean associations are lost on him. When they investigate the murder of a millionaire author of science fiction novels, both Lu and Frank end up being immersed in the books, but this never happens with a Shakespearean narrative in the series – the only time they actually watch a theatre performance (*Hamlet*, what else?), they admit that they have no idea what the play is about.

While no visible change is observed in the characters' knowledge of the Shakespearean heritage over the four seasons, the repeated application of Shakespearean references confirms our suspicion that the intended target audience of the series may be partly the conservative retirees who comprise the primary viewership of BBC One. Nevertheless, the way both script and *mise-en-scène* are inundated with Shakespearean references, though not employed in any consistent or complex way, testifies to the series' intention to attract broader (international, demographically and culturally more hybrid) audiences. In order for these references to work, at least some viewers must be expected to recognize more of the Shakespearean oeuvre than the characters do, but only so far that they may not be confused by inconsistencies, and the less educated spectator may also be able to enjoy the central premise of the crime

series without being alienated by too much Shakespeare. The key to its success probably lies in the approach the series employs: to turn Shakespeare quotations into comic opportunities, the television audience only needs to recognize that what is being said (and ignored) is something famous by Shakespeare, but no actual knowledge of the dramatic or poetic texts is required. In a sense, this readiness in catering to a variety of audiences may be yet another Shakespearean element in the series, reminiscent of how the Elizabethan public playhouse would have seen spectators from a wide range of social classes, some finding enjoyment in slapstick comedy and bawdy exchanges, others appreciating intertextual references to the classics.

Poachers and their audiences

At the same time, as Linda Hutcheon points out, all viewers of adaptations may fall into one of two categories: those who recognize the work as an adaptation and those who enjoy it as any other work. 'For an adaptation to be successful in its own right, it must be so for both knowing and unknowing audiences' (Hutcheon 2006: 121). The series makes the two attitudes visible through the contrast between the way Lu and Frank take the Shakespearean names and references at face value, while Sebastian, an obvious representative of Hutcheon's 'knowing' audiences, recognizes and revels in all textual and thematic hints, even adding a few to the conversation, as if winking surreptitiously at the educated viewer. True, the Shakespearean fragments peppering Sebastian's conversation are typically from the better-known, often proverbial phrases an average high school education would expose viewers to. In S03E07, a group of eco-warriors is called Mortal Coil (a name that no one but Sebastian finds clever) – incidentally, the same name is used by the band of musicians in the 2015 comic biopic *Bill*, produced by the Horrible Histories team (where they even play with the textual context of the phrase, saying 'We'd better shuffle off' (00:07:43) when they depart after another concert disrupted by Shakespeare's ill-advised improvization). In neither case are we expected to contemplate our own mortality, or Hamlet's suicidal thoughts.

The use of this phrase from *Hamlet* would be all the more remarkable in this particular episode since the case investigated by Lu and Frank is inspired by *The Taming of the Shrew* rather than *Hamlet*. The episode's title ('Best Beware my Sting') and the family structure of the characters investigated all point us in this direction. The case concerns energy tycoon Gordon Minola and his two daughters, rebellious Kate and sweet Bianca, the latter about to marry Lucas De Boulay, but in fact conspiring with Rufus Hortensio to get her hands on her father's money and out of the marriage. The episode is a typical example of the not entirely random form of poaching that characterizes the whole series: names and family relationships may just about ring a bell, and this association is typically confirmed by a quotation in the episode's title, but the events themselves are not made to resemble the dramatic source of inspiration. In the above example, Bianca and her fiancé are apparently kidnapped, for which Kate is blamed, as a result of her open hostility towards her father's non-eco-friendly business and his equally open preference for his younger daughter. Eventually, however, Bianca's fiancée is found dead, Bianca turns out to be the villain of the plot and the father welcomes Kate into the family business, ready to transform it into a more environmentally conscious operation.

In another episode, S04E04, an American PI accused of murder is called Joe Venice, and he may easily stand for Shylock, associated with money and being the outsider. As the cultural Other, it is no wonder that he nearly falls victim to a conspiracy; however, by the end, he is acquitted and exonerated, and even allowed to buy the car he pursued – nicknamed Mistress Quickly – for his Hollywood commissioner. Other suspects involved in the case are Portia Dane and Reese Alonso – whether the latter name is inspired by *Merchant*'s Nerissa or *The Tempest* is hard to tell since the plot revolves around illegal speed races and racing cars. To crown this mess of Shakespearean drama, inspired by at least three different plays, the episode's title is 'Most Wicked Speed', from Hamlet's words describing the hasty marriage of his mother and uncle.

It is true that some other episodes try to be more consistent in their references – 'Too Much Water' (S04E03) begins with the discovery of a female body drowned in the River Avon, floating on top of the water very much like Millais's painting – and she turns out to be one Ophelia, former beauty queen. But her surname

(by marriage) is Skylark, possibly inviting an association of *Romeo and Juliet*'s lark and nightingale, confirmed by the end when it turns out that the murderer, Vanessa, was originally called Rose, although she now goes by another name. But the only forbidden love affair in the story is between Antonio da Costa, Italian-born employee and his male partner, and neither is the plot revolving around questions of paternal legacy or leadership. Thus, both the *Hamlet* and the *Romeo and Juliet* parallels remain superficial at best.

It is of course a critical commonplace that this adaptation strategy – taking random elements of already available cultural products, and using them for one's own purposes – is very much characteristic of our times. This is the method Douglas Lanier describes as 'textual poaching', defined as 'a raid on a literary domain "owned" by others', typical of popular culture that 'fastens on Shakespearian passages immediately relevant or useful to its purposes without great regard for fidelity or authenticity' (2002: 52). However, what we are witnessing today is not simply an acknowledgement of Michel de Certeau's observation of 'reading as poaching', based on the realization that reading is far from being a passive activity (1984: 174). What we can notice in contemporary culture is a conscious attitude of irreverence, a disregard for the inherited form and unity of texts and a prioritizing of a decontextualized repurposing of any odd fragment of these earlier creations that takes the fancy of the new 'prosumer' or 'produser' (Lehmann and Way 2017: 73), the user who is as much producer as consumer, and anything but a passive recipient of ready-made products.

It is partly in this sense that the term 'textual poaching' has entered critical discourse through the work of Henry Jenkins in the field of fandom studies (Jenkins 1992), but this form of appropriation has clearly gained institutional acceptance by now. As a result, Shakespeare is not only free prey for private fans, but the poachers that hunt and gather in his textual forests are often representatives of the establishment, which no longer expects television scriptwriters to educate the masses or to prescribe a reverential attitude towards the canon, but only to keep viewers glued to the screen through entertaining them. This is perfectly exemplified by *Shakespeare & Hathaway: Private Investigators*, which was produced by the BBC and broadcast on BBC One, a free-to-air public television channel funded by taxpayers' money, rather than ambitious amateur audiences. Even though the irreverent

attitude suggests an unofficial, unauthorized form of engagement with Shakespeare, the serial format allows the reader to expect and appreciate the variations not only on the texts targeted by this poaching activity, but also on the extent and style of poaching, whether it is plot structures, textual fragments, names and character relationships or any other aspects of the Shakespearean oeuvre that are involved. This multifaceted approach in turn makes it possible that *Shakespeare & Hathaway* offers a series of reflections on the state of Shakespeare reception and scholarship in the twenty-first century as well.

But the metaphor of poaching and the way it is employed by *Shakespeare & Hathaway* may also be useful when considering the many coloured – and otherwise mostly forgotten – sources equally readily snatched up by Shakespeare himself when he was creating his own work. As Diana E. Henderson and James Siemon emphasize, when considering Shakespeare's own working method, it is worth remembering not simply his 'reinterpretation of particular narratives and phrases', but also his 'practice of reading widely and combining scraps from many sources' (1999: 206). As the editors of this volume point out in the 'Introduction', serial revisitations of Shakespeare-inspired material may bring to mind the playwright's own readiness to adapt earlier material. Not only had the plots of the majority of Shakespeare's plays been invented by others, but the same inherited – or found, stolen, poached, appropriated, repurposed – elements were in turn reworked more than once during the dramatist's career, as discussed in several chapters in the first section of the volume. Some of these repeatedly used found plots may appear as common themes, such as reconciliation, or the father–daughter relationships explored in the late plays, the transgressive social practice of cross-dressing or the melodramatic device of twins separated by natural or social forces. Some plotlines are revisited with variations that have an impact on genre classification; the Ovidian myth of Pyramus and Thisbe appears both in *Romeo and Juliet* and in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in the latter case with a comic twist. Even more evident is the alteration between the ways the same structural device of the pretended death scene – devised by a benevolent friar – is employed in *Romeo and Juliet* and in *Much Ado about Nothing*, to radically different effects.

The seriality of genre: A comic setting for cosy crime

Another element which can be seen as a form of serialization is manifested in *Shakespeare & Hathaway*'s generic associations. In a way, any work identifying itself with a recognizable genre is by definition joining a series, continuing a pattern that feeds upon a history of earlier representatives of the genre, while also shaping the tradition for the future by joining it with its own variation on the pattern. It is therefore significant how the (very English) tradition of Shakespeare and Shakespearean adaptations is joined by the (equally very English) tradition of the cosy small-town detective series, set in the (as English as it gets) picture-postcard heritage location of Stratford-upon-Avon. As one reviewer praises the series by comparison to its most iconic predecessor by promising that 'Fans of *Midsomer Murders* will settle in straight away' (Stevens 2018) – *Shakespeare & Hathaway* intends to combine the thrill of the chase with the comic attraction of the quirky rural location. At the same time, the tragical-comical-historical hybrid itself may bring back associations of Shakespearean drama, reinforcing a reading strategy of expectations of generic complexity based on the awareness that Shakespearean tragedies tend to include elements of comic relief, while most comedies have darker shadows.

The serial application of this opportunistic and often tongue-in-cheek attitude is thus a right match for the reworking of early modern source texts, but as employed by *Shakespeare & Hathaway: Private Investigators*, this serial repurposing results in a complex adaptation strategy equally typical of the contemporary mediascape. While the series seems no more than a quirky mystery series with a strong comic streak, only mildly overshadowed by the actual murder investigations, it is interesting to see how the Shakespearean element gradually gains more visibility and significance, precisely as a result of the serial treatment of certain aspects of the narrative and characterization.

Nevertheless, the significance of the familiar genre is more than the creators' desire to associate their series with previous works' popularity. One of the key elements of the cosy or clue-puzzle type of crime fiction is its setting, a characteristically isolated, enclosed space, whether a country house or a sleepy little village, as the

majority of the work of Agatha Christie and her contemporaries testify. Yet 'if we look at Christie's *oeuvre* as a whole, rather than at individual texts, and at the place of seriality and repetition within that oeuvre, a somewhat more complex picture emerges' (Schmid 2012: 12–13). As David Schmid points out, it is precisely the serial revisiting of the same location that leads to the realization that the pretty little town hides a disproportionate amount of crime under its peaceful surface, which effectively undermines the impression of an idyllic, safe space (2012: 7). This type of seriality is thus one of the strengths of the episodic crime series, allowing the viewer to observe a thematic accumulation rather than a narrative development.

There is, of course, a psychological and a sociocultural aspect of authors' preference for such locations, on the borderline between the rural and the urban, but also of the tragic and the comic. In *Shakespeare & Hathaway*, the globally known but physically limited space of Stratford-upon-Avon not only brings to mind the genre's tradition, but it also draws our attention to the built environment as cultural heritage, with a number of private and public buildings either crumbling from disuse or being eroded by the incursions of contemporary global (popular) culture. Several episodes show that the formerly idyllic community is being transformed under our watchful eyes into a tourist trap, its traditional community being hounded out of their homes and meeting places by developers and industry magnates. While the detectives inhabit a shabby little office in a half-timbered building in the old town, and frequent The Mucky Mallard (referring to The Dirty Duck, a popular pub for visitors to the Royal Shakespeare Theatre), the crime investigations lead them to stately homes and modern luxury estates whose opulence could not show a greater contrast to their own material circumstances.

Heritage site and cultural memory – Shakespearean spaces and acting styles

With these serial laments on the destruction of the heritage site, it is impossible to ignore how the changing space of the market town implies an irrevocably altering English countryside, and with it the erosion of the cultural memory of Shakespeare. On the one hand, the formerly self-contained world of the small town has become a place of transition: residents move out, businesses move in and

hordes of tourists and opportunistic criminals are passing through. On the other hand, when it comes to the state of affairs in the Shakespeare cult, we can witness a phenomenon that – for want of a better word – must be called secularization: the disappearance of a quasi-religious reverence for the bard, also exemplified by the increasingly irreverent forms of repurposing (or poaching) endemic in contemporary culture. This is yet another feature equally characteristic of cosy crime fiction, manifested in the representation of the setting. As Susan Rowland argues, the genre is concerned with how the sacred space is polluted by evil, and it resolves this conflict by secularization: 'In *fantasy only*, because it is a self-referential game, the closure of the solution of the crime does more than restore traditional social structures. It restores the sacred place as a social space. It redeems modernity from sin, violence, and chaos' (Rowland 2010: 127). Through the choice of Stratford-upon-Avon as its setting, *Shakespeare & Hathaway* allows the redemption through a secularization of the space, recognizing the obsolete aspects of the Shakespeare cult. The real Warwickshire market town may still try to identify (and sell) itself as a near-sacred place of worship, but the series shows that the majority of locals have long abandoned any belief in the sacredness of the Shakespearean heritage. They are ready to fleece any pilgrim who falls into their hands: a theatre building is used for a magician's performance, and the park around the Royal Shakespeare Theatre is the favourite haunt of conjurers, tricksters and all sorts of petty criminals. The detectives invariably reveal these criminal intentions and unmask those who exploit the unsuspecting visitors, but the resolutions never imply a newly strengthened belief in the sacredness of Shakespeare.

True, Stratford's association with the material – and purely commercial – aspects of the Shakespeare cult is not an entirely new phenomenon. In a sense, the shift in public adoration from text to space began over 250 years ago. As Andreas Höfele summarizes what he calls 'the Stratford syndrome':

> Stratford-on-Avon is the home of Shakespeare, both in the sense of where he originally came from and in the sense of where he still is, where you can, so to speak, find him at home. At least, this is the promise the site extends to its well over half a million visitors per year, the magical aura carefully sustained around

> some half a dozen Tudor properties in the town itself and the neighbouring countryside. (2000)

The origins of associating Shakespeare with Stratford and celebrating him in this little market town go back to David Garrick's Jubilee of 1769, which started the long list of Stratford celebrations of Shakespeare. And while many discussions of the Shakespeare tourist industry focus on the 'narrowness and superficiality [that] seem to be the qualities most associated with the tourist-as-spectator' (Purcell 2023: 117), the majority of such discussions tend to observe tourists within the theatre rather than in the streets. Yet Michael Dobson points out that the first Jubilee's visitors – the Shakespeare pilgrimage industry – had much in common with contemporary tourists, who flock to the famous sites. Both those early pilgrims and today's visitors are attracted to the 'key shrines of Shakespeare's England (principally Anne Hathaway's Cottage and Shakespeare's Birthplace) without displaying the slightest interest in attending the theatre: the performance of Shakespeare's plays remains irrelevant to some of the major functions of his cult' (Dobson 1992: 226).

This is the kind of cultural tourism that we can observe in *Shakespeare & Hathaway* as well, where neither the local residents of Stratford-upon-Avon nor more than a handful of cultural enthusiasts are even interested in the theatrical embodiment of Shakespeare, opting for casinos, wellness resorts, yoga retreats or nature walks instead. Locals are catering to these demands by hiring actors to advertise their services in Elizabethan costume, even dressing up as Shakespeare characters. These scenes of opportunistic entrepreneurs allow the series to engage in a critical discussion of the Shakespeare phenomenon as a whole, where the serial element at work results in a form of accumulation. Repeatedly seeing these signs of the times, the serial format allows us to meet such commercialized uses of the Shakespearean oeuvre in more and more diverse variations, confirming our belief that what we are witnessing is not a single isolated instance but the universal state of affairs. This nostalgic hankering after a lost past is once again reminiscent of the issues familiar from conservative political agendas that are expected to resonate with the majority of BBC One's viewers.

The transformation of Shakespearean Bardolatry into the contemporary form of a secular, predominantly commercial cult

is visible through a series of changes in the social and cultural composition of the quasi-historical setting of Stratford-upon-Avon. The theatre is a marginal and commercially failing enterprise, and the plays as literary works are mostly ignored by the lead characters. The target of criticism in *Shakespeare & Hathaway* is never the content of the Shakespeare oeuvre, but rather the commercial aspects of the Shakespeare cult. As the third wheel in the operation, classically trained Sebastian, laments over the sacrilege they are forced to commit: 'The gods of theatre will never forgive us!' (*Shakespeare & Hathaway* S04E07, 00:15:58), but in this fictional vision of Stratford, this is how the whole Shakespeare industry appears to be making a living. One episode (S03E05 'Thy Fury Spent') even addresses the position of Shakespeare studies in contemporary cultural theory, when the opening of a new Shakespeare centre is greeted with antagonism by a feminist group, who question the hegemonic cultural status of the dead white male author par excellence, blaming him and his ilk for silencing female voices. Yet another episode shows the level of fanaticism displayed by some fans when a couple of participants turn up for a Shakespeare-themed nature walk dressed in full Elizabethan garb. One man takes the Shakespearean references to such an annoying level that he soon gets on everyone's nerves – it is no wonder that he ends up dead, and he will not to be missed by any of the characters, not even his own wife.

One additional aspect that may add to the Shakespearean complexity of the series is the way it employs and challenges the notion of the Shakespearean actor as a category. On the one hand, the series consistently demonstrates the disappearing prestige of Shakespearean acting, showing how the cultural capital associated with the training and the canonical author can rarely be exchanged for actual capital. Sebastian exemplifies the ways Shakespearean 'qualities or performative traits that evoke cultural refinement and knowledge in one context are seen as out-of-touch and even histrionic in another' (Blackwell 2017: 223); his one moment of true theatrical success also invokes 'the running joke that every comic dreams of playing Hamlet' (Greenhalgh 2007: 665). Sebastian's Shakespearean aspirations do not translate into marketable skills and actual commodities in the real world of the small market town and its PI agency. The only way his classical training can be turned into profit is through his ability to don an endless variety of disguises

when undercover surveillance is required for an investigation, and these diverse disguises continue to add to the Shakespearean quality of the series through creating an expectation of the ever-increasing variety of his performances.

Yet the serial engagements with the idea of the Shakespearean actor offer an extended contemplation on the concept itself; with Sebastian as the constant point of reference, during the four seasons, we encounter several forms of Shakespearean playacting, offering yet another example of repetition with variation that is at the heart of seriality. The diverse types of Shakespearean performers and performances include artists struggling to make ends meet, others going commercial or some with an uncompromising resistance to the forms of mainstream culture. In the cut-throat world of market capitalism, theatre for its own sake is an anachronism, and actors are relegated to the margins of society and onto the brink of insignificance, where their debates about artistic concepts render them meaningless poseurs.

By setting the majority of the action in and around recognizable tourist locations, but hardly ever inside a theatre, we are repeatedly made to observe that Stratford's Shakespeare industry that may once have been rooted in an interest in the Shakespearean text and performance – a strong attraction of the RSC and the possibility of a visit to the theatre – has been transformed into a commercial enterprise, the marketing of the Shakespeare houses and Shakespeare-related trivia. What remains now are the catchwords and labels, the fridge magnet length of quotations sold as souvenirs, and one is forced to wonder how much of the Shakespearean labels that adorn Stratford-upon-Avon, from the names of boats to cottages and businesses and more, are in fact recognized by tourists.

In this way, the series uses the setting of Stratford-upon-Avon similarly to the way the Shakespeare cult fictionalizes the real and historical, adding and interpreting the remaining (and missing) elements of both the authorial work and the material remnants of the author's biography. In *Shakespeare & Hathaway: Private Investigators*, Stratford-upon-Avon adds to this mix the attraction of a heritage site, and it is obvious that the criminal tendencies have nothing to do with Shakespeare. The small Warwickshire town in the Heart of England does not have such a high number of murder cases because it is the town of Shakespeare, but possibly because its cultural values have already been eroded by market forces.

Nonetheless, Shakespearean references – and the investigators called Shakespeare and Hathaway – are always part of the solution, a means of re-establishing law and order to a world disrupted by the forces of chaos. The solution rarely comes in the form of a recognition of the referential value of the Shakespearean text, but if not the awareness of Shakespearean drama and its intricacies of meaning, theatricality is always part of the process of uncovering the crime and tricking the suspects into revelation or admission of their guilt. In this way, the series' nostalgic engagements with a Stratford filled with Shakespearean heritage confirm its intentions of memorializing not only Shakespeare but also Stratford-upon-Avon as a site of cultural memory: 'the act of memorialising Shakespeare enables each collective to register its own significance by connecting itself with his name' (Smialkowska and King 2021: 2).

But beyond associating Stratford with Shakespeare trivia and a list of characters' or contemporaries' names, precisely through its association with comedy, *Shakespeare & Hathaway* takes a stand on the side of Shakespeare as a canonical author, a representative of high culture, by mocking (however lovingly) its protagonists' ignorance of Shakespeare's oeuvre and cultural significance. Predominantly through repeatedly revisiting the contemporary manifestations of the Shakespearean canon, the serial repurposing of Shakespearean material functions not simply as a continuation but as an accumulation as well, which forces the spectator to rethink and revise the boundaries of the canon and its position in popular culture. At the same time, the potentially endless, open-ended narrative of the murder mystery allows the series to cyclically revisit the most pertinent questions about the relevance of Shakespeare and the Shakespeare cult for twenty-first-century mainstream society.

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10

Serial Shakespeare after the end of the world

From repetition compulsions to the romance of recycling in *Station Eleven*

Christina Wald

What would happen to Shakespeare if a pandemic killed 99 per cent of the human population in a few weeks, all infrastructure collapsed and all established governments fell apart?[1] Would Shakespeare's plays survive such an end of the world? If they survived, what could they offer for this post-apocalyptic situation? Would they serve as relicts, as reminders of what has been lost or as blueprints to recreate the past? Or could Shakespeare's plays be retooled to develop a different future in the twenty-first century? Such questions are raised in the miniseries *Station Eleven*, first released in the winter of 2021/2022 on HBO in the midst of an actual pandemic. Creator Patrick Somerville based *Station Eleven* on Emily St. John Mandel's 2014 novel of the same title, but the series departs from the novel in some respects.[2] Entangling several plotlines happening before,

during and twenty years after the pandemic, the most prominent action centres on a theatre group called the Travelling Symphony dedicated to performing Shakespeare plays with a new musical score. Soon after the global collapse of civilization, they begin to travel around Lake Michigan in conditions that resemble the wandering troupes of Shakespeare's time. As I will argue, the series shows how Shakespeare is reactivated to work through traumatic losses in a serial manner on both a personal and a collective level.

It is noteworthy that the TV series increases the relevance of the novel's Shakespearean intertexts, chiefly *King Lear* and *The Tempest*, and adds new ones, most prominently *Hamlet*. *Station Eleven* shows scenes from three different performances of *Hamlet* by the troupe, each with a different cast and different implications for how Shakespeare can be serially reactivated in the post-apocalypse. Some actors play different parts across the three performances, with each constellation offering new affordances to come to terms with their traumatic losses. What is more, the series embeds its own action in Shakespeare's plotlines, focusing in particular on the question of inheritance taken from *Lear*, of loss, grief and revenge taken from *Hamlet*, and of surviving severe damage taken from *The Tempest*. *Station Eleven* thus focuses on three Shakespeare plays, which themselves are intertextually linked and can be fruitfully read in a serial manner, with *The Tempest* being a romance version of the previous tragedies. As Paul Kottman has recently reminded us, 'all the internal strife of "Shakespearean plots" in which brother betrays brother, in which kingdoms are at risk, daughters grow apart from fathers, [are] all once again gathered up and recycled in *The Tempest* as if to "test" the old formulae' (2019: 121).

Station Eleven continues this testing via recycling. Though we might habitually distinguish between 'timeless' tragedies and 'disposable' pop culture (Lanier 2002: 3), the series' first shots make clear that Shakespeare could belong to the abandoned cultural waste in a post-apocalyptic world: a dirty, decomposing programme for a *King Lear* production is shown in a derelict theatre overgrown by plants and inhabited by animals (see Figures 10.1 and 10.2).

Watching these darkly lit shots without a narrative introduction explaining the setting in the post-pandemic future and without an establishing shot to provide spatial orientation, TV viewers may understand only in retrospect that what they are seeing is an abandoned theatre building: suddenly, after 70 seconds, the scene

FIGURES 10.1 AND 10.2 Screenshots of the opening minutes of Station Eleven © Paramount Television Studios for HBO 2021.

switches to the Chicago Theatre in its full splendour, shot from the same perspective (see Figures 10.3 and 10.4), where TV viewers as well as the diegetic theatre audience witness the unexpected end of the *King Lear* performance.

The main actor, Arthur Leander, dies onstage from a heart attack just before Gloucester can say 'O ruined piece of nature, this great world / Shall so wear out to naught' (*KL* 4.6.130–1). This disruption of Shakespeare's most apocalyptic tragedy functions as the dramaturgical starting point for the global spread of the influenza virus which hits Chicago on that night and kills almost all inhabitants.[3]

FIGURES 10.3 AND 10.4 Screenshots of the opening minutes of *Station Eleven* © Paramount Television Studios for HBO 2021.

The premature interruption of the tragedy also leads to the survival of several characters related to Arthur: Kirsten, the child actor who plays young Goneril, is taken care of by Jeevan, a spectator who had rushed to the stage to help Arthur. Arthur's second wife Elizabeth, their son Tyler and Arthur's friend Clark survive the pandemic on a flight to Arthur's funeral that is intercepted at a provincial airport. The ensuing plot oscillates between events before the flu outbreak, the first two years after the collapse and the action

twenty years later, when Kirsten has become the star performer of the Travelling Symphony. Eventually, the company visits the airport community, where all surviving protagonists meet. *Station Eleven*'s non-chronological form emphasizes effects of serialization and at the same time undercuts an ordered, teleological understanding of seriality; it thus creates a traumatized aesthetic that makes the painful and disorientating seriality of psychological acting out and working through palpable for audiences.

'Survival is insufficient': *Station Eleven*'s adaptational network

The Travelling Symphony's motto 'Survival is insufficient', which Mandel called 'almost the thesis statement' of her novel (2015) and which has been used in this manner on posters marketing the series, expresses their dedication to art as an important meaning in life, but it also raises the question of how Shakespeare ought to be re-performed in radically altered circumstances. *Station Eleven* tests varying forms of recovering Shakespeare that range from verbatim performances and rewritings by the Travelling Symphony to more oblique references to the plays, which provide character constellations and plot elements for the offstage action. The series also makes clear that Shakespeare's survival has depended on previous adaptations. Accordingly, the company's slogan 'Survival is insufficient' is taken from a post-apocalyptic science fiction graphic novel that is also titled 'Station Eleven', which was written by Miranda, Arthur's first wife, and gifted by Arthur to Kirsten, who cherishes the novel. The graphic novel can be categorized as a loose adaptation of *The Tempest*, which has been called 'the mother of all sci-fi' (White 1999: 5) and discussed as 'scientific romance' (Maisano 2014). Not only the author's name, Miranda, but also parts of the action link the sci-fi novel to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*: Set in a flooded space station where some humans have survived the apocalypse, the graphic novel reimagines a 'brave new world' after a wreck (*Tem* 5.1.183).

It is part of the recycling circuits of the series that the line 'Survival is insufficient' is neither Miranda's invention nor the invention of the actual author Mandel, but, as many other lines in the graphic novel,

a repurposed quote. It is taken from the *Star Trek Voyager* episode 'Survival Instinct', which belongs to the *Star Trek* canon that itself quotes from Shakespeare. *Station Eleven* directly refers to one of these Shakespeare links when young Kirsten watches the 1966 *Star Trek* episode called 'The Conscience of the King' about a Shakespeare theatre group travelling through space who perform a *Hamlet* production. In the episode 'Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Aren't Dead', whose title refers to Tom Stoppard's rewriting of *Hamlet* that came out in the same year as the *Star Trek* episode, the series thus indicates that young Kirsten might have first encountered *Hamlet* via *Star Trek* and other adaptations, and that the actor who has become a star therefore performs a networked script with multiple origins that opens up multidirectional ways of interpretation, as Douglas Lanier has amply theorized in his rhizomatic understanding of Shakespeare (Lanier 2014). Sometimes, *Station Eleven* derives irony from this oblique serial recycling. For instance, when a potential new member of the Symphony auditions, he needs special permission to perform a non-Shakespearean scene. He presents a speech from the movie *Independence Day*, but some members of the diegetic rehearsal audience and the extra-diegetic TV audience might be aware that this speech was itself modelled on the St. Crispin's Day speech in Shakespeare's *Henry V* (see Tichenor 2021).

Shakespearean repetition compulsions: Post-apocalyptic *Hamlets*

In *Station Eleven*, the Shakespearean reconnections have traces of a repetition compulsion, which has been amply theorized in psychoanalytic and cultural theory as a phenomenon of seriality. I will in the following explore how the series uses Shakespeare's plays to act out and work through past trauma and to develop models for future action, both on the individual and on the collective level. The Travelling Symphony reinterprets *Hamlet* as the drama of being a bereft survivor in a post-apocalyptic world. In lieu of proper funerals and graves, which could not be provided in the emergency situation of a global pandemic, the traditional form of tragedy offers a template to come to terms with pervasive loss. As Tobias Döring has argued,

> acts of mourning, to become effective, need monuments and mementoes. . . . Individual responses to loss and bereavement, let alone communal efforts to come to terms with death, must resort to familiar forms in linguistic or poetic or some other conventionalized shape as focal points and agents of affective mediation. Whenever these are not available or not accessible in any given situation, mourning fails. As a personal and social performance, it can instead become pathological or turn into retributive action. (2006: 72–3)

While Arthur's son Tyler represses his grief and instead seeks retribution for his grievances, for Kirsten in the title role, the performances of *Hamlet* become a forum to act out and work through experiences of loss and violence. Given that Kirsten means 'the anointed' 'who walks with God' and Raymonde means 'well-advised protector', she and Tyler are presented as two contrastive reactions to the apocalyptic losses they suffered. The notions of acting out and working through derive from Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic work on repetition compulsions and were made prominent in the trauma theory of the later twentieth and twenty-first centuries by the work of Dominick LaCapra. When a trauma is too overwhelming to emotionally come to terms with at the time of its occurrence, the traumatized person repeats it later in order to experience it more fully. When they act out (*ausagieren*) the trauma, they are not fully aware of this painful repetition because they cannot fully recollect the initial trauma. Working through (*durcharbeiten*), however, is a form of serial reactivation that allows for a certain degree of control and awareness and enables a gradual coming to terms with the trauma (Freud 1962; see Ganteau 2020 for an overview of the concept's uses).

Depicting this process of acting out and working through, the Symphony's first *Hamlet* performance of about thirty lines from Act 1, Scene 2 is cross-cut with Kirsten's traumatic experiences as a child. Thus, when Gertrude recites the lines 'Do not for ever with thy vailed lids / Seek for thy noble father in the dust. / Thou knowst 'tis common all that lives must die' (*Station Eleven* S01E02, 00:28; *Ham* 1.2.70–2), the performance is cut against fragments of a scene when eight-year-old Kirsten, having fled to the apartment of Jeevan's brother Frank, realizes that her parents have died of the flu. Past and present are closely interlaced not only visually, but also

by making the sound carry over, so that the childhood scenes have a *Hamlet* voice-over and the play is underlain with dialogue from Kirsten's past. By this intermingling of the past and the present, Hamlet's lines 'I know not seems' and 'I have that within which passeth show' (*Station Eleven* S01E02, 00:29; 00:31; *Ham* 1.2.76; 85) are filled with memories and insights into Kirsten's tormented inner life, making clear that she is, just like Hamlet, 'possessed by the unspeakable' (Neill 1997: 225) and that her experience of time is haunted by intrusions of the traumatic past into the present. The fact that she cries onstage despite having performed *Hamlet* multiple times before emphasizes that the tragedy provides her with a forum for a serialized acting out of her multiple traumatic experiences of loss.

Her parents remain a mediated presence in her memories, as Kirsten calls them, but only reaches their mailboxes, listening to their recorded voices again and again. Eventually, she receives text messages from their phones stating that the owners of the phones have died at the hospital and cannot be visited. When young Kirsten finally hands her phone to Jeevan with the words, 'I got weird texts' (S01E02, 00:30), her comment can also be read in relation to Shakespeare's lines from the future, spoken by her adult self still suffering from the losses, thus further blurring the distinction between the present and the past. In his article, 'Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through', Freud argued, 'we may say that the patient does not *remember* anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, but *acts* it out. He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he *repeats* it, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it' (1962: 150). Kirsten will later quote a line from 'Station Eleven' that catches the paradox temporality of repetition compulsions induced by traumatic loss, an unacknowledged seriality: 'I feel this again for the first time' (S01E06, 00:20). *Station Eleven*'s aesthetics lets audiences share Kirsten's traumatized experience of time, as scenes from different times switch, clash and overlap constantly: like the traumatized survivor who is haunted by intrusive memories, audiences live in several times simultaneously. The series will gradually reveal that Kirsten has not only lost her biological parents and her father figure Arthur, but also her post-pandemic caretakers Frank and Jeevan. Thus, the ghostly parental plea 'Remember Me' (*Ham* 1.5.91) is even more ambiguous for Kirsten than for Hamlet, and the series carefully constructs not only

the order in which these losses are revealed but also the degree to which Kirsten comes to terms with them.[4]

Simultaneous to this process of acting out, the serial re-enactment has aspects of the working through of trauma, the gradual coming to terms with it and the increasing acknowledgement of seriality. The scripted, rehearsed *Hamlet* scene is a highly controlled situation, which gives Kirsten a degree of mastery over her emotions and memories. In this vein, some reviewers have even suggested that Kirsten, like a method-acting-trained performer, here might deliberately use her childhood experience to reinforce the emotional power of her roleplay (Whiting 2021; Nestruck 2022). Her performance oscillates between control and compulsion, just as Hamlet shifts between the strategic playing of his 'antic disposition' (*Ham* 1.5.170) and genuine mental distress that lets him lose control over his actions. Thus, after the applause and praise for the star performer, one audience member remarks, '[y]ou're charged with that Day Zero pain. It's like you never left' (S01E02, 00:40–41) and the Symphony's conductor observes, '[s]omething had you. Just for a second. What happened? Tell me' (S01E04, 00:08). Kirsten refuses to or is unable to talk about her trauma, however, and instead uses Shakespeare's words as the medium for serially acting it out and working it through.

As part of this working through, *Hamlet* provides Kirsten with scripts that grant her the ability to react to situations of danger differently than in her childhood and thus to increase the variation involved in serial repetition. For instance, directly after the *Hamlet* performance, she interrogates a mysterious audience member whom she finds highly suspicious. When he threatens to kill or kidnap members of the Symphony, she stabs him in a surprise attack. She here proves to be both less hesitant than Hamlet and less impulsive because she first makes sure that he is in fact suspicious and not an innocent bystander like Polonius. It will later turn out that this audience member is a self-proclaimed prophet for the younger generation – and even later that he is Arthur Leander's son Tyler. That her interaction with him is cross-cut with scenes in which young Kirsten cries in panic for Frank, which are later revealed to have happened while Frank was stabbed by an intruder, shows that she repeats aspects of her past with different coordinates: while as a child she helplessly witnessed the murder of her surrogate family member, she now proactively protects her artistic family.

Several episodes later, Kirsten completes this process of working through Frank's loss: in a poison-induced hallucination, she imagines her return to the time when she lived with Jeevan and Frank. Invisible to the brothers, she can communicate and interact with her own younger self, trying to alter the events that led to the murder of Frank. She has to realize, however, that she cannot change what happened in the past, which is presented before her eyes as a scripted performance largely sealed off from her intervention as spectator. What she can change, however, is her attitude towards the past that she keeps reliving as if it happened to her in the present. As LaCapra has put it, '[i]n acting-out, the past is performatively regenerated or relived as if it were fully present rather than represented in memory and inscription, and it hauntingly returns as the repressed. Mourning involves a different inflection of performativity: a relation to the past that involves recognizing its difference from the present' (1999: 716). As part of Kirsten's working through via mourning, in her hallucination she remains in the apartment with Frank's body after Jeevan and her younger self have left, taking her leave in a prolonged death watch at the end of which Frank's body has turned into a skeleton and the apartment has transformed into the derelict state it is in twenty years later.

In the final episode of the series, the collective, political aspect of the Shakespearean serial reactivation is made particularly prominent through the third and final *Hamlet* performance, which takes place at the airport community. The arrival of the Travelling Symphony at the former airport is modelled on the arrival of the travelling players at Elsinore, and Kirsten now becomes Hamlet-the-director, who casts Arthur's son Tyler as Hamlet-the-character. Similar to Hamlet's dumb show in Shakespeare's play, the Symphony's *Hamlet* as play-within-the-series re-enacts the past as it re-assembles Tyler as Hamlet, his mother Elizabeth as Gertrude and his former replacement father Clark as Claudius. They can thus act out and work through the problematic family constellation in which they came to live in the airport community before Tyler, an angry child, disappeared under circumstances that made his mother believe that he died. To hide his identity, Tyler calls himself Lonergan after a ghostly character in the graphic novel 'Station Eleven'. Even before the rehearsals start, it becomes clear that Clark in his life offstage has transformed into a Claudius

character who fears the rebellious potential of the younger generation. He confides in Elizabeth that he re-read *Hamlet* and realized how dangerous Hamlet's defiance of the authorities is: 'Imagine if our teenagers felt that anger that clearly' (S01E08, 00:25). Clark therefore plans to prohibit the performance and to prolong the troupe's quarantine, effectively turning them into prisoners: instead of fearing a renewed outbreak of the flu, it is the contagious quality of Shakespeare's script that Clark seeks to control.[5] Elizabeth agrees to play Gertrude because she senses that the mysterious young actor who will play Hamlet is her son, who is alive after all but refuses to talk to her. It is only by rehearsing and performing the play that they begin to communicate. For their first encounter, Kirsten suggests the confrontation between Gertrude and Hamlet in Act 3, Scene 4, and Tyler can eloquently, via Shakespeare, not only acknowledge their re-encounter as mother and son, but also express his disgust with the older generation. Meeting his mother and 'uncle' again after two decades, Tyler's anger is undiminished; just as Hamlet returns from England as an active avenger, Tyler's return to the airport community is marked by his destruction of Clark's Museum of Civilization and hints that he might plan to assassinate members of the airport community. Viewers already know that his rebellion is not only personal, but also a political move. Tyler is the mysterious leader of a cult for young people born after the flu outbreak and determined to fight the older generation. Calling themselves 'the Undersea children' and following the mantra 'There's no before', both taken from Miranda's graphic novel 'Station Eleven', Tyler and his followers embody Hamlet's 'messianic urge, his casting himself as scourge and minister, together with his prophetic premonitions' (Samolsky 2003: 83).

This final *Hamlet* performance is enmeshed with and transformed by its rewriting in *The Tempest*. Clark's physical transformation in the year 2040 brings him close to how Prospero has often been theatrically presented, with long grey hair and beard and a cape that looks like a magician's robe (Figure 10.5). The series expands on this parallel between *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*, which gives Tyler the double role of rebellious sons Hamlet and Caliban, who both plan to kill their replacement fathers. Kirsten is not only Hamlet-the-director but also becomes a Prospero figure who directs the play and finally gives up the book that helped to magically enchant

FIGURE 10.5 Screenshot of Clark as Claudius-Prospero in episode 8 of *Station Eleven* © Paramount Television Studios for HBO 2021.

her life, the graphic novel 'Station Eleven', when she lets one of Tyler's followers run away with it. She also learns to let go of her 'daughter' figure, Alex, who eventually leaves with Tyler, Elizabeth and the Undersea children. The performance is again cross-cut with the memories of Tyler, the Hamlet actor. Haunted by his miserable childhood days at the airport, Tyler as Hamlet unexpectedly threatens to kill Clark as Claudius on stage with the very knife that Frank's murderer used. Kirsten, the director who watches the action from the wings, is confronted with the possibility that her trauma of watching both Arthur and Frank die onstage will be repeated. In a peripety that transforms the tragic action to romance, however, Tyler abandons his plan when he realizes that he is united with Clark in their mourning for Arthur (and when, resolving the lingering Oedipal conflict, he understands belatedly that Clark is gay, was in love with his father and never replaced his father as his mother's new sexual partner). In this way, the performers of this third *Hamlet* production achieve reconciliation through *anagnorisis*, through insight into their own mistakes and misunderstandings, and avert, at least for their offstage lives, the catastrophic ending of the tragedy. For its family drama, the series employs Shakespeare's tragic script to work through and resolve violent impulses that stem, at least in part, from painful memories shaped by a child's misinterpretation.

The series thus begins with a *King Lear* performance that serves as a foreboding prologue to the apocalypse and it culminates in a *Hamlet* production in which revenge is forestalled in favour of reconciliation, effectively the action of *The Tempest*. *Station Eleven* serially re-enacts, condenses and reinterprets Shakespeare's development from writing tragedy to writing tragicomic romance, with *King Lear*, as Joseph Wittreich has argued, likewise functioning as the starting point for this shift as the 'stark prologue' to the romances (1984: 196, see also Kottman 2019). *Station Eleven*'s ending in its romance spirit also has an unexpected reunion in store for Kirsten when she meets Jeevan, who after all had survived what she thought was a lethal wolf attack. They promise to meet annually henceforth, because Kirsten will add the airport to the Symphony's route. The title of the final episode, 'Unbroken Circle', hence means a spiral rather than a repetition loop, as the symphony's circular route is modified and as the traumatic repetition compulsions of the central characters are transformed by and into therapeutic art. This individual healing in spiral loops of working through has political and ecological implications that I will discuss in the following section.

The romance of recycling: Working through ecological trauma

The series' portrayal of serial acting out and working through works on different scales: In addition to zooming in on psychic processes of the individual mind, the series also reflects on the collective, political and ecological task of coming to terms with traumatic loss in order to break free from harmful repetitions of the past. From episode 1 onwards, the camera work literally provides the bigger picture: it intermittently offers a planetary view of the no longer globalized Earth, as scenes are presented in overhead shots with varying degrees of distance. These overhead shots are also used to demonstrate the lush reforestation and to show how nature has taken back former urban and industrial settings. Visually, the series here responds, I would argue, to the threat of global warming and the sixth mass extinction, that is, to our fear of the catastrophe to come, even if it does not directly tackle the question in its dialogue. It is striking that, just as in the novel, the characters never explicitly

comment on the ecological problems that had been caused by the lost, unsustainable civilization for which some characters mourn. Both the novel and the series can therefore be regarded as part of what Mark Bould has analysed as 'the Anthropocene unconscious' of current literature and culture, in which other catastrophes stand in for the repressed knowledge of the climate catastrophe, the apocalypse to come, the apocalypse that has already begun (Bould 2021: 4, 17; see also Vermeulen 2018 and Eve 2018 for ecocritical readings of Mandel's novel). As Bould puts it, these literary texts, films and artworks are not characterized by silence about the climate catastrophe, but by 'expressive aphasia' (2021: 4). In the case of *Station Eleven*, this replacement phenomenon is a story about personal, cultural and technological losses after a flu outbreak. However, the series not only uses more ecologically evocative visual imagery than the novel, but parts of its production and its release happened in a phase of increased awareness about the close ecological interconnection of human and non-human life forms and the unintended damaging consequences of our actions: as we have learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic, virus outbreaks are a result of human intrusion into wildlife areas, so there is not only a symbolic but also a causal connection between a pandemic catastrophe and the climate catastrophe.

This charges the series' reactivation of Shakespeare, one of the cultural icons of modernity, with ecological meaning. As Heather J. Hicks puts it in her study of post-apocalyptic fiction, post-apocalyptic survivors face two options: they can either 'move beyond salvaging mere scraps of modernity and rebuild dimensions of it in earnest or they should concede that modernity is beyond salvage and attempt to devise something that transcends its historical forms' (2016: 3). These two options are taken up in *Station Eleven* and played out as conflict between the characters, in particular between Clark, the Claudius-Prospero character, who dreams of rebuilding civilization in its previous form, and Tyler, the Hamlet-Caliban, who violently rebels against the older generation. The conception of Tyler is one of the most significant revisions that the series undertakes: in the novel, the Prophet is a paedophile and authoritarian cult leader who mainly serves as antagonist to Kirsten and the Travelling Symphony. In the series, he is a more ambivalent and enigmatic character whose rebellion against the older generation and their nostalgia for the lost civilization of late capitalism might have to do

with differing ecological awareness. For instance, in the immediate aftermath of the flu outbreak, when Tyler is an eight-year-old child, he is disappointed by the adults' lack of imagination regarding the planet's post-apocalyptic future: to the surprise of his parent's generation, Tyler suggests that humankind should not aim to repopulate the planet. When they have to decide which information about current civilization ought to be saved for the future before the internet breaks down, he does not reject Clark's demand that all of Shakespeare's plays need to be saved but wonders whether they should delete rather than save the Wikipedia entry on capitalism. Amused by his naïve approach, his mother responds, '[w]e'd just invent it again' (S01E05, 00:34), because for her, capitalism is an inevitable stage of human evolution or a repetition compulsion of its own kind. In the plot strand set twenty years later, no economic transactions in the post-pandemic world are ever shown; the series remains vague regarding the economic structures of the new-found communities.

Station Eleven thus leaves room for speculation about what our future might look like: after the collapse of civilization and carbon-based capitalism, the survivors might not only have suffered traumatic losses but also gained the chance to create a more just and more sustainable future. Some changes should perhaps more accurately be described as an absence or even a liberation rather than as a loss. As LaCapra has argued in his reflections on collective responses to trauma, 'the very ability to make the distinction between absence and loss . . . is one aspect of a complex process of working-through' (1999: 699). Accordingly, in *Station Eleven*, the tragic script of repetition – to kill the king who killed the king, or to reinvent capitalism, ecological exploitation and mass extinction – gradually gives way to a different form of seriality that I suggest calling the romance of recycling: a transformative re-assemblage of leftovers.

The political and aesthetic dimensions of this romance of recycling condition each other. The culminating *Hamlet* performance demonstrates that the Symphony's re-assemblage of the remaining 'scraps of modernity' is much more captivating for the young generation than the inventory of unused objects in Clark's Museum of Civilization. While the museum chronicles loss because its founder hopes to recreate the past, the Symphony creatively works with both remnants and absences. As usual, they

employ their aesthetics of leftovers for their *Hamlet* performance. They use torchlight and minimal scenery built from relicts on three small stages placed next to each other, some of them converted from their pickup trucks (now drawn by horses when they are travelling). The actors wear flamboyant costumes designed from remnant materials, for instance, from a large number of spools, sponges, cans and gloves, thus reflecting on the conspicuous consumption of the past.[6] Using leftovers found at the respective places of performance, the company grounds Shakespeare firmly in their environment, also by performing outdoors and sometimes on the bare ground. This site-specific recycling of Shakespeare in an aesthetics of repurposed old world-remainders makes their productions artistically more inventive than the fairly conventional, indoor and static pre-pandemic *Lear* production shown at the beginning.

This pre-pandemic *Lear* takes place on a wintery set (see Figure 10.4), whose artificiality is emphasized when one of the stones falls onto the stage floor during Arthur's collapse, the noise betraying that it is made of cardboard. Later, when a doctor tries to reanimate Arthur onstage, someone shouts for the artificial snowfall to be stopped. This contrast highlights the ecological approach of the post-apocalyptic performance: it acknowledges nature as an agent in its own right, whose weather cannot be switched on and off at human command, while the *Lear* performance was still implicated in what has been described as an ontology of the scenery by the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk. In this 'Kulissen-Ontologie', 'humans act as dramatic animals in front of the massif of a nature that can never be anything other than the dormant background for human operations', even though after the Industrial Revolution, nature is increasingly used as a 'resource storehouse' and a 'universal dumping ground' (2015: 36). The opening shots of the series drastically make clear that a new ecological ontology has gained momentum after the flu outbreak, as the derelict theatre is now inhabited by plants and animals, which have taken centre stage: the dormant background has become the active foreground, and the human actors are reduced to an object, present only as a photograph of Arthur Leander on the decaying theatre programme (see Figures. 10.1, 10.2, 10.3 and 10.4). In a phrase that fits this transformation of *King Lear*'s staging in *Station Eleven*, Bruno Latour has suggested that climate change

> has not only become a piece of news, not only a story, not only a drama, but also the plot of a tragedy. And a tragedy that is so much more tragic than all the earlier plays, since it seems now very plausible that human actors may arrive *too late* on the stage to have any remedial role. . . . Through a complete reversal of Western philosophy's most cherished trope, human societies have resigned themselves to playing the role of the dumb object, while nature has unexpectedly taken on that of the active subject! (2014: 12–13)

Similarly, Timothy Morton has observed that '[r]ight now, ecological awareness presents itself as tragedy' (2021: 27). Their invocation of the patterns of tragedy to describe the climate crisis has been corroborated by commentators who describe our current pandemic as a revenge tragedy, in which non-human life forms, viruses, now take revenge on humans for the human destruction of the plant and animal worlds (e.g. Narine 2015: 9). What is remarkable about the series *Station Eleven*, however, is that it goes beyond the tragic patterns of catastrophe usually employed in post-apocalyptic fiction, film and TV series. It contributed to the series' outstanding success that its post-pandemic tale of pervasive loss has offered strange comfort to spectators during the pandemic. This comfort partly derives, I argue, from its hopeful outlook on a post-apocalyptic future where human beings, despite their suffering, also manage to creatively respond to loss and grief in the spirit of romance.

Ecological theory is trying to grasp our current moment with new terminology such as 'pre-traumatic stress disorder' in the face of the ecological catastrophe to come, 'anticipated grief' over the losses that we and future generations will experience, 'ecological grief' over the losses we already experience and 'solastalgia' for the lost physical and mental wellbeing that we used to derive from a healthy environment.[7] Yet *Station Eleven* shows us a world in which the process of ecological destruction has been drastically slowed down, nature has reclaimed spaces of civilization and humans have managed to cope with, and even take pleasure in, their new frugal lives. As an 'exercise in "secondhand nonexperience"' (Heise 2008: 206), this speculative outlook helps us imagine a world beyond source depletion. Forensic spectators of *Station Eleven* will notice that the first episodes obliquely comment on the uneasiness of late capitalist consumers: to the sound of the screeching streetcar and

Jeevan's hyperventilating breathing during a panic attack, a shot shows an electrically lit train station that features posters for trips to the countryside with headlines such as 'Get out' (S01E01, 00:18); the series then inserts an eight-second shot of the same place shot from the same angle abandoned and overgrown by nature, with a soundtrack of chirping birds (S01E01, 00:18) before cutting back to the year 2020. *Station Eleven* repeats this technique of cross-cutting, which has an ambiguous effect on both worlds: on the one hand, the shots of renaturalized urban spaces devoid of humans indicate imminent mass death and the collapse of civilization, but on the other hand, the sun-lit, overgrown, abandoned city of the future has a peaceful, pastoral quality that offers a soothing alternative to the urban, increasingly chaotic and apocalyptic city life shown mainly at night, at winter, in blue colours and with stressfully loud noise.

In *Station Eleven*'s re-assemblage of leftover Shakespeare material, the shift from tragedy to the comedic happy ending typical of Shakespeare's romances, including family reunions and the return of those supposed dead, therefore also bears ecological significance. As ecological theory has pointed out, comedy patterns fit the ecological demands of our present and future much better than tragedy:

> The comic mode of human behavior represented in literature is the closest art has come to describing man as an adaptive animal. Comedy illustrates that survival depends upon man's ability to change himself rather than his environment, and upon his ability to accept limitations rather than to curse fate for limiting him. It is a strategy for living which agrees well with the demands of ecological wisdom. (Meeker 1996: 168–9)

Whereas tragedy culminates in (ecological) catastrophe, comedy allows for renewal, rethinking and rebirth (see also Dürbeck 2012: 4), and Shakespearean romance grants both the characters and spectators unexpected and undeserved rewards, reconciliations and reunions. *Station Eleven* has this utopian dimension of wish-fulfilment with 'the feel of a hypnotic fairy tale', as one reviewer put it (Metz 2021), which includes the complete dissolution of racism, sexism, classism and ableism. In the Travelling Symphony, which defines itself as a large family, non-binary and physically disabled characters as well as actors of different ethnicities live in

various queer relationships. In this regard, *Station Eleven* differs from many post-apocalyptic novels and films that 'fail to imagine new experiences of race, gender, and sexuality' and instead 'all too often reproduce conservative ideologies', as Barbara Gurr has shown (2015: 2).[8] While this imagination of a socially more inclusive and just future is explicit, the ecological significance of the series depends on the viewers' interest and skills in excavating the Anthropocene unconscious of its action, dialogues and visual imagery. As typical of complex TV, *Station Eleven* thus caters to audiences with different sensitivities and ideologies: it can be watched on the whole spectrum between a denial of, or at last a diversion from, our knowledge of climate change and relief from intense eco-anxiety. My ecocritical reading argues that the series invites us, in a meta-adaptational and meta-serial move, to reflect on techniques of adaptation as ecological survival skills that may help to imagine and build a future beyond the repetition compulsions of resource depletion and accelerating global warming.[9]

Despite the hopeful romance ending, the series leaves some mysteries and traumas unresolved, both on the individual and on the collective level. For instance, Kirsten works her way back to the traumatic losses of Jeevan, Frank and Arthur, but she never remembers her biological parents in flashbacks or ever talks about them. *Station Eleven*'s serialized working through thus leaves its protagonist in the finale 'that within which passeth show' – and thus, room for audiences to speculate about her past as well as about a potential continuation of the series. Given the open political interpretation of *Station Eleven*, the mise-en-scene of the final shot is noteworthy, which shows Kirsten and Jeevan's leave-taking at a fork in the woods after they had been miraculously reunited at the airport. Read as a symptom of either the Anthropocene unconscious or of climate trauma, this image signals that the rebuilt post-apocalyptic human communities are at a crossroads regarding their reactivation of modernity's leftovers: they have to decide whether they will tread the same path of developing once more a full-blown, ecologically exploitative civilization or whether they will choose a different way. Shakespeare's serial reactivations may help them to decide and may help us to reflect on how we feel about this decision.

Notes

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2 See Brown's discussion of the novel and previous post-apocalyptic fiction that engages with Shakespeare (Brown 2019).

3 See Wittreich 1984 and Poole 2019 for discussion of *King Lear*'s apocalyptic imagery.

4 Presenting a young woman with multiple parents as survivor of a humanitarian catastrophe and modelling her situation on Hamlet's, *Station Eleven* ties in with other recent serial *Hamlet* adaptations, for instance, *Black Earth Rising* (BBC and Netflix 2018), which explores the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide (see Wald 2020: 137–86).

5 As Bernard has pointed out, this contagious quality of Shakespeare's plays is part of *Hamlet*'s metatheatrical commentary on early modern antitheatrical anxieties (2019: 225).

6 In this respect as well, the troupe takes up early modern theatre practice. As Rose has pointed out in her ecocritical reading of *The Tempest*, the 'ecology of salvage extends from the fiction of *The Tempest* to the stage materials, garments, hand properties and set pieces, which were recycled from prior early modern contexts into theatre storehouses and then onto the stage' (2017: 272).

7 See Craps' excellent overview over these concepts (Craps 2020).

8 In Mandel's novel, as far as readers can tell, the maintenance of the Shakespeare heritage is predominantly a white preoccupation as well, which has led Thurman to conclude, '[i]f Shakespeare survives the apocalypse, so too does whiteness' (2015: 59). The series' multi-ethnic cast differs from the novel and is particularly relevant since the travelling company may also invoke for audiences the touring troupes that brought Shakespeare's plays to the British colonies as a means of imposing British art and values (Thurman 2015: 59; Smith 2016: 298–300). The colonial legacy and racism that characterized the world in 2020 seem, however, to be dissolved in the post-apocalyptic world of 2040.

9 My reading thus seeks to contribute to the nascent field of ecocritical adaptation studies as recently sketched by Meikle and Geal. While Meikle states that 'the study of adaptation needs to be joined with the study of political ecology in the age of climate change' (2021: 265), Geal points out that ecocritical adaptation studies, opposed to intermedial ecocriticism with a synchronic perspective, can take into account historical and transcultural comparison to discuss 'how human attitudes to various aspects of the non-human world around us change and adapt through time and space' (2023: 6). Studying post-apocalyptic adaptations as nodes of the Shakespeare rhizome that spans centuries and cultures across the globe is one way of contributing to this research.

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