THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF SHAKESPEARE ON SCREEN IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

by

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ABSTRACT

The thesis explores twenty-first-century adaptations and appropriations of Shakespeare on screen, spanning cinema, television and online productions. It considers how a range of screen productions, spanning different mediums, aesthetics, languages and intended audiences, create cultural artefacts of the times in which they were made.

The opening three chapters explore representations of British national identity, and how adaptations of different Shakespeare plays have reflected, interrogated and unpicked 'Britishness' in the opening decades of the 2000s. These chapters consider in turn: the BBC series *The Hollow Crown: The Wars of the Roses* (dir. Cooke, 2016) and its existence within the cultural moment of Britain's vote to leave the EU; the different approaches to adapting *Coriolanus* in Ralph Fiennes's 2011 Hollywood-style action film and Ben Wheatley's disorienting anti-Hollywood deconstruction of the play in *Happy New Year, Colin Burstead* (2018), set in post-Brexit Britain; and the ways in which British culture, heritage and nostalgia are woven into adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* in Kelly Asbury's 2011 computer-animated film *Gnomeo & Juliet* and Carlo Carlei's 2013 film, scripted by Julian Fellowes.

The closing three chapters analyse screen adaptations through the lens of metamodernism, a structure of feeling proposed as the twenty-first-century successor to late twentieth-century postmodernism, which oscillates between sensibilities characterised by postmodern irony and detachment and a return to sincerity and affective connection. These chapters consider in turn: adaptations of *King Lear* in *The King is Alive* (dir. Levring, 2000) and *Lear's Shadow* (dir. Elerding, 2018), and how they reclaim the play from its position of bleakness and nihilism during the closing decades of the twentieth century; the intersections of documentary authenticity and cinematic artifice in two non-Anglophone films, *Makibefo* (dir. Abela, 2000) and *Caesar Must Die* (dirs. Taviani and Taviani, 2012), which adapt *Macbeth*

and *Julius Caesar* respectively; and the ways in which *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was adapted in four different online productions created in 2020 under lockdown restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, which blend postmodern pop culture referentiality with affective sincerity.

Throughout all six chapters, the thesis analyses the ways in which screen adaptations of Shakespeare – within the related but distinct media of film, television and digital theatre – have responded to the cultural and historical moment surrounding their production. It also explores what Shakespeare is doing within these mediums, and the ways in which the adaptive potential and cultural capital of Shakespeare on screen has developed from its position at the end of the twentieth century.

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INTRODUCTION

Roger Ebert – one of the most influential and recognisable names in film criticism and journalism – once described movies as 'the most powerful empathy machine in all the arts', and asserted that '[t]he great movies enlarge us, they civilise us, they make us more decent people' (2005). His idea of cinema as an 'empathy machine' emphasises the power of the moving image to make audiences feel a broader range of emotion, to experience a wider perspective, than they might during their everyday lives. According to Ebert,

> perhaps the most important thing a movie can do … [is] take us outside our personal box of time and space, and invite us to empathize with those of other times, places, races, creeds, classes and prospects. I believe empathy is the most essential quality of civilization. (2010)

Ebert's focus is on the viewer as recipient, but the 'empathy machine' works both ways. Whilst cinema has the power to transport audience members 'outside [their] personal box of time and space', it equally bestows upon the director, actor, visual effects artist – or anyone whose work and creative influence goes into making a movie – the power to transport the viewer to a 'box' of their choosing, to make them experience something of the feelings of a person whose 'box' might be very different to their own.

It is worth pausing also on Ebert's use of the term 'movie' (which I have followed in the above paragraph for consistency), a primarily US English synonym for 'film', the term more commonly used in British English. However, as Russell Jackson notes, '[a]lthough "film" remains in common usage as a generic term, digital technology has made it inaccurate when applied to work no longer shot, edited or distributed on chemically coated celluloid' (2020, p. 1). This obsolescence does not apply in the same way to 'movie', however, which is originally

a contraction of ‘moving picture’; whether shot using celluloid or digital technology, the resultant picture by its very nature still moves. Whilst Ebert’s original sense is clearly focused upon cinema, his use of the term ‘movie’ indirectly opens up his analogy to the wider field of moving image media to include television and online productions. This breaking down of the distinctions between different forms of moving image media is in keeping with current trends, as ‘rapid developments in the distribution and consumption of audio-visual products have reduced distinctions between what is viewed in the home and what is seen in public’ (ibid.).

Whilst Ebert argues for moving image media to be considered the most powerful of all ‘empathy machines’, I would argue that Shakespeare is an equally potent machine. Douglas Lanier argues that ‘both popular culture and avant-garde performance have transgressed and redrawn the boundary of what can constitute “Shakespeare” with ever-greater insistence … in response to a newly powerful cultural dominant in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century’ (2011, p. 145). Consequently, Shakespeare – the canon, the body of interpretations and performances arising from them, and the wider international phenomenon – has arguably become a more powerful empathy machine than ever as its cultural reach has continued to extend. Ewan Fernie describes Shakespeare as ‘primarily a contemporary dramatist and writer, because he is currently taught, read and performed on a global scale unmatched by any other author’, and argues that Shakespeare ‘is more embedded in our modern world than he ever was in the Renaissance’ (2007, p. 175). Fernie further suggests that ‘Shakespeare’s presence is built out of the range of human presences to which he lends dramatic life … Shakespeare makes his own way into the present only inasmuch as his characters come alive here’ (ibid., p. 177). Those adapting and performing Shakespeare around the world in the twenty-first century feel empowered to express themselves by the opportunities afforded by his characters and their stories, putting their own stamp on a play to say something about their own ‘box of time and space’. Productions resonate with audiences not through the plays’ early modern context or

original historical settings, but through the 'human presences' within them and the ways in which they are performed and adapted to reflect the experiences of people the audience recognise in the world today.

When Shakespeare's works are adapted through moving image media, the combined force of these two empathy machines, powerful in their own right, can logically be considered to be amplified further still. It is apt that the earliest surviving example of moving-image Shakespeare – a fragment from 1899 of Herbert Beerbohm Tree's performance as the title character of *King John* – is characterised by extreme emotion. James Ellison argues that '[t]he core of Tree's approach was to make John (played by himself) into a more interesting and sympathetic figure' than he had been earlier in the nineteenth century, and that 'we see the legacy of this approach on the screen' (2007, p. 299). Judith Buchanan describes Tree's John as 'writhing in pain, earnestly mouthing inaudible words, gripping his chair, frantically wiping his hand to rid himself of Prince Henry's solicitous attentions, clutching at his chest, stretching out his arms in despair and eventually dying with histrionic ceremony' (2005, p. 22). Stripped of sound, colour and the events of the play leading up to it, Tree's performance of John's death becomes a wordless vignette of sensation, compelling the audience to empathise with the dying king in his final moments.

Over one hundred and twenty years later, Joel Coen brought another of Shakespeare's kings to life on screen in *The Tragedy of Macbeth* (2021), this time with sound but once again in black and white – a choice by Coen, rather than a technological limitation as in Tree's film. Whilst Coen's stark monochrome and striking cinematography were lauded by critics, ultimately it was the performances of his cast – particularly those of Denzel Washington and Frances McDormand as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth respectively – that were afforded the highest praise. A. O. Scott's *New York Times* review offers a key example:

> The Macbeths may be ruthless political schemers, but there is a tenderness between them that is disarming, and that makes them more vivid, more interesting, than the more cautious and diligent politicians who surround them. … Washington, whose trajectory from weary, diffident soldier to raving, self-immolating maniac is astonishing to behold. (2021)

Tree's *King John* and Coen's *The Tragedy of Macbeth* may be separated by more than a century, but the focus on empathetic engagement in Buchanan and Scott's respective responses to the two films is noteworthy. In both films, it is the power of Shakespeare and cinema in synergy that is fundamental to empathetically engaging the audience, transporting them from their own 'box' to a different one of the filmmaker's creation.

Roland Barthes argues that 'every text is eternally written *here and now*', and is formed of 'a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture' (1977, pp. 145, 146, original emphasis). Barthes's hypothesis was formulated with literary texts in mind, but is equally applicable to moving image texts, as exemplified in the Shakespearean films of Tree and Coen. As well as demonstrating the empathetic power of both Shakespeare and the moving image, both films also offer examples of how screen adaptations of Shakespeare reflect the wider cultural moment of their creation. Ellison describes Tree's John as 'a gothic, decadent interpretation of the character … [which] was very much in tune with the *fin-de-siècle* anxieties and vulnerabilities of late Victorian Britain' (2007, p. 302). He notes that it 'was first shown amid great emotion at contemporary events' towards the end of 1899 – specifically the outbreak of the Boer War in South Africa; and a miscarriage of justice in France, known as the Dreyfus Affair, which was rooted in antisemitism (ibid., p. 311). Ellison argues that the filmed scene from Tree's *King John* 'may have been puzzling to many, but to some it must have formed a simple but timely comment on tyranny versus just government, and the pursuit of morality in national and international affairs' (ibid.). Whilst the audience's reaction cannot be known to

the degree of certainty that Ellison asserts, he nonetheless highlights the way in which Tree's *King John* reflects the late nineteenth century moment from which it emerged.

Coen's *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, meanwhile, has been linked to the cultural moment of the COVID-19 pandemic. Gregory M. Colón Semenza argues that '[w]hat makes [the film] so compelling in a time of plague is its explicit, methodical interest in the ways our stories are transformed by the physical and mental spaces in which we encounter them' (2022, p. 310). Similarly, Jeffrey Wilson observes how the majority of people watching Coen's film 'are not in a theater with 300 other people' but 'in [their] own homes', suggesting that experiencing the film is 'not a communal social, artistic event; it's a very solitary one' (quoted in Walsh, 2022). Wilson continues

> [T]here are going to be the moments of reflection where you just sit with yourself and think some things through. 'Macbeth' is really a play about the darkness. And a lot of people have had some dark experiences in the past couple of years. … [F]or those two hours of [Coen's film], you can lean into the danger and the trouble and the difficulty of the world. (ibid.)

Importantly, Tree's *King John* is not *about* the Boer War or the Dreyfus Affair, just as Coen's *The Tragedy of Macbeth* is equally not *about* the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, the films implicitly reflect the respective socio-historical moments of their creation through the aesthetic, directorial and adaptive choices made. The two films capture the Zeitgeist to offer cultural artefacts of the late nineteenth century and early 2020s respectively.

Terence Hawkes asserts that '[w]e use [Shakespeare's plays] in order to generate meaning. … Shakespeare doesn't mean: *we* mean *by* Shakespeare' (1992, p. 3, original emphasis). It is this 'meaning' which is captured in each screen adaptation of Shakespeare, offering a cultural artefact of the time, place and socio-historical context in which it was

conceived, created and consumed. Shakespeare on screen is able to create cultural artefacts in a way Shakespeare on stage cannot. Theatre is fundamentally ephemeral, reflecting the cultural moment of the production uniquely during each performance. When the production ends, the moment passes. It is captured only in the subjective recollections of those who saw it, and any physical paratexts such as programmes and photographs. In contrast, screen Shakespeare creates permanence: a tangible document either of a cinematically adapted, constructed and edited production, or of a moment in time captured through the moving image.

Throughout this thesis, I aim to explore the cultural significance of twenty-first-century adaptations and appropriations of Shakespeare on screen, considering how a range of productions – spanning different mediums, aesthetics, languages and intended audiences – create cultural artefacts of the times in which they were made. Whilst the thesis takes this as its central premise, my argument is presented across two connected but distinct concepts. The first section of the thesis focuses upon the idea of cultural identity, exploring representations of British national identity and how screen adaptations of different Shakespeare plays have reflected, interrogated and unpicked 'Britishness' in the opening decades of the 2000s. The second section of the thesis takes the concept of cultural sensibility as its focus. The chapters in this section analyse screen Shakespeares from across the globe through the lens of metamodernism, a structure of feeling proposed as the twenty-first-century successor to late twentieth-century postmodernism, which oscillates between sensibilities characterised by postmodern irony, depthlessness and detachment and a return to sincerity, depth and affective connection. These two sections are made up of three chapters each, and their discrete focuses are presented in more detail in separate introductions which begin each section.

Whilst each section has its own focus, together they form the singular focus of this thesis – that of the cultural significance of Shakespeare on screen during the twenty-first century so far. The aim of the thesis is to analyse the ways in which screen adaptations of

Shakespeare – within the related but distinct media of film, television and digital theatre – have responded to the cultural and historical moments surrounding their production. The thesis also explores what Shakespeare is doing within these mediums, and the ways in which the adaptive potential and cultural capital of Shakespeare on screen has developed from its 'sudden contemporary renaissance' in the final decade of the twentieth century (Boose and Burt, 1997, p. 14). Put simply, this thesis attempts to identify and explore the 'meaning', as identified by Hawkes, in a range of twenty-first-century screen Shakespeares; and, returning to Ebert's analogy once again, to unpack the empathetic and culturally resonant 'box' to which each screen adaptation attempts to transfer its audience.

SECTION 1: CULTURAL AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

On 27 July 2012, Kenneth Branagh stepped onto a stage in London and performed lines written by William Shakespeare. On the surface, this statement appears unremarkable. However, Branagh was not performing as a Shakespearean character, but as nineteenth-century civil engineer Isambard Kingdom Brunel. The stage was not in London's theatre district, but in the centre of the Olympic Stadium in Stratford. And neither the in-person audience, nor those watching at home on television, were there to see a Shakespeare production, but the opening ceremony of the 2012 Summer Olympics directed by Danny Boyle. Branagh as Brunel appeared as one of what L. Monique Pittman describes as an 'abundance of heart-thumping metonyms for Britain' (2015). He recited Caliban's full 'Be not afeard' speech (*The Tempest*, 3.2.136-144)[1] near the start of the ceremony at the base of a replica of the Glastonbury Tor, whilst Elgar's 'Nimrod' variation played behind him. 'Standing in as a metonym for the Great Poet', argues Pittman, 'Branagh in many ways replicated the manner in which Shakespeare serves as a metonym for Great Britain' (2015). Erin Sullivan goes further, arguing that, during Branagh's performance of Caliban's speech in particular, 'Shakespeare was working overtime, standing in as a symbol of British cultural prestige, social inclusion, national achievement, creative potential and citizen empowerment all at once' (2013, p. 5). Indeed, rather than being a lone reference, Shakespeare permeated the whole ceremony, entitled 'Isles of Wonder', which took *The Tempest* as its inspiration. The ceremony's writer, Frank Cottrell Boyce, states that 'Shakespeare was ambient … it's not like we were trying to get Shakespeare in, he's just

[1] All quotations from Shakespeare's plays throughout the thesis refer to *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works* (2021), R. Proudfoot, A. Thompson, D. S. Kastan and H.R. Woudhuysen (eds), London: Bloomsbury Arden.

there, part of the cultural air that we breathe' (quoted in Prescott and Sullivan, 2015, pp. 45-46).

Widening her focus to both the Olympic and Paralympic ceremonies of 2012, Sullivan notes how 'Shakespeare became a repeated point of focus in the desire to celebrate British creativity and the influence it has subsequently had on the rest of the world' (2013, p. 7). It is undeniable that Shakespeare is now a global phenomenon, with his plays performed, translated and studied around the world. However, the prominent presence of Shakespeare's work as a symbol of Britishness in the 2012 ceremonies offers a compelling example of Shakespeare's continuing status as a symbol of British cultural and national identity in the twenty-first century. This status is of course not new. Willy Maley argues that '"Shakespeare" and "Britain" have grown up together, their fortunes entangled' (2006, p. 489). Maley's placement of both 'Shakespeare' and 'Britain' into inverted commas is noteworthy, highlighting how both have taken on meanings beyond the historical person of Shakespeare and the geographical and political entity of Britain. His suggestion is that Shakespeare's legacy, influence and near-mythical cultural status, and British history, society and national identity, have been – and continue to be – intrinsically linked. Tracing the entanglement of Shakespeare and Britain back to the publication of the First Folio in 1623, Michael Dobson draws attention to the elegy written by Ben Jonson that was included as part of the book's preface – 'Triumph, my Britain, thou hast one to show / To whom all scenes of Europe homage owe' – arguing that, with the publication of the poem and this couplet in particular, 'Shakespeare and British national identity came to be understood as inseparable, with the artistic achievement of the Complete Works nationalized … as an exemplary triumph of Britain itself' (2000, p. 40). Sullivan contends that '[s]ince the eighteenth century "Brand Shakespeare" and "Brand Britain" [have] been intimately linked, with the boy from Warwickshire and his exceptional writings being co-opted to stand for British talent, influence and might' (2013, p. 9).

The moving image too has been linked to British national identity since the early days of cinema. Sarah Street identifies

> the cultural conception of what we mean by British films: the extent to which they participate in establishing nationhood as a distinct, familiar sense of belonging which is shared by people from different social and regional backgrounds. We have inherited a dominant conception of what it is to be British, a collective consciousness about nationhood which has, in part, been constructed by cultural referents, including cinema. (2009, p. 1)

With Shakespeare also playing a foundational role in the history of the moving image, Shakespeare, cinema and Britishness can be considered to be almost inseparably intertwined. Street notes how 'British culture is steeped in nostalgia', and suggests that 'British films are seen to offer cultural commentary about the contemporary mobilisation of the past' (ibid., pp. 127-128). The screen history of *Henry V* offers a significant example of such nostalgia and mobilisation. In describing the first two major cinematic adaptations of the play, Eugene McNamee asserts that Laurence Olivier's 1944 film 'was made as a straightforward propaganda exercise to rally the troops and the people of Britain in the face of Nazi aggression', whereas Kenneth Branagh's 1989 film 'came after the Falklands War, a conflict which more directly echoes the narrative of the play in that it sought to establish a claim to non-national territory by force' (2004, p. 19).

The thread of tying screen *Henry V*s to Britain's military and colonial history continues with Thea Sharrock's feature-length television adaptation, the final episode of the first series of *The Hollow Crown* (2012), a co-production by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), US media corporation NBCUniversal, and Sam Mendes's production company Neal Street Productions. Dan Leberg argues that

> As transnational Quality Television, *The Hollow Crown* prefers the safety of a political middleground to being perceived as too radical or too tame, a preference that risks normalizing classical colonial power structures within an allegedly-authoritative interpretation … [Tom] Hiddleston's Henry V capitalizes on the Quality of Shakespeare's drama by hinting at the contemporary politics of pre-emptive war and imperialism, but only from a safe and marketable distance that preserves the traditional veneration of the character as a virtuous Christian hero. (2018, pp. 29, 30)

Such cut-and-dried political readings of these films are far from unequivocal, however. For example, Russell Jackson suggests that 'to label [Olivier's film] as "propaganda" is a simplification', describing it as an adaptation 'at once escapist and in touch with the reality of its audience's experience' which 'participates in the renegotiation of the discourses of masculinity, social relationships and national identity that the conflict [the Second World War] made inevitable' (2007, p. 71). Moreover, Jackson describes Branagh's film as 'consciously responsive to at least some of the spirit of its own age', but argues that 'the question is surely one of resonance rather than (as with Olivier) any political or propagandistic intention' (2014, pp. 119, 118). Similarly, Ramona Wray argues for Mendes as producer to be considered as an 'auteur' who 'exhibits a continuing concern with male bodies in situations of weakness or vulnerability' in his wider cinematic work; and that 'Mendes inscribes himself on *The Hollow Crown* with a discernible signature and in such a way as to unmoor Shakespeare's histories from any easily identifiable triumphalist emphasis' (2016, p. 476). Whilst the historical and political motivations of the screen *Henry V*s of Olivier, Branagh and Sharrock are open to interpretation, each adaptation presents a cultural artefact of their respective moments of creation, demonstrating the ways in which one Shakespeare play can embody Britishness in different forms at different times.

The three chapters which make up the opening section of this thesis present analyses of a range of film and television Shakespeares that appeared in the second decade of the twenty-first century. Whilst not the only contributing factor, the British public vote to leave the European Union – commonly referred to as 'Brexit' – including both the years leading up to the referendum in 2016 and its ongoing aftermath, was central to the shaping of British national identity in this period. Richard T. Ashcroft and Mark Bevir identify 'a consistent discursive connection between Brexit and British national identity', and describe Brexit as 'the latest stage in a debate over national identity that has been ongoing since 1945, when decolonization led to a series of changes that radically altered Britain' (2020, p. 121). Each chapter in this section explores adaptations of a specific play – or series of plays – in order to interrogate the ways in which they create cultural artefacts of British culture and identity during the moment of their creation. Chapter 1 takes as its focus the adaptation of the *Henry VI* plays in *The Hollow Crown: The Wars of the Roses* (dir. Cooke, 2016), the second series of *The Hollow Crown* broadcast by the BBC in the year of the Brexit vote. It explores the history of these plays being adapted for television throughout the second half of the twentieth century to reflect periods in which British national identity was perceived to be in crisis, and how the second series of *The Hollow Crown* continues this legacy in the twenty-first century. Chapter 2 explores two cinematic adaptations of *Coriolanus*: Ralph Fiennes's 2011 film *Coriolanus*, and Ben Wheatley's 2018 film *Happy New Year, Colin Burstead*. The chapter explores the ways in which both films incorporate influences from different cinematic traditions, most notably the Hollywood action and war genres in the case of Fiennes's film, and auteur-led British comedy-drama in Wheatley's film, and how these are used to adapt Shakespeare's play to reflect national identity in the years following significant socio-political events – the Brexit vote in *Colin Burstead*, and the 2003-2011 Iraq War in Fiennes's film. Chapter 3 analyses the ways in which *Romeo and Juliet* is adapted in the 2013 film directed by Carlo Carlei and produced by Julian Fellowes,

who also wrote the screenplay; and Kelly Asbury's 2011 computer-animated film *Gnomeo & Juliet*. Both films are made with the intent to make *Romeo and Juliet* accessible to a young audience, but they also offer adaptations of the play which engage with concepts of Britishness and how they are tied to Shakespearean performance in the twenty-first century in markedly different ways. Where Carlei's film upholds elitist and exclusionary attitudes through reinforcing concepts of 'traditional' approaches to Shakespeare and British identity, Asbury engages with British cultural kitsch to destabilise these concepts.

The screen adaptations across these first three chapters encompass a variety of media, genres and intended audiences, but share a common thread of presenting Anglophone adaptations of Shakespeare with strong connections to culture and identity in twenty-first-century Britain. In this sense, they demonstrate the way in which Shakespeare has continued 'working overtime', to borrow Sullivan's phrase, in British moving image media, and how his works and influence continue to be 'part of the cultural air that we breathe' as Cottrell Boyce suggests. Together, they demonstrate the multifarious ways in which Shakespeare continues to offer a powerful and attractive channel for writers and directors to convey their feelings and experiences of British culture and identity, and offer compelling cultural artefacts of twenty-first-century Britain.

CHAPTER 1:

REFLECTING BREXIT BRITAIN THROUGH THE FIRST TETRALOGY IN THE BBC'S *THE HOLLOW CROWN: THE WARS OF THE ROSES*

Shakespeare's first tetralogy of English history plays – the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III* – are overtly political in the historical power struggles they dramatize. Significantly, they have also been reflective of contemporary politics since they were first written and performed. It is likely no accident that *Richard III* concludes with a period of monarchical instability being ended through the crowning of Henry VII, the grandfather of Elizabeth I, as Shakespeare and his collaborators were writing at a time when questions were increasingly being asked of what would happen in England upon the death of the aging, childless queen. As the plays have been adapted in successive centuries, they have continually been reshaped by writers and directors to comment on the politics of the time. Arguably the first to do this was Restoration dramatist John Crowne, whose 1680 play *The Misery of Civil War* closely adapted the second and third parts of *Henry VI* – despite dishonestly stating in the Prologue that 'by his feeble skill 'tis built alone, / The Divine Shakespeare did not lay one Stone'. Barbara Murray notes that *The Misery of Civil War* was performed against 'the continuing unsettling nature of the social and political climate' of the Exclusion Crisis during the reign of Charles II, during which 'fear seems to have been cultivated at all levels'; and that 'it was a very bold playwright indeed who would choose in that season not only to open a play with a rebellious Jack Cade but also to take full responsibility for it' (2001, p. 135).

Whilst *Richard III* has enjoyed more consistent popularity, Stuart Hampton-Reeves and Carol Chillington Rutter assert that 'on the English stage, [the *Henry VI* plays] are among the most marginal and least seen of all Shakespeare's plays' and that '[o]f all the canon, they are the plays least performed outside of England' (2006, p. 1). Roger Warren argues, however, that the *Henry VI* plays 'have come fully into their own since the end of the Second World War' due to their 'uncompromising violence … from which earlier generations had shrunk', and that they 'dramatize contemporary as much as Elizabethan issues: the struggle for power, the manoeuvres of politicians [and] social unrest' (2008, p. 1). Christopher Ivic argues that *2 Henry VI* and *3 Henry VI* in particular 'are traumatic rather than patriotic, staging a multitude of transgressions … that are represented as a threat to England'; whilst Randall Martin describes *3 Henry VI* as a play in which 'a nation turns on itself in epidemic savagery, dissolving its own social foundations' (2013, p. 239; 2008, p. 1). Hampton-Reeves and Rutter describe the three parts of *Henry VI* as 'plays that put England at the edge of chaos and contemplate questions of national identity from the marginal position of imminent disaster', linking their revival since the mid-twentieth century to 'a wider anxiety about the nature and authenticity of Englishness itself, which … has been in crisis since the *de facto* end of Empire after the Second World War' (2006, p. 1). During the second half of the twentieth century, the first tetralogy became the dark counterpoint to the second tetralogy – *Richard II*, the two parts of *Henry VI* and *Henry V* – for which 'mid-twentieth-century orthodoxy was to see an arc … toward the making of the nation, with *Henry V* a brief apogee' (Morse, 2014, p. 16). In contrast, the *Henry VI* plays have been imbued with their own orthodoxy during the same time period. If the second tetralogy is about the making of the nation, with *Henry V* as the zenith of this story, then the first three plays of the first tetralogy focus upon the breaking of the nation, with *Richard III* the brutal nadir.

Whilst *Richard III* has received two major big screen adaptations in the twentieth century – Laurence Olivier's 1955 film, in which he also played the title role; and Richard Loncraine's 1995 film with Ian McKellen as Richard – none of the *Henry VI* plays have yet been adapted into feature films, most likely due to their relative obscurity for mainstream audiences (although both Olivier and Loncraine included lines and events from *3 Henry VI* in their films). It is notable therefore that the BBC has televised adaptations of the first tetralogy on four separate occasions. The broadcaster's relationship with the cycle began with *An Age of Kings* (dir. Hayes, 1960), a fifteen-part serialisation of both the first and second tetralogies, with the closing seven episodes based upon the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*. Five years later, the BBC broadcast *The Wars of the Roses* (dirs. Midgley and Hayes, 1965), John Barton and Peter Hall's conflation of the four plays into a trilogy, originally performed in 1963 by the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) in Stratford-upon-Avon. The first tetralogy was next adapted as part of the *BBC Television Shakespeare* series, broadcast between 1978 and 1985, through a sequence of adaptations directed by Jane Howell transmitted over four Sundays in January 1983. The most recent BBC adaptation of the first tetralogy – and the one upon which this chapter is primarily focused – is *The Hollow Crown: The Wars of the Roses*, directed by Dominic Cooke from an adapted screenplay by Cooke and Ben Power. The series was central to the BBC's 2016 'Shakespeare Festival', a month-long season of programming to mark four hundred years since Shakespeare's death. Executive produced by Sam Mendes, *The Hollow Crown: The Wars of the Roses* features a cast of high-profile actors from film, television and stage including Judi Dench, Hugh Bonneville and Sally Hawkins, and led by Benedict Cumberbatch as Richard. The series offers a continuation from the 2012 series *The*

Hollow Crown,[2] which was based on the second tetralogy and featured a cast of similarly recognisable names including Patrick Stewart, Ben Whishaw and Tom Hiddleston.

Whilst the BBC's Shakespeare Festival was broadcast as part of Shakespeare's quatercentenary, this milestone was overshadowed by the unfolding political events of the first half of 2016, which ultimately saw the British public vote to leave the European Union – widely referred to as 'Brexit'. Political debates, current affairs programmes, news reports and referendum broadcasts from 'Vote Leave' and 'Britain Stronger In Europe' – the official 'Leave' and 'Remain' campaigns respectively – were a near-constant presence in television schedules alongside *Hollow Crown* Series Two when it was first broadcast over three Saturday evenings in May 2016. The broadcast scheduling ties the BBC's Shakespeare Festival to the cultural moment of the Brexit campaign by temporal proximity at the very least. However, as Kinga Földváry suggests with regard to *Hollow Crown* Series Two in particular:

> [W]ith the advantage of historical hindsight, one can hardly fail to wonder how the broadcast of the second cycle, dominated by a haunting sense of an internally divided kingdom, ruled by manipulative and monstrous monarchs, just preceded the Brexit referendum, when British identity and the country's relationship to Europe was at its most uncertain. (2020, p. 108)

Whilst the political machinations of the fifteenth century ruling classes, and the battles and bloodshed that occurred as a result, cannot be considered to correlate directly with Britain's twenty-first-century vote to leave the EU, the echoes of a divided country and fractured national identity noted by Földváry cannot be denied. Reading Russell Foster's description of 'Brexit Britain' three years after the vote to leave, the parallels with the contention between the houses

[2] Hereafter in this chapter, *The Hollow Crown* and *The Hollow Crown: The Wars of the Roses* will be referred to as 'Series One' and 'Series Two' respectively, in order to clearly distinguish the two series from each other; and to distinguish the second series from other adaptations of the first tetralogy which have used 'Wars of the Roses' in their titles.

of York and Lancaster in his characterisation of 'Leavers' and 'Remainers' – those who voted for and against Brexit respectively – are potent:

> In the new, poisonous political atmosphere of Brexit Britain, two nations inhabit the same space. … Both of these nations exhibit the traditional tropes of nationalism – an imagined community, a whitewashed and selective version of history, a belief in a collective destiny, and a visible intolerance to outsiders. In Brexit Britain, the 'outsider' is not merely the EU or Islam, but the opposing nation of Leavers or Remainers, each of which is imagined to be incompatible with, and anathema to, the other, and thereby unwelcome in the same nation. The result is an intolerant climate in which two nationalisms … struggle to neutralise the other, and as the contest is based not in the quantifiable realm of economics or policy but in the vague, fluid and amorphous realm of identity, the Manichean struggle between Leavers and Remainers cannot be won by either side. (2019, p. 69)

Hollow Crown Series Two is not alone in being linked to a particular moment in British history: each of the twentieth-century BBC adaptations of the first tetralogy identifiably provide a cultural artefact of the respective times in which they were made by reflecting the contemporary social and political landscape – and by extension the national identity – of Britain. Patricia Lennox describes *An Age of Kings* as 'a post-World War II celebration of national idealism moderated by knowledge of the human cost of war'; whereas Susanne Greenhalgh considers it to be 'a narratively gripping power play rather than a conservative pageant, presenting a vision of politics in tune with current international events' (2001, p. 237; 2017, p. 425). Whilst these interpretations differ, the influence of post-war politics and national identity upon the series is clear. *The Wars of the Roses*, broadcast only five years after *An Age of Kings*, reflects the shifting politics of contemporary Britain and beyond. Hall describes how he 'became more and more fascinated by the contortions of politicians, and by the corrupting

seductions experienced by anybody who wields power', and 'became convinced that a presentation of one of the bloodiest and most hypocritical periods in history would teach many lessons about the present' (Barton and Hall, 1970, p. x). Translated to the screen by the BBC, the recorded production offers 'a sense of arrogant, self-centred swagger in a senseless political maelstrom' in which '[t]here seems little attempt by the characters to understand the meaning of what is going on – politically or morally' (Manheim, 1994, pp. 131, 132). Similarly, Howell's quartet of adaptations for the *BBC Television Shakespeare* series were 'filmed from September 1981 to April 1982 … turbulent months which saw, on both the national and world stage, political assassinations, war, violent protests and jubilant street parties – all potent cultural material for any production of *Henry VI*', creating adaptations which 'took Shakespeare's exploration of political factions and their impact on society and made out of them a contemporary parable that continues to strike a chord' (Hampton-Reeves and Rutter 2006, pp. 124, 118). Despite these 'turbulent' times, Michael Manheim suggests that Howell 'seems rooted in an outlook, identifiable most recently with the immediate post-Vietnam War period, that has not given up on the human spirit' (1994, p. 132).

Just as the BBC's twentieth-century adaptations of the first tetralogy reflected the changing British national identity through the influence of the months and years leading up to their broadcast, *Hollow Crown* Series Two can similarly be considered to be influenced by the socio-political shifts during the years in which it was filmed and televised to become a cultural artefact of early twenty-first-century Britain. Whilst Britain voted 'Leave' in 2016, 'Brexit is the expression of conflicts which have been building in the electorate for decades, not their cause' (Sobolewska and Ford, 2020, p. 2). The term 'Brexit' has been in usage since 2012, predating Prime Minister David Cameron's pledge in January 2013 to hold a referendum on Britain's membership of the EU if the Conservative Party was re-elected ('Brexit, *n.*', 2022; 'David Cameron', 2013). The victory of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) in the European

Parliament election of May 2014 – the first win in a national election for the forthrightly Eurosceptic party, and the first time neither the Labour nor Conservative parties had won such an election since 1910 – demonstrated the growing appetite amongst the British public for Brexit (Wintour and Watt, 2014). The casting of Cumberbatch in *Hollow Crown* Series Two was announced a month before UKIP's victory, and by October 2014 principal photography on the series had begun (Barraclough, 2014; 'Principal photography', 2014). The production period for the series therefore overlapped with the years leading up to Brexit, providing Cooke's serialisation of the first tetralogy with its own 'turbulent months' of 'potent cultural material' in a manner which powerfully echoes the filming of Howell's adaptations in particular during the early 1980s. Whether consciously or subconsciously, the political developments which formed a backdrop to *Hollow Crown* Series Two's production likely impacted on Cooke and Power's adaptation of the first tetralogy.

With the *Henry VI* plays in particular having been linked since at least the mid-twentieth century to ideas of a crisis of national identity, it is impossible to deny the timeliness of the BBC's latest adaptation of this cycle of plays in reflecting the social and cultural character of Britain at a time of significant political upheaval when the nation's identity was being reshaped once again. This chapter presents an exploration of the adaptation of the *Henry VI* plays within *Hollow Crown* Series Two through the lens of Brexit as a tipping point in Britain's national identity, exploring how the first two episodes of the series crystallize the cultural and socio-political Zeitgeist of Brexit Britain through the adaptational and filmic choices made Cooke and Power. It also makes the argument for *Hollow Crown* Series Two to be seen as a cultural successor to *An Age of Kings, The Wars of the Roses* and Howell's first tetralogy adaptations, offering close analysis of how specific scenes from the *Henry VI* plays are adapted – or omitted – in all four productions. In doing so, this chapter demonstrates the adaptation of the *Henry VI* plays within *Hollow Crown* Series Two as the most recent point in a line of screen adaptations

of the plays to capture the tensions and crises simmering within the national identity, articulating how the small-screen history of the *Henry VI* plays offers insight into the changing national identity of Britain across the past six decades.

1.1 'Hung be the heavens with black' (*1 Henry VI*, 1.1.1)

The funeral of Henry V as presented in act 1 scene 1 of *1 Henry VI* appears in all four BBC adaptations – not only providing a logical point of comparison, but also offering insight into how the plays have been shaped for the small screen. The adaptation of the funeral by the respective directors and screenwriters of the successive BBC productions is essential in giving immediate insight into the nature of their adaptation of the plays as a whole. Edward Burns notes that '[i]t is not completely clear whether we see the delayed and disrupted beginning of the funeral … or the end of the funeral as the coffin leaves Westminster Abbey', but argues that '[i]t is an important irony in the scene that the very concerns raised by the death of Henry prevent a properly respectful completion of the ritual of his funeral' (in Shakespeare, 2000, p. 115). It is not only each director's creation of the funeral itself that is important therefore, but also to what extent the ceremony is disrupted and in what manner this disruption takes place.

The adaptation of act 1 scene 1 of *1 Henry VI* appears at the start of *An Age of Kings*'s ninth episode 'The Red Rose and the White'. The synopsis of the episode in the published screenplay states that '[t]he dissension that is to dominate the reign of this youthful Henry [VI] is evident even before his father has been laid to rest in Westminster Abbey', suggesting an adaptation in line with Burns's reading of the funeral scene (Keats and Keats, 1961, p. 310). This is initially evident in Hayes's choice to begin the episode *in media res* with Henry V's funeral already underway as Bedford (Patrick Garland) begins his opening speech. The director places Henry's coffin at the centre of the set, allowing Gloucester (John Ringham) and

Winchester (Robert Lang) to bicker across the dead king's body. However, director Michael Hayes's adaptation proves to be the least chaotic of the funeral scenes across the four BBC adaptations of the play, imbued as it is with clear reverence towards Henry V as monarch and dignified solemnity at his passing. The original broadcast of *An Age of Kings* in 1960 temporally places it midway between the BBC televising the coronation of Elizabeth II in 1953, and the state funeral of Winston Churchill twelve years later in 1965; both aesthetically and politically, Hayes's adaptation of *1 Henry VI* act 1 scene 1, and the *Henry VI* plays more widely, sits between these two events. The adaptational choices by both Hayes and screenwriter Eric Crozier demonstrate a more measured approach to the funeral scene, capturing the restrained optimism and nostalgia of British national identity during the post-war period.

In the play, Bedford's prayer to the ghost of Henry V (*1H6*, 1.1.44-56) is interrupted by the entrance of the first messenger, breaking off mid-sentence – 'A far more glorious star thy soul will make / Than Julius Caesar, or bright –' (1.1.56) – his incomplete speech emphasising the disruption of the funeral. By cutting short Bedford's line as he begins to eulogise Henry V through comparison to great leaders of the past, Shakespeare also suggests the abrupt end of an era of such leadership through the king's premature death, as well as foreshadowing the troubled reigns of both Henry VI and those who will follow him until Richmond claims the throne at the end of *Richard III*. Adapting the scene for *An Age of Kings*, Crozier removes not only Bedford's final incomplete line but every line other than his first, reducing both the sense of disruption and the suggestion of the turmoil to come. As a result, Bedford simply urges his fellow nobles to 'Cease, cease these jars and rest your minds in peace' (1.1.44), bringing his hands together in prayer as he speaks. Gloucester and Winchester then follow his reverent example by crossing themselves at Henry's coffin as if in apology to the dead king for their argument. Whilst the director has an ominous drumbeat sound as the first messenger enters following this, the messenger then stands respectfully at the head of Henry's

coffin and also crosses himself before speaking – an action repeated by the second and third messengers. This not only emulates the reverential actions of Bedford, Gloucester, and Winchester, but also adds a pause of several seconds between Bedford's line and the first messenger's speech, reducing further still the sense of disruption to Henry's funeral.

The Wars of the Roses represents a significant shift away from the post-war nostalgia and nationalism which underpinned *An Age of Kings*, and towards a postmodern cynicism stemming from a national identity disenchanted by the political world. This is translated into the dark, oppressive, and claustrophobic shooting style of Hayes and Robin Midgley, which foreshadows the Jan Kott-influenced nihilism of Peter Brook's *King Lear* (1971) – another screen adaptation with its roots in an RSC production from the same period. Similarly, the funeral of Henry V in the first episode of *The Wars of the Roses*, simply titled 'Henry VI', feels considerably more chaotic than it did in *An Age of Kings.* The opening image offers a long shot of the empty throne silhouetted against an iron lattice and shot through the bars of a similar grille in the foreground. This immediately highlights the sense of Hayes and Midgley's adaptation being encased in a prison cell, foreshadowing Henry VI's feelings of being trapped upon the throne: 'Was never subject long'd to be a king / As I do long and wish to be a subject' (*2H6*, 4.9.5-6).

The choices made by Hall and Barton in adapting Shakespeare's play result in the scene being considerably truncated – for example, through reducing the number of messengers interrupting the funeral from three to one – and increase the sense of urgency in the nobles' abandonment of the funeral. More notable in the funeral scene in 'Henry VI' are the elements not taken directly from the play, and the ways in which they ironically anticipate the events set to unfold over the first tetralogy. Just as in the stage version of *The Wars of the Roses*, Barton opens his adaptation with the prologue-like 'latest will and testament' of Henry V (taken from Edward Hall's *Chronicle*, one of Shakespeare's sources for the *Henry VI* plays) and spoken by

'the voice of King Henry V' as a voiceover (Barton and Hall, 1970, p. 3). From beyond the grave, Henry instructs his noblemen 'to love and join together in one league and one unfeigned amity', making the rapid descent of his funeral into arguments between the same nobles all the more poignant in their betrayal of the late king's wishes. As Henry speaks, the camera pans across the faces of the nobles kneeling around the king's body lying in state, the use of close-up – verging on extreme close-up in the case of some of the characters, their faces barely fitting the screen – emphasising the egocentricity of each man. Hayes and Midgley introduce these men to the audience as separate individuals, complete with identities and ambitions that the camera can barely contain, rather than the unified group Henry wills them to be.

Howell's sequence of four adaptations reflects not only a significant shift in British national identity during the 1980s, but also the BBC's need to redefine its identity at the time of their broadcasting, especially as the *BBC Television Shakespeare* series had gained a poor reputation since its inception in 1978. Martin Banham argues that '[t]he opportunity in this television series was to astonish and delight "the layman", not to confirm his prejudices that Shakespeare is wordy and dull or to seduce him with a scenic tour of Europe' – an opportunity he believes the series unequivocally missed (1980, p. 34). Howell's first tetralogy was in part a direct reaction to this, creating productions which '[launched] an all-out assault on the assumption that televised Shakespeare must use "realistic" film techniques and naturalistic production designs' (Cook, 1992, p. 330). The four episodes were originally transmitted on BBC Two only two months after the launch of Channel 4 in November 1982. The new commercial channel had been '[c]harged by Parliament … "to be innovative and experimental in content and form", and "to disseminate education and educational programmes"' (Hobson, 2008, p. vii). The broadcast of *An Age of Kings* in 1960 had been commissioned partly to win the BBC the rights to launch BBC Two in 1964 as the UK's third television channel (Wyver, 2013, p. 20). Howell's radical approach to televising Shakespeare's histories can similarly be

seen as a reaction to new competition, as the initial remit of Channel 4 was similar in many ways to that which had defined BBC Two at its inception nearly two decades earlier.

Where *The Wars of the Roses* reflects the politically-numbed national identity of the mid 1960s, Howell's productions tap into the active contempt for politics and authority which characterised British counterculture during the late 1970s and early 1980s. The clearest example of Howell's progressive approach to staging the first tetralogy is what she describes as the 'adventure playground set' – an edifice of wooden ramps, rope ladders, and swinging doors upon which all four plays are enacted (quoted in Fenwick, 1983a, p. 23). The set is brightly painted in blocks of colour at the beginning of the cycle, but gradually becomes ravaged and blackened by the events of the plays. Howell sees the nobility in the *Henry VI* plays as being 'like … prep-school children', whom she costumes in dressing-up-box style attire which similarly begins brightly coloured but grows increasingly dull and worn out across the tetralogy (ibid.).

Howell's adaptation of the funeral scene at the start of 'The First Part of Henry the Sixth' offers perhaps the greatest sense of ceremony of all the BBC adaptations. As the scene begins, a lone soldier sings a lament accompanied by occasional chants and drumbeats from a cortège of black-robed figures, as Henry V's crown and coffin are ceremonially carried onto the set. However, the sincerity of the funeral procession and soldier's song are soon undermined as the lighting gradually brightens to reveal the multi-coloured adventure playground set, with the crudely painted structure causing the solemnity of the actors to appear absurd. The pageantry of the scene is also contrasted by Henry's coffin: an uncovered wooden box with a simple painted skeleton adorning the lid – childlike and primitive in contrast to the pageantry surrounding it. Echoing Hall and Barton's adaptation of the scene at the beginning of *The Wars of the Roses*, Howell opens her version of the funeral with lines that historically predate Shakespeare's play. The lyrics of the soldier's lament are closely adapted from a

fifteenth-century prayer originally composed not for the historical Henry V, but in honour of Henry VI in the years following the later king's death (Grummit, 2015, p. 240). Moreover, the soldier is portrayed by Peter Benson, the actor who plays Henry VI across Howell's four adaptations. This choice of doubling lends the opening song an additional haunting nature: the adult Henry VI paradoxically mourns his father whilst also singing an elegy for himself, foreshadowing his own troubled reign and bloody end. The director also shrewdly doubles actors in the roles of the three messengers who interrupt the funeral. Howell's messengers are played by Brian Protheroe, Paul Jesson and Ron Cook, who also play Edward IV, George Duke of Clarence and Richard III respectively in subsequent episodes – as if the disorder yet to come has uncannily managed to intrude upon the funeral of Henry V.

1.2 'And hark what discord follows' (*Troilus and Cressida*, 1.3.110)

In a parallel to Hayes and Midgley's ominous shot of the throne at the beginning of *The Wars of the Roses*, establishing the tone and approach of Hall and Barton's bleak version of the first tetralogy straight away, Cooke and Power make a similar choice for the opening moments of *Hollow Crown* Series Two which immediately ties their adaptation to contemporary British national identity. Episode One[3] begins with a sweeping aerial shot of the sea, soon revealed to be the English Channel as the white cliffs of Dover come into view. Graham Holderness contends that the cliffs 'occupy a peculiar and privileged place in the iconography and mythology of British nationalism' as they are 'regarded by tradition as the source of [the] nation's genesis' (1991, pp. 79-80). However, he also highlights the paradoxical nature of the

[3] The three episodes of *Hollow Crown* Series Two are entitled 'Henry VI, Part 1', 'Henry VI, Part 2' and 'Richard III'. However, the first episode is in fact mostly adapted from *1 Henry VI* and *2 Henry VI*, whilst the second almost entirely presents an adaptation of *3 Henry VI*; only the third episode is named consistently with its source play. Therefore, to avoid confusion between the titling of the episodes and the names of Shakespeare's plays, I will refer throughout this chapter to the three episodes of *Hollow Crown* Series Two as 'Episode One', 'Episode Two' and 'Episode Three'.

cliffs, suggesting that they 'provide us with our most characteristic national image of vulnerability, exposure, openness to the peril of foreign invasion' so that '[t]he point where the nation's identity begins is also the point where it could most easily be violated or re-conquered' (ibid., p. 81).

Melanie Küng notes that, '[i]n the build-up to the vote on the EU referendum, the white cliffs were far from symbolising togetherness and openness, standing instead overwhelmingly for divisiveness and inhospitality', but nonetheless argues that 'it is useful to think of the coastal landscape around Dover as a cultural palimpsest where meanings are multi-layered and overlapping' (2020, pp. 200, 201). This palimpsestic status has been literalised in the way in which messages have been projected directly onto the cliffs by both 'Leave' and 'Remain' supporters to promote and further their own ideologies. For example, on 29 March 2017, the date on which Prime Minister Theresa May formally triggered the Brexit process by invoking Article 50 of the Treaty of the European Union, the 'Leave'-supporting *Sun* newspaper projected its celebratory tabloid headline – 'Dover & Out' – onto the cliffs, sending 'a direct message to people on the Continent' as the cliffs 'can be seen by the naked eye from the equivalent French cliffs, Cap Blanc Nez, just west of Calais' (Lennon, 2017). Similarly, on the morning of 31 January 2020, the final day of Britain's EU membership, anti-Brexit campaign group Led By Donkeys projected a filmed message to the EU featuring interviews with veterans of the Second World War, who expressed their sadness over Brexit and hope for greater unity in the future (Turnnidge, 2020). Initially, therefore, Cooke's use of the white cliffs of Dover might appear to present an idealised and straightforward image of Britishness. But, due to the complexities within the location's symbolism, and the contradictory ways in which the cliffs have featured in the nation's popular imagination in the months and years both before and since the EU referendum, Cooke's opening shot in fact reflects the fractious nature of British national identity both within the first tetralogy and in Brexit Britain.

As the camera travels over the English Channel, opening narration is spoken by Judi Dench as a voiceover. Dench's received pronunciation accent, and her association as a highly regarded and recognisable Shakespearean actress, lend the voiceover a sense of British authority. This is complicated, however, by Dench's role in Episode Three as the Duchess of York, taking over from Lucy Robinson who plays the character in Episodes One and Two. Dench's voiceover therefore provides a sense of foreshadowing at the opening of Episode One that echoes Benson's lamenting soldier in Howell's 'The First Part of Henry Sixth', as if the elderly Duchess of York is looking back on the events leading up to her son Richard's bloody reign. In a further parallel to both Howell's adaptation and the opening moments of *The Wars of the Roses*, Dench's lines are not taken from any part of the first tetralogy. However, rather than drawing on historical sources, Cooke and Power draw from elsewhere in the Shakespearean canon, closely adapting a passage originally spoken by Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida*:

> The heavens themselves, the planets and this [earth]
> Observe degree, priority and place,
> […]
> Office and custom, in all line of order.
> […]
> Take but degree away, untune that string,
> And hark what discord follows. (1.3.85-6, 88, 109-110)

On a literal level, the lines provide a fitting precursor to the events at the beginning of *1 Henry VI*: the death of Henry V is the trigger to 'take but degree away', with 'discord' following almost immediately. More significantly, however, the use of lines from *Troilus and Cressida* also has implications for *Hollow Crown* Series Two's relationship to national identity. L.

Monique Pittman argues that, '[s]tripped of their context in [*Troilus and Cressida*] and presented in conjunction with the powerful symbolism of [the white cliffs] … this transplanted speech fuses claims of right order with British national identity—a nation bounded by the seas, protected by its terrain, and ordered by nature itself' (2022, p. 134). Moreover, by replacing Ulysses's original phrase 'this centre' (1.3.85) with 'this earth', Pittman suggests that Cooke and Power bring to the audience's mind John of Gaunt's deathbed speech from act 2 scene 1 of *Richard II*, which uses the phrase twice. 'Both the explicitly quoted passage from *Troilus and Cressida* and the ghosted lines from *Richard II*', Pittman argues, 'appear in dramatic contexts that undermine the sureness of those virtues and the assertion that a Providential natural order guides and protects the British nation' (ibid., p. 135). Comparing *Troilus and Cressida*'s relationship with national identity to that of Shakespeare's histories, Matthew Greenfield argues that 'Shakespeare's tetralogies and the other English history plays move toward closures in which the nation heals and the dream of community reasserts its claim', whereas '*Troilus and Cressida* explores a more pessimistic political argument. If Shakespeare's histories maintain an investment in some idea of national community, *Troilus and Cressida* works programmatically to reveal the nation as a collection of fictions' (2000, p. 181). As a result, when combined with the complex national symbolism evoked by the white cliffs, Cooke and Power's choice to draw the first lines of Shakespeare heard in *Hollow Crown* Series Two from *Troilus and Cressida* further drives the series' conceptualisation of national identity towards that of crisis and destruction.

Beginning Episode One with lines from *Troilus and Cressida* also aligns Cooke and Power's adaptation of the first tetralogy with the sensibility of that play. At the beginning of the twentieth century, A. C. Bradley identified 'a spirit of bitterness and contempt' within the play, which 'seems to pervade an intellectual atmosphere of an intense but hard clearness' (1905, p. 207). In a parallel to the renewed fortunes of the *Henry VI* plays in the second half of

twentieth century, Efterpi Mitsi notes that 'Shakespeare's cynical and irreverent treatment of the Trojan legend' gained popularity after the Second World War: 'In one of the most violent centuries in the history of humanity, the staging of *Troilus and Cressida* provided theatre practitioners and theatregoers with the opportunity to reflect on the absurdity of war' (2019, p. 7, 3). *Hollow Crown* Series Two is therefore imbued from the outset with the bleakness and bitterness found in Shakespeare's later play – and adapting Dench's voiceover from lines spoken by Ulysses in particular amplifies this sense. Tim Spiekerman describes Ulysses as one of the play's most pessimistic and nihilistic characters, who is 'wiser than the other characters, but he seems to use his intelligence primarily to manipulate them to his desired ends', and a character who sees in the world 'weakness, cruelty, and cool indifference toward the highest human hopes' (2016, p, 525, 536). Whilst the attributes Spiekerman identifies within Ulysses can be evidenced in the actions of numerous characters throughout the first tetralogy, Cooke and Power's use of Ulysses's lines to open Episode One magnifies this sense, closely aligning their production with the character's cynical and manipulative perspective from the very start.

The opening scene at the white cliffs directly feeds into Cooke's adaptation of the funeral of Henry V, as Sir William Lucy (Tom Beard) – who performs the function of the first (and here, only) messenger who interrupts the nobles – is seen riding along the cliffs on his journey to Westminster Abbey. In a further departure from both the play and previous BBC adaptations, an intertitle preceding Cooke's version of act 1 scene 1 informs us that the action takes place '[j]ust after the funeral of Henry V'. The reason for this may simply be one of continuity: Sharrock included extratextual scenes from the king's funeral in her adaptation of *Henry V* for *Hollow Crown* Series One, so Cooke's choice to move the action to immediately after the funeral allows Series Two to pick up moments after Series One ended. However, in making this change, Cooke allows the funeral to go uninterrupted, going against Burns's idea that the prevention of the king's burial is an important irony at the start of the play. As a result,

Hollow Crown Series Two's version of act 1 scene 1 takes on a notably different character from the BBC adaptations which preceded it.

With the ceremony over, Gloucester (Bonneville) removes the crown from Henry's coffin and carries it to an area at the side of the cathedral. A door is closed behind him, and the dialogue begins. The play calls for Bedford, Gloucester, Exeter, Warwick, Winchester, and Somerset to be present at the start of the scene – as well as 'the funeral' (1.1.0.1), which Burns notes potentially adds a further six extras – with the three messengers entering and exiting at points throughout (in Shakespeare, 2000, p. 115). In contrast to this, Cooke makes the opening scene a distinctly intimate discussion between Gloucester, Winchester (Samuel West), Exeter (Anton Lesser) and Lucy. This becomes an even more conspicuous choice when considering the continuity implied from Sharrock's *Henry V*, in which the funeral is well attended with people also seen lining the streets outside the church. By setting the scene after the funeral rather than during it, and having the dialogue happen in an enclosed room between just three nobles and Lucy, Cooke makes the events of the scene much more private, even clandestine in nature. The adaptation of the funeral scene also sets out the director's overall approach to adapting the first tetralogy: the separation of public and private, of the lower classes and nobility, is a theme which permeates *Hollow Crown* Series Two.

This division of public and private continues during Cooke and Power's adaptation of *1 Henry VI* throughout the first half of Episode One. This is evidenced in their adaptation of the dispute between Gloucester and Winchester in act 3 scene 1. In the play, the argument is augmented by violence between the servingmen of the two nobles: first in the city streets as reported by the Mayor of London; and then in the parliament itself, where the action is set, through the intrusion of three brawling servingmen. In Episode One, however, Cooke and Power remove both the three servingmen from the scene and any reference to violence taking place outside the parliament, confining the disagreement to the argument between members of

the nobility. This approach continues in the next scene, which offers Cooke and Power's version of the coronation of Henry VI (Tom Sturridge) in Paris, adapted from act 4 scene 1. The scene initially depicts a lavish ceremony attended by crowds of people, but swiftly cuts to a private area within the cathedral after Henry is crowned; much like the earlier funeral of Henry V, the majority of the scene is moved to take place after the ceremony. This contrasts with the two previous BBC versions of act 4 scene 1 in *The Wars of the Roses* and *BBC Television Shakespeare* (the scene is not included in *An Age of Kings*), in which the entirety of the scene occurs during Henry's coronation ceremony as in the play. By once again shifting the action so that it no longer takes place in public view, Cooke and Power shift the political nature of their adaptation. The ceremony gives the false impression to the commoners that all is well, whilst the disorder that follows is kept behind closed doors. The dispute between the servants Vernon and Basset is also revised considerably: the lower-class characters are removed from the scene entirely in Cooke and Power's version, and it is Henry who initiates the discussion with York and Somerset about the wearing of roses, making the rift between the two houses confined solely to the nobility.

1.3 'By this I shall perceive the commons' mind' (*2 Henry VI*, 3.2.373)

Cooke and Power's excision of the lower-class characters becomes more noticeable still during the second half of Episode One, which offers a considerably truncated adaptation of *2 Henry VI* – a play populated by many lower-class characters. Prominent scenes in the play featuring these characters include the miracle at St. Albans, which forms much of act 2 scene 1; the petition and combat of an armourer, Thomas Horner, and his apprentice, Peter Thump, introduced in act 1 scene 3 and concluded in act 2 scene 3; and, most notably, the rebellion led by Jack Cade, which unfolds throughout act 4. Maya Mathur argues that, whilst lower-class

characters and scenes were a source of comedy in Elizabethan drama, '[r]ather than enforcing the boundaries between "high" and "low" characters, comic situations could be used to blur the border between them' (2007, p. 36). Moreover, considering *2 Henry VI* in particular, Ronald Knowles suggests that '[t]he miracle, combat, and rebellion scenes each comment on the main action by developing a comedy that is never free from irony' (1991, p. 185). The scenes focused upon the lower-class characters within *2 Henry VI* – and the first tetralogy more widely – are therefore crucial to the social and political commentary offered by the play and any adaptation of it.

Jack Cade and the rebels are regularly singled out as the foremost example of the comedic social commentary offered by the play. Manheim describes the Cade rebellion as dramatized in *2 Henry VI* as 'surely among the most telling representations of political insurrection in literature'; whilst Ronda Arab suggests that 'through their self-referential, sometimes self-parodic humour [the rebels] control a great deal of the political rhetoric of the play' (1994, p. 135; 2005, p. 6). That Shakespeare put the Cade rebellion on the Elizabethan stage during a period of social turmoil is also noteworthy. According to Knowles, '[t]he earlier, mid-Tudor depiction of Cade in *The Mirror for Magistrates* (1559) is moral and theological', but '[b]y the 1590s Cade's rebellion was generally seen in more political than theological terms' (1991, p. 176). Arab argues that the Cade rebellion scenes demonstrated to Elizabethan audiences 'the well-known, and to many minds justified, discontent of contemporary food and enclosure rioters in England', and that *2 Henry VI* therefore 'articulates the potential power, as well as the motives, of late sixteenth-century labourers to wreak bloody havoc on the social body' (2005, p. 5).

Shakespeare's depiction of the Cade rebellion in act 4 of the play can therefore be considered both inherently political and knowingly satirical, a status which is perpetuated in the BBC's twentieth-century screen adaptations of *2 Henry VI*. As the emblematic character of

act 4, Jack Cade himself becomes a pivotal figure in how the rebellion in each adaptation specifically reflects British national identity at the time it was made. The earliest BBC version of the rebellion occurs in *An Age of Kings*'s eleventh episode, 'The Rabble from Kent', which offers the most comedic screen version of Cade. Peter Cochran describes Esmond Knight's Cade as 'a downmarket Falstaff', highlighting Knight's performance choices that recall those of Frank Pettingell, who plays Falstaff earlier in the series (2013, p. 63). Knight's first entrance is accompanied by a jaunty fanfare, immediately making it clear that Hayes's version of Cade is primarily a clown. Combined with Knight's Falstaffian performance, Cade's costume and appearance in *An Age of Kings* – a cowl over his shoulders, feathers protruding from his cap, standing with arms akimbo in most of his scenes – also brings to mind popular depictions of Robin Hood. As a result, Cade is characterised as both a heroic outlaw working for the common people and a music-hall-style source of comic relief within the series' aesthetic of post-war nostalgia.

Cade appears at the start of the second episode of *The Wars of the Roses* trilogy, 'Edward IV', played by Roy Dotrice. In contrast to Knight's jaunty figure, Dotrice's Cade is 'a hideous man with a fake black beard, a scar down his cheek, and a scalp condition' who wears a military-style armoured costume (Cochran, 2013, p. 64). Dotrice also makes Cade much more menacing and aggressive than Knight, as evidenced in his uncomfortable intimidation of the Clerk of Chartham in the sequence adapted from act 4 scene 2. Hall and Barton also make clever use of doubling by casting Dotrice both as Cade and Edward Plantagenet, later King Edward IV. The actor 'played both Cade and Edward IV with a cocky exuberance that seduced the audience even as they shuddered at his deeds' – the rebellion of the former being echoed by the reign of the latter, with both presaging the enigmatic tyranny of Richard III (Castaldo, 2015, p. xvii). This is demonstrated in Hayes and Midgley's filming of Cade's final speech from act 4 scene 8, after his followers abandon him. Dotrice looks

straight into the camera, which zooms in on his scarred face, transforming his aside into a one-way conversation with the viewer that foreshadows the soliloquies of Ian Holm's Richard yet to come.

Offering a significantly different Cade once again, Howell describes the character as played by Trevor Peacock in 'The Second Part of Henry the Sixth' as a 'Lord of Misrule', who offers 'some sort of devilishness that is in all of us' (quoted in Fenwick, 1983b, p. 27). Peacock sees this version of Cade as being linked to the socio-political moment of the early 1980s:

> I think Cade is a bit of a lunatic but the people did respond to him … That still happens: look at the riots in this country now [late 1981]. The National Front is a very Cade-like thing … Someone says, 'March with us and bash people' – Pakistanis, or, in Cade's case, the nobility – and they do. Though the plays are historical they are about continual processes in human beings. (ibid.)

The anarchic madness Peacock's Cade brings to the production reaches its zenith in a sequence that occurs between Howell's adaptations of the sixth and seventh scenes of act 4. Following Cade's final lines of scene 6, in which he commands his followers to 'set London Bridge on fire' and 'burn down the Tower too' (4.6.14-15), Howell depicts the rebels carrying out a carnivalesque book-burning. The director superimposes over this sequence a close-up of Peacock's maniacally laughing face. Cade's opening lines of scene 7 are delivered in the same fashion: Peacock's head fills the screen as he orders the rebels to 'pull down the Savoy' and 'th'Inns of court' (4.7.1-2), presenting Cade as the colossal puppet-master of the rebellion. Peacock's face appears again over a close-up of the blazing pages in the final book-burning scene. With wide eyes and bared teeth, the actor's face dissolves into the flames, shifting Cade from a dictatorial to a diabolical presence and ending the scene on an apocalyptic note. Howell further suggests the demonic nature of Cade by slowing down both the audio and video of

Peacock's closing laughter, transforming it into a monstrous roar which continues as we see the rebels gather in the centre of the now blackened and scorched set.

Two further screen adaptations of Cade, found in productions not commissioned by the BBC, are noteworthy. The first appears in the English Shakespeare Company's (ESC) *The Wars of the Roses*, an adaptation of both the first and second tetralogies into a heptalogy by Michael Bogdanov and Michael Pennington. After touring the production during the second half of the 1980s, all seven plays were recorded for television and broadcast in 1991. In an adaptive choice that echoes Peacock's observations about Cade, the ESC gives the rebellion a 'hooligan, National Front theme' (Bogdanov and Pennington, 1990, p. 111). Bogdanov describes the rebels in the sixth of the seven plays – televised as 'Henry VI: The House of York' (dir. Bogdanov, 1991) – as a 'drink-sodden, totem-twirling, Union Jack brigade of Doc Martened bovver boys' led by Pennington's Cade, 'a machete-twirling tornado, with spiky red hair and a Union Jack vest' (ibid.). Manheim suggests Pennington's Cade is 'a bonafide revolutionary terrorist' whose appearance '[suggests] popular images of the IRA bomber', connecting the rebellion to the Troubles which fractured both the British Isles and British national identity throughout much of the second half of the twentieth century (1994, p. 136). The appearance of Pennington's Cade, however, is most obviously based upon Johnny Rotten, frontman for punk rock band the Sex Pistols who were formative in establishing British punk counterculture. Ruth Adams suggests that '[p]unk could be argued to be a reframing of national identity in the image of (certain elements of) the working classes, rather than that of the ruling classes', offering a logical connection between the rebels and punk counterculture across the centuries (2008, p. 476).

The second notable screen Cade outside of the BBC's adaptations appeared as part of *The Complete Walk*, Shakespeare's Globe's series of thirty-seven short films created to commemorate the quatercentenary of Shakespeare's death. The films were originally screened

along the banks of the Thames over the weekend of 23 and 24 April 2016 (just weeks before the first episode of *Hollow Crown* Series Two was broadcast) and subsequently shown in other UK cities, as well as in Shanghai and Beijing. Alongside footage from recorded Shakespeare's Globe performances and clips taken from the British Film Institute archive, each short film also incorporates new adaptations of scenes filmed on location around the world. The newly filmed sections of *The Complete Walk: Henry VI Part 2* (dir. Bagnall, 2016) relocate the action of the Cade rebellion to modern-day Spitalfields Market. Nick Bagnall also highlights the contemporary political parallels of the rebellion by including footage of the riots which began in London and spread to other locations across England in August 2011. Neil Maskell's performance as Cade offers the most naturalistic screen version of the character yet seen, offering none of the humour or theatricality of those that have come before him. Maskell's modern costume is a simple overcoat and scarf of muted greys and blues, and his performance is driven by revolutionary anger.[4] Cade's simmering rage in *The Complete Walk* also foreshadows Maskell's performance as the title character in *Happy New Year, Colin Burstead* (dir. Wheatley, 2018) two years later – a film over which the spectres of both Brexit and Shakespeare also hang, and which is a primary focus of Chapter 2 of this thesis.

1.4 'But now is Cade driven back, his men dispersed' (*2 Henry VI*, 4.10.34)

The decision by Cooke and Power to remove not only all scenes involving Jack Cade and the rebels from *Hollow Crown* Series Two, but also any references whatsoever to either Cade or the uprising, sets it apart from all major screen versions of the first tetralogy which have preceded it. Considering the increasingly politicised depictions of the Cade rebellion in

[4] At the time of writing, *The Complete Walk* short films have not been publicly available since 2017. However, a brief clip of Maskell as Cade is available on the BBC's *Shakespeare Lives* website: https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03w0wps (Accessed: 17 September 2022).

adaptations of the *Henry VI* plays, its absence from *Hollow Crown* Series Two is, at the very least, highly conspicuous. Indeed, the absence of Cade and the rebels was regularly noted in articles and reviews at the time of the series' broadcast (for example, see Billington, 2016; Cooray Smith, 2016; and Lloyd, 2016). Földváry suggests that the removal of the Cade rebellion and other subplots allows '[t]he remaining narrative [to] find its focus much earlier on the rise of Richard III to power', allowing Cumberbatch – 'the long-awaited sight for sore eyes for a significant portion of the viewing public' – to make his appearance as early in the series as possible (2020, p. 110). Similarly, Cooke has described his vision for the series as a 'trilogy [which] poses the question, "How many bad decisions does it take to put a psychopath [Richard] in power?"', cutting '[a]ny elements which didn't fit that central story' (quoted in BBC Media Centre, 2016, p. 31).

The complete removal of the Cade rebellion from *Hollow Crown* Series Two means that comparison with past screen adaptations of the characters is not possible. However, as the absence of Cade and the rebels is so notable as to warrant multiple mentions in contemporary media coverage of the series, there is value in considering not only the impact of removing these characters upon Cooke and Power's version of the first tetralogy, but also the potential reasons for their removal in the context of Brexit Britain. Eleanor Rycroft argues that the removal of the lower-class characters and scenes 'mean[s] that the version of Britain presented almost entirely belongs to a white, male ruling class', and that 'the production enacts a series of intersectional erasures … that deliberately suppress elements of difference in favour of a monolithic "Englishness"' (2021, p. 32). Rycroft also notes that 'no single major character display[s] an Irish, Scottish or Welsh accent, thereby focusing and distributing class and national difference within the narrow confines of England's north and south', and suggests that '[t]hrough its blanket use of RP for the courtly elite, [*Hollow Crown* Series Two] seems at pains to eschew any class dialectic from its adaptation of the source texts' (ibid.). The

homogeneity of the British accents in the series is likely to have been at least in part a practical decision to allow the series to translate easily to the US market. However, whilst also potentially intended to de-politicise the *Henry VI* plays in particular, the excision not only of the lower-class characters but also of British accents across the series other than RP has the opposite effect. The contention between the houses of York and Lancaster, and the ruptures it wrought across Britain, is framed by *Hollow Crown* Series Two as a political conflict which concerned the ruling classes only. Against the backdrop of Brexit, the series seems to suggest that the division between 'Leave' and 'Remain' can be seen in the same manner: the common people become insignificant, with any meaningful consequences and impact lying with those in power.

Whilst the warring houses of York and Lancaster, and the infighting and bickering between the nobles who inhabit them, give directors ample opportunities to reflect the political machinations of their time, Cade and the rebels have provided potent material to reflect the anti-establishment sentiment of their cultural moment as has been demonstrated throughout the screen adaptations of *2 Henry VI* by the BBC and others: Dotrice's jaded nihilist, Peacock's wild revolutionary, Pennington's punk anarchist, Maskell's calculating rioter. It is therefore pertinent when considering the absence of the Cade rebellion in *Hollow Crown* Series Two to take into account that, during the months leading up to Brexit, the strongest anti-establishment sentiment purported to come from members of the establishment itself. The official 'Vote Leave' campaign positioned itself as anti-establishment most clearly through undercutting the messages of Remainers as the establishment attempting to maintain the status quo for their own benefit. As John Clarke and Janet Newman note:

> The Remain campaign mobilized a whole panoply of experts and apparently authoritative sources to warn of the risks and dangers of leaving the EU. Characterizing the Remain campaign as 'Project Fear', the Leave movement drew a sharp distinction

> between the 'threats' issuing from the 'establishment' and the simple desires of 'ordinary people' to 'take back control' of their society and their country. (2017, p. 110)

This anti-establishment self-styling by the 'Leave' campaign was epitomised in a statement by politician Michael Gove who, when asked in a live television interview to name economic experts who supported Brexit, answered: 'I think people in this country have had enough of experts' (Mance, 2016). In the same interview, Gove – and the 'Leave' campaign more widely – was also accused of employing 'the "post-truth" politics of Donald Trump', specifically in their repeated citation of the disproved statistic that Britain sends £350 million to the EU every week, and would therefore be better off by this amount after Brexit (ibid.). 'Post-truth' was selected by the Oxford English Dictionary as its 'Word of the Year' in 2016, which they defined as an adjective 'relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief' ('Word of the Year', 2016). The OED noted that the word '[had] seen a spike in frequency [in 2016] in the context of the EU referendum in the United Kingdom and the presidential election in the United States' (ibid.).

The figure of Cade in many ways appears to fit comfortably within the context of post-truth politics, in which the lines between establishment and anti-establishment, fact and opinion, have become blurred or insignificant. The 'Leave' campaign rhetoric of mistrusting experts echoes the status of the rebels as 'the enemies of … all learning and of the learned professions' (Lake, 2016, p. 98). Dick the Butcher's famous suggestion – 'The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers' (4.2.71) – with which Cade agrees, provides the earliest indication of the rebels' animosity towards the educated members of the establishment. This is further evidenced through the treatment of the Clerk of Chartham, declared 'a villain and a traitor' (4.2.98-99) by the rebels for being able to write his name and ordered by Cade to be hanged 'with his pen and inkhorn about his neck' (4.2.100-101); as well as the execution of Lord Saye

by Cade because he 'hast most traitorously corrupted the youth of the realm in erecting a grammar school' (4.7.29-30).

Hampton-Reeves suggests that, to Cade and his followers, '[t]ruth, identity, history, and authority rest on self-determination rather than the determination of historical record' – a viewpoint which closely parallels the post-truth politics of the twenty-first century (2014, p. 70). This can be seen when Stafford's brother outrightly describes Cade's right to the throne as 'false' (4.2.130), to which Cade replies: 'Ay, there's the question; but I say 'tis true' (4.2.131). Stafford's brother then declares: 'Jack Cade, the Duke of York hath taught you this' (4.2.144); Cade responds in an aside, 'He lies, for I invented it myself' (4.2.145). Cade's retort is included for comic effect, but it also demonstrates him admitting freely that his claim is based on falsehoods – or 'alternative facts'. In contrast, Stafford's accusation is based in fact: York earlier states in a soliloquy that he has 'seduced a headstrong Kentishman, / John Cade of Ashford, / To make commotion, as full well he can, / Under the title of John Mortimer' (3.1.355-358). This positions Cade not as a true anti-establishment figure as he claims to be, and as he has been characterised in screen adaptations of *2 Henry VI*, but at least in part as a puppet of the nobility. In this sense, Cade offers a parallel to 'Leave' campaigners like Gove who positioned themselves as anti-establishment, but in truth were very much part of the ruling class. Moreover, when Stafford asks Cade's supporters: 'And will you credit this base drudge's words, / That speaks he knows not what?' (4.2.141-142), they reply: 'Ay, marry, will we; therefore get ye gone' (4.2.143). Again, the rebels' response is comic, but more importantly reveals they are willing to follow Cade even though they know what he says is not true. This offers a further parallel to twenty-first-century post-truth politics, with personal beliefs being more important than factual accuracy.

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If the Cade rebellion has the potential to fit so well into the socio-political moment of 2016, then its complete removal from *Hollow Crown* Series Two can be considered even more striking. Alongside their stated reason for cutting any plotlines which did not directly relate to Richard's path to power, Cooke and Power may have wanted their adaptation to come across as apolitical and stand apart from the current affairs which surrounded it, with Episode One in particular attempting to establish a version of the first tetralogy separate from the cycle's links to British national identity in crisis. Cade may therefore have been excised completely to avoid any parallels, intentional or otherwise, with the contemporary events that formed a backdrop to the series. This is a generous reading, however, and arguably lets both the director and writer off the hook too easily. The inherently political nature of the *Henry VI* plays, and their renewed resonance, critical attention and presence on stage and screen since the mid-twentieth century, arguably makes adapting the first tetralogy in an entirely politically neutral manner an impossible task.

Hampton-Reeves and Rutter describe *2 Henry VI* as 'arguably the only one of the histories that gives a substantial voice to the presence of ordinary people in history and their ability to mobilise themselves in sufficient numbers … to disrupt the conventional notion of history as the story of kings and nobles' (2006, p. 21). By removing these characters, *Hollow Crown* Series Two reverses this notion, re-establishing the idea of history and national identity as being shaped not by 'ordinary people', but solely through political manoeuvring by those in power. Whether intentional or not, this too reflects the political landscape and national identity of Brexit Britain. The idea of Brexit being 'the will of the people' – and those who oppose it being 'the enemies of the people' – have become standard elements of the political lexis in Brexit Britain (see Powell, 2019, p. 91). In truth, however, David Cameron's decision to call a referendum on Britain's membership of the EU was not driven by a desire to know 'the will of the people'. The Conservative party had been deeply divided on Britain's economic and

political relationship with Europe since at least the late 1980s, and since being elected as prime minister in 2010 Cameron had had to contend with the increased support for UKIP's populist anti-European platform (Daddow, 2015, p. 4). The EU referendum was his attempt to resolve both the deep-seated rifts within his own political party and fend off threats from outside it. Much as the nobles in the *Henry VI* plays only value the opinions of the British people insofar as they allow them to further their own ambitions, Cameron gambled on 'the will of the people' being to remain in Europe in order to achieve his own goals. By removing Cade and the other lower-class characters from *Hollow Crown* Series Two, Cooke and Power offer a parallel to Brexit Britain by bringing this reality into sharp focus. 'The will of the people' is just another fabrication: the common people are not needed, because the story – whether that of the first tetralogy or Brexit Britain – is ultimately not about them.

CHAPTER 2:

CORIOLANUS AND CULTURAL TRAUMA IN THE FILMS OF RALPH FIENNES AND BEN WHEATLEY

Whilst those who supported 'Leave' and 'Remain' in the EU referendum in 2016 are separated by fundamental disagreement, they are united by the damaging impact of the current period of British history and politics upon Britain's collective mentality and identity. Jeffrey C. Alexander proposes the concept of '[c]ultural trauma', which he argues

> occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their collective consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways. (2016, p. 4)

Susanne Abse describes a 'national trauma' surrounding Brexit which has 'produce[d] a lack of trust and create[d] fear and then anger', and argues that

> In psychoanalytic terms we would say that [trauma] is likely to generate paranoid-schizoid ways of thinking, which is a state of mind where rigid beliefs dominate and where it becomes harder and harder to stay in touch with empathic, generous feelings. It's a dog eat dog state of mind. And one could propose that this state of mind has arisen because we have become a dog eat dog society. (2019)

Even before Britain voted for Brexit, the language of trauma was being used to describe the referendum campaign. In an article published the day before the vote took place, Jay Elwes described the EU referendum as 'the most politically traumatic event in British public life since Iraq', highlighting how 'it zoomed in on some of the most sensitive zones of the British national

psyche, and exploited them mercilessly for political ends' (2016). Elwes's reference to the 2003-2011 Iraq War as the most recent traumatic prior to Brexit is noteworthy. Both the war and public response to it arguably stemmed from the trauma of people around the world witnessing the terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington D.C. on 11 September 2001, commonly referred to as '9/11'. The Iraq War was one of numerous conflicts in the ongoing 'Global War on Terrorism', more commonly referred to as the 'War on Terror', instigated by the US in the wake of 9/11 and supported by its allies, including the UK.

As well as being a significant historical and political moment, 9/11 and its aftermath can be considered a watershed social and cultural moment, reflected in the moving image media created in the years that followed. Peter Bradshaw identifies a 'history of evasion … [and] of indirect intuition' in post-9/11 cinema, characterised by 'the idea that cinema could feel and transmit the anxieties of 9/11 in situations which did not appear to be explicitly about the attacks' (2010). Films such as *War of the Worlds* (dir. Spielberg, 2005), an adaptation of H. G. Wells's 1897 novel relocated to twenty-first-century America, and *Cloverfield* (dir. Reeves, 2008), a found footage film about a Godzilla-like alien creature attacking modern-day New York, amongst others have been cited as recreating both the imagery of, and the emotional response to, the 9/11 attacks (see Sánchez-Escalonilla, 2010; Wetmore Jr., 2012). The War on Terror received a similar treatment by the film industry. Films including *Lions for Lambs* (dir. Redford, 2007) and *The Hurt Locker* (dir. Bigelow, 2008) based on political and military reality were released alongside fantastical films such as *Iron Man* (dir. Favreau, 2008), in which the title character is captured in war-torn Afghanistan by a terrorist cell using weapons manufactured by his US company; and *Source Code* (dir. Jones, 2011), in which a mutilated and comatose Afghanistan war veteran is unwittingly used in an alternative timeline experiment. One key difference is that, whilst there was a buffer of a few years between the events of 9/11 and their influence on cinema, 'a wave of fiction films appeared during the [War

on Terror] itself … that cumulatively constitute an astonishing engagement with a highly unpopular war' (Kellner, 2010, p. 219).

This chapter explores the ways in which *Coriolanus* has been adapted and employed by directors on the big screen in order to reflect cultural trauma in Britain and more widely both post-9/11 and post-Brexit. The fact that filmmakers have been drawn to *Coriolanus* to do this is unsurprising: it has been identified as a play characterised and fuelled by negativity and animosity arguably more than any other Shakespearean work. Robert Ormsby describes *Coriolanus* as 'a relentlessly ugly play, one that seethes with mutual hatred that is barely discernible from mutual dependence', whilst Peter Holland suggests that '[t]here are times when the play can feel as contemptuous of its audiences as Caius Martius does of the citizens of Rome' (2014, p. x; 2013, p. 1). *Coriolanus* is also a play about politics. Anthony Davies describes *Coriolanus* as Shakespeare's 'most uniformly political tragedy' – a reputation which can be traced all the way back to the food riots of the Midlands during 1607 and 1608, which may have provoked Shakespeare's interest in adapting the Roman legend (2015, p. 240). Whilst *Coriolanus*'s inherently political nature has regularly been apparent on stage, it has been less prominent on screen due to the play rarely being adapted for film or television. The BBC provided the only two major made-for-screen versions of the play of the twentieth century: first as part of *The Spread of the Eagle* (dir. Dews, 1963), which adapts all four of Shakespeare's Roman plays into a twelve-part series, of which *Coriolanus* forms the first three episodes; and then through Elijah Moshinsky's 1984 adaptation, broadcast as part of the *BBC Television Shakespeare*.

Ralph Fiennes's 2011 film, the play's first major screen adaptation, reinforced the tragedy's inherently political nature by updating the story to an indeterminate but recognisably contemporary setting 'with all the accoutrements of modern urban warfare' (Holland, 2013, p. 136). Fiennes adapted the play for the big screen '[b]y manipulating elements of that

quintessentially accessible Hollywood genre, the action film', including 'narrative clarity, frenetic editing techniques and an abundance of violence' (Ormsby, 2014, pp. 224, 223). Fiennes's *Coriolanus* currently stands alone as the only direct adaptation of the play into film, but stage productions have since explored its suitability for the cinematic gaze. Manuel Antonio Jacquez describes Robert Lepage's 2018 Stratford Festival production as being 'akin to a film adaptation performed live', and suggests that the director's 'filmic approach seemed an especially appropriate match for Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*' (2019, pp. 111-112). Reviewing Barry Avrich's filmed version of Lepage's production, Peter Kirwan notes 'a near-perfect alignment between form and content' in which at times 'the recreation of film is uncanny' (2020).

Equally cinematic was Josie Rourke's 2013 *Coriolanus* for the Donmar Warehouse, which featured Tom Hiddleston in the title role. Anna Blackwell suggests that Rourke's production 'borrow[s] from the visual culture of action cinema', with Hiddleston himself acting as a signifier of this (2014, p. 340). She describes Hiddleston as 'a paradigmatic example of contemporary Shakespearean celebrity', suggesting that '[f]igures like Hiddleston more than ever now exist multiply, performed actively and personally in a variety of media forms and remediated passively online' (2018, pp. 57, 76). Hiddleston's recurring role as Loki within the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) has contributed significantly to this status, combining his 'Shakespearean' and pop culture statuses. He first appeared as Loki in *Thor* (dir. Branagh, 2011), a film with 'several Shakespearean echoes, the majority of which are conscious artistic decisions made by Branagh' (ibid., p. 59). Fiennes's film draws on a similar hybridity of Shakespeare and pop culture. Starring as Caius Martius, Fiennes would have been at the height of his fame for playing primary antagonist Lord Voldemort in the *Harry Potter* film franchise, the final instalment of which – *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2* (dir. Yates, 2011) – was released in the same year as *Coriolanus*. Gerard Butler, who plays Tullus Aufidius, was

primarily associated with action films – particularly *300* (dir. Snyder, 2007), for which his portrayal of the film's protagonist King Leonidas earned him international fame.

Ben Wheatley's film *Happy New Year, Colin Burstead* (2018) offers the only other cinematic adaptation of *Coriolanus* so far, and presents a markedly different approach to the play. Wheatley has stated he was inspired to write *Colin Burstead* after seeing Rourke's production:

> I didn't know the play that well — it felt alien … [T]he hero does all of this heroic stuff right at the start, then just becomes more undone as it goes on. So, to understand it more, I thought I'd do an adaptation set in modern times and reduced right down. Instead of armies and battles and murders, I'd turn it into a tight family drama. (quoted in Graham, 2018)

In stark contrast to Fiennes's film and the cinematically inflected stage productions of *Coriolanus* during the 2010s, Wheatley's approach to adapting the play for the screen is distinctly anti-Hollywood. Where Fiennes, Rourke and others channel action blockbusters and modern war movies, Wheatley's film has been described as '*Coriolanus* meets *Abigail's Party*', the comparison to Mike Leigh's play – best known through the version filmed for the BBC's *Play For Today* series (dir. Leigh, 1977) – emphasising *Colin Burstead*'s domesticity and dialogue-driven approach (Graham, 2018). Wheatley's anti-Hollywoodisation of *Coriolanus* is perpetuated further through the film's setting: *Colin Burstead* is unmistakeably British in its locations, cultural reference points and cinematic aesthetic.

In contrast to Fiennes's film, which retains Shakespeare's language throughout, *Colin Burstead* presents a new story performed in contemporary English which takes inspiration from Shakespeare's play – 'a lot of the rhythms of the film are from *Coriolanus*', according to Wheatley (quoted in Bowman, 2018). The director has described how he 'distilled [*Coriolanus*]

down to family arguments' and 'reduced each scene down to a sentence and then built it back up again' ('Writer, director and editor', n.d.). As a result of this process, Wheatley's film never presents a straightforward scene-by-scene modernisation of the play. Taking place over the course of a whole day – specifically 31 December – the film depicts the unfolding events at a country manor in Devon, which Colin (Neil Maskell) has hired to celebrate New Year's Eve together with his extended family and friends. The film's title suggests that Colin is its primary Martius figure – as Maskell notes:

> Coriolanus goes out and fights, then comes home and thinks there should be no democracy, and he should make all the decisions. Well, Colin thinks, 'I'm the main breadwinner, I've paid for the house — we're all going to have the new year that I dictate' (quoted in Graham, 2018).

Whilst various subplots are present throughout the film, the central narrative focuses upon the arrival of Colin's estranged brother David (Sam Riley), unexpectedly invited by sister Gini (Hayley Squires), whose presence provides the main source of conflict. With Colin positioned as analogous to Martius, David as his opposite can be considered the film's primary Aufidius figure.

Adam Lowenstein argues that 'Wheatley's films constitute a cinema of disorientation: we often wish we could find our way back to the familiar cinematic spaces and genre codes to which we are accustomed, but Wheatley has gleefully erased the map and set the house on fire' (2016, p. 5). This approach is evidenced throughout Wheatley's filmography: his second feature, *Kill List* (2011), combines realist drama, crime thriller and folk horror; whilst his fourth film, *A Field in England* (2013), is a combination of historical drama and psychological horror, as well as being permeated with experimental and surrealist elements. *Colin Burstead* is arguably less transgressive in terms of genre, echoing the director's debut feature *Down*

Terrace (2009) by remaining predominantly within dramatic realism, provoking the comparisons with the work of Leigh as discussed earlier, as well as Wheatley's contemporary Shane Meadows (Flanagan, 2018, p. 21). However, *Colin Burstead* presents Lowenstein's 'cinema of disorientation' through Wheatley's approach to adapting Shakespeare for the screen, as the themes, events and characters of *Coriolanus* overlap, echo, and bleed into each other. The relationship between *Colin Burstead* and *Coriolanus* is effectively encapsulated in the film's working title, '*Colin You Anus*' – a play on words which made it all the way to the film's first teaser poster (Rose, 2018). Wheatley's original quasi-homophonous phrase is crude in multiple senses: just as '*Colin You Anus*' sounds vaguely like *Coriolanus*, so Wheatley's film messily echoes Shakespeare's play. The transformation of the more commonly heard expletive 'arsehole' into the anatomical 'anus' is both humorously vulgar and idiosyncratically British, qualities which can arguably be applied both to *Colin Burstead* and Wheatley's filmography more widely.

An example of Wheatley's disorientation of *Coriolanus* can be seen in the duplication and distortion of Menenius's fable of 'a time, when all the body's members / Rebelled against the belly' (1.1.93-94), presented by the character as an analogy for Roman society. The speech is first echoed in a conversation between Colin's father Gordon (Bill Paterson) and his friend Nikhil (Vincent Ebrahim). Gordon is complaining after Colin earlier coldly refused to loan him money, aligning Gordon with the rioting Roman citizens demanding grain in the play's opening scene. Nikhil takes on a Menenius-like role in trying to placate Gordon, telling him: 'The family is a body: head and arms…'. Gordon cuts him off, however, unconvinced by the analogy, leading to Nikhil speaking more frankly: 'Colin is helping you by not giving you money. The more money you get, the bigger the fuck-up'. However, Gordon tells the same story to Colin in a later scene when trying to convince him to confront David and ask him to leave the party: 'Paint a picture, tell him a story. Like the, erm… The family is a body and if

one part of that doesn't, you know…'. The repetition initially appears to reposition Gordon as a Menenius figure, but his previous dismissal of the analogy and half-hearted parroting of it to Colin (who is equally unconvinced) renders the body metaphor as a hollow echo of both Nikhil's earlier telling and the speech from Shakespeare's play. E. A. J. Honigmann notes how Menenius's fable 'points forward directly to Coriolanus' error, the belief that a man can renounce his kith and kin', but also argues that 'the deeper the play penetrates into character the further it moves away from the fable's assumptions about social roles and obligations … substituting it for a very different vision of society' (2002, p. 181). Through his contemporisation, duplication and curtailment of Menenius's analogy, Wheatley parallels the foreshadowing of Martius's fatal flaw, similarly setting up Colin's downfall. In turn, the film not only moves away from the idea of the family as a singular, interconnected society but fractures and undermines it, offering an ironically apt metaphor for the extreme disfunction which characterises the extended Burstead family throughout Wheatley's film.

Colin Burstead can also be considered a cultural successor to *The Hollow Crown: The Wars of the Roses* (dir. Cooke, 2016) in terms of the film's existence in post-Brexit Britain – both in terms of when Wheatley made it at the start of 2018, and the time and place in which the narrative is set. The director describes the film as his

> return to contemporary filmmaking in a contemporary setting … That was something I consciously wanted to do because I felt like I had made a lot of films I was slightly dodging or skirting around dealing with what was going on in the country. Even though all [my] films are political in their way, I just wanted to make something that was much more current. (quoted in Thomas, 2018b)

Whilst *Colin Burstead*'s narrative is not explicitly about Brexit, the media response to the film perceived Wheatley's conscious reflection of contemporary Britain (for example, see Thomas

2018a; A.D. 2018). Just as *The Hollow Crown: The Wars of the Roses* can be considered to be a serialisation of Shakespeare inherently tied to the cultural moment of Brexit in the years leading up to the EU referendum in 2016, *Colin Burstead* is also reflective of national identity in Britain in the years immediately following Brexit. Spanning a range of generations and ethnicities, the members of the Burstead family and their friends gathered in the country manor in which much of the film's action takes place offer a concentrated view of the director's perspective on post-Brexit Britain. In this sense, Wheatley's fracturing and undermining of Menenius's idealistic body metaphor presents a bleak and cynical outlook on British national identity in the years following the referendum.

Brexit is overtly discussed only once in the film during a brief exchange between Colin's uncle Jimmy (Peter Ferdinando) and Fran (Nicole Nettleingham), Colin's teenage daughter.

JIMMY: How's school?

FRAN: Brilliant. Really looking forward to the massive crash of the economy.

JIMMY: Oh, come on... You know it was about democracy. I'm the good Brexit – the Tony Benn Brexit.

FRAN: Fuck Labour and fuck the Tories. Does that make it clearer for you?

The conversation between the two characters presents a microcosmic analogy for the political and generational divide in Britain. Jimmy's description of 'the good Brexit' echoes the nebulous forms of Brexit which emerged in the political discourse both before and after the referendum, and his imprecise citation of 'democracy' in response to Fran's cynical negativity parallels the way Brexit 'was considered by many right-wing and Eurosceptic media outlets and politicians to be "a victory for democracy"', a viewpoint shared by many who voted 'Leave' (Bell, 2017, p. 52). In contrast, fifteen-year-old Fran shifts from sarcastic negativity to

nihilistic anger, reflecting the feelings of many young people who were unable to vote in the referendum. Whilst the scene is brief and inconsequential to the main plot of *Colin Burstead*, its inclusion ties the film to the cultural moment of post-Brexit Britain. The scene also occurs at approximately the midpoint of Wheatley's film, suggesting that Brexit – whilst only mentioned briefly – is at the centre of the tensions within the Burstead family.

Whilst Wheatley has openly acknowledged the influence of *Coriolanus* upon *Colin Burstead*, no academic research has yet been published on the film's Shakespearean foundations and echoes. This chapter therefore places *Colin Burstead* at its core, putting the film in conversation with Fiennes's film both as currently the only direct big-screen adaptation of *Coriolanus*, and as a key example of the Hollywoodisation of the play during the twenty-first century. The opening half of this chapter will interrogate what Wheatley does with *Coriolanus* in appropriating it into his anti-Hollywood family drama, and how this compares with the Hollywood-style action genre adaptation of Fiennes in particular. The concluding half will then consider the effect of Wheatley situating *Coriolanus* in a recognisable version of contemporary Britain, and how this creates a cultural artefact of post-Brexit British national identity.

2.1 'First, you know Caius Martius is chief enemy to the people' (1.1.7-8)

Graham Holderness notes that *Coriolanus* 'has long lent itself to contemporary appropriations' since it was first performed; however, he suggests that the play is now 'more contemporary than it ever has been since the early seventeenth century' and identifies Martius as 'a folk-hero for the third millennium' (2014, pp. 104, 89). Moreover, Holderness proposes 'the "Coriolanus myth", a peculiarly contemporary realisation of the classic man of war', embodied through numerous twenty-first-century film protagonists (ibid., p. 116). He puts forward the main

character of *The Hurt Locker*, Sergeant William James (Jeremy Renner), as a key example of a modern-day Coriolanus figure, his Martius-like qualities including 'his deepest happiness [lying] in reckless exposure to danger, in a terrifying level of risk', and 'an almost complete disengagement from any kind of society other than that of the particular "battlefield" he fights in' (ibid., pp. 117, 118). Holderness's description parallels Emma Smith's assessment of Shakespeare's Martius as 'a hero so battle-hardened that he can scarcely operate in civilian society' (2019, p. 271).

Whilst not a soldier, Colin demonstrates a similar disengagement with society, and an inability to empathise with those around him or communicate other than through conflict. An early scene shows Colin shutting out everyone and everything by lying on his bed with his eyes closed listening to white noise through noise-cancelling headphones – 'It's for my nerves', he tells his wife Val (Sura Dohnke). The next scene shows Colin on the telephone to Gini, during which he feigns poor mobile signal when she begins to discuss the reasons why she has invited David – creating an excuse to end the call rather than engage with the conversation. Later in the film, when Colin finds his sister-in-law Paula (Sarah Baxendale) alone in tears in the kitchen, he takes her into the wine cellar – 'a private space where you can get your crying done', as he calls it – then shuts her in there alone. Colin's exasperated 'fucking hell', muttered under his breath as he closes the door behind him, demonstrates his Martius-like ability to 'scarcely operate in civilian society', even – or perhaps especially – when that society is his own family and friends.

As a precursor to *Colin Burstead* and its title character, the 'Coriolanus myth' identified by Holderness also haunts earlier films made by Wheatley. *Kill List*'s protagonist Jay (Maskell) exists as the clearest Martius-like character within the director's filmography. A former soldier, Jay is quick-tempered, erratic and struggling to adjust to civilian life. Working as a contract killer with friend and fellow ex-military Gal (Michael Smiley), Jay executes his victims with

increasing brutality and even commits additional murders out of a twisted sense of morality, putting both Gal and himself in increased danger in the process. Like both Martius and *The Hurt Locker*'s James, Jay relishes his personal 'battlefield' – that of the hitman – and the risk it poses, whilst failing to function successfully within civilian society. Jay haunts *Colin Burstead* in particular through Maskell, who plays both characters with a similar intensity and unpredictable edge.

The Coriolanus figure can also be traced in Wheatley's 2015 film *High-Rise* not through a Martius-like character in the mould of James in *The Hurt Locker* or Jay in *Kill List,* but through the presence of Hiddleston who plays the film's protagonist, Dr. Robert Laing. Wheatley saw Hiddleston perform in Rourke's *Coriolanus* as part of the casting process for *High-Rise* (Graham, 2018). As a result, the film is intrinsically linked with Wheatley's first encounter with *Coriolanus*, as well as being haunted by the Shakespearean influences upon the director at the time it was made. Just as Rourke's *Coriolanus* drew on the visuals of Hollywood action films and Hiddleston's MCU notoriety, so Hiddleston's image as Martius bleeds into *High-Rise*. Blackwell notes how Hiddleston built up his physique in preparation for playing Martius as a man of war, and that his physical preparation was most clearly demonstrated in Rourke's production when Martius showered topless alone on stage (2014, pp. 346, 347). Hiddleston's muscular body is also included prominently near the start of *High-Rise* when Laing falls asleep sunbathing naked on his balcony. When fellow high-rise inhabitant Charlotte (Sienna Miller) disturbs him, Laing loosely covers his lower half with a towel but allows much of his body to remain visible. Hiddleston's body is further objectified by Charlotte's description of Laing as 'an excellent specimen', reducing the actor to his physical appearance in the role. In this moment, Hiddleston's Laing directly echoes the actor's appearance as Martius on stage, inserting his Shakespearean image into Wheatley's primarily non-Shakespearean film.

High-Rise further draws on Hiddleston's wider Shakespearean status through the actor's on-screen reunion with Jeremy Irons, who plays the eponymous building's architect Antony Royal. Only a few years earlier, Hiddleston and Irons had played Prince Hal and King Henry IV respectively in the first series of *The Hollow Crown* (2012). These echoes are most keenly felt during a sequence in which Royal summons Laing to his penthouse apartment. The penthouse includes a garden terrace, described by Royal as a 'folly' to satisfy his wife's 'careful cultivation of an intense sort of nostalgia'. The early modern period is evoked in particular, as the entrance to Royal's futuristic plain white workshop is housed in the façade of a Tudor thatched cottage, lending the sequence an additional recognisably Shakespearean visual marker. The reunion of Hiddleston and Irons on screen results in their previous Hal and Henry roles haunting their portrayal of Laing and Royal, as the high-rise's aptly named aging monarch gets the measure of the new young resident he considers should be part of the building's ruling elite. At the end of their conversation, Laing is invited by Royal to a party being thrown by his wife 'full of the sort of people you should know'. However, the party leads to Laing's Hal-like rejection of Royal's 'court': not knowing the party is an eighteenth-century fancy-dress ball, Laing turns up in a modern suit and is humiliated by Royal's wife and other guests.

Taking into account these wider echoes of Shakespeare and *Coriolanus* in particular within Wheatley's past films, *Colin Burstead*'s appropriation and 'disorientation' of *Coriolanus* cannot therefore be considered in isolation within the director's body of work. Just as Lowenstein describes how the director 'erase[s] the map' of genre codes within his films, Wheatley equally blurs – or obscures completely – the boundaries of where his Coriolanus figures begin and end, and what is and is not Shakespeare.

2.2 'This Martius is grown from man to dragon' (5.4.12-13)

Whilst Fiennes's and Wheatley's respective cinematic approaches to *Coriolanus* are notably distinct from one another, both directors use the opening sequences of their films to establish their individual (and contrasting) cinematic aesthetics. Before depicting the 'mutinous Citizens' (1.1.1.1) who appear at the play's opening, Fiennes begins with a newly invented scene that introduces Tullus Aufidius. The director opens on a close-up of a hunting knife being sharpened by an unseen character, who we later learn is Aufidius. Dimly lit and barely visible, Aufidius is initially cast by Fiennes's cinematography in the role of the villain. The scene cuts between the knife being sharpened and news footage of Fiennes's Martius facing off against the food riots taking place in Rome. The focus on Aufidius's knife contrasts with the modern combat attire and automatic firearms of Martius and his soldiers seen on the television screen, a distinction furthered by the 'intricate tribal etchings' engraved on the weapon suggesting a sense of otherness set against Martius's markedly Western appearance (Logan, 2011, p. 1).

Fiennes's directorial and adaptational choices during this opening sequence firmly position his *Coriolanus* as an action film by drawing on cinematic tropes and conventions of the genre. The sequence has clear parallels with the opening scene of *Iron Man 2* (dir. Favreau, 2010), an MCU action blockbuster released only a year before *Coriolanus*. *Iron Man 2* opens with antagonist Ivan Vanko (Mickey Rourke) watching television coverage of a press conference which closed the first *Iron Man* film, in which Tony Stark (Robert Downey Jr.) – the film series' protagonist and Vanko's nemesis – reveals his superhero identity as Iron Man. Aufidius's sharpening of his dagger in preparation for battling Martius is reminiscent of Vanko crafting and honing his weapon of choice – technologically-advanced metallic whips he will later use to attack Stark – at the opening of Favreau's film. Moreover, Aufidius's dark and gloomy location parallels that of Vanko, whose impoverished workshop contrasts with Stark's polished, corporate opulence. The narrative device of the villain observing his nemesis through

a television screen can be traced back further in the action genre to films such as *Speed* (dir. de Bont, 1994). The main plot of Jan de Bont's film focuses on a bus a rigged with explosives, which will detonate if it travels below fifty miles per hour. Throughout the film, terrorist Howard Payne (Dennis Hopper) tracks the developments of the bus on multiple television sets through both news reports and a CCTV feed from the bus itself. Payne pays particular attention to the film's protagonist, police officer Jack Traven (Keanu Reeves), whom he considers his nemesis after Traven foils Payne's attempt to blow up a lift full of people in the film's opening act.

Through drawing on recognisable action genre conventions such as these, Fiennes positions Aufidius as a Hollywood villain in the mould of Payne and Vanko; as a result, Martius is cast as his opposite in the role of the action hero. Both *Speed* and *Iron Man 2* make the relationship between the hero and villain deeply personal, even obsessive, which Fiennes also includes in *Coriolanus*. This trope fits the relationship between Martius and Aufidius in the play, as demonstrated through the language the characters regularly use to describe each other. Martius and Aufidius's opening exchange of act 1 scene 8, the first time the two characters share the stage, in particular lends itself to a face-off between an action hero and villain:

> MARTIUS: I'll fight with none but thee, for I do hate thee
> Worse than a promise-breaker.
>
> AUFIDIUS: We hate alike:
> Not Afric owns a serpent I abhor
> More than thy fame and envy. Fix thy foot. (1.8.1-4)

In adapting the exchange for the screenplay for Fiennes's film, Logan cuts Shakespeare's poetic comparisons to concentrate the play's language down to its basic sentiments: Martius retains only his first line, and Aufidius only his first three words (2011, p. 24). The scene

continues as a dialogue-free knife fight between the two men as their soldiers stand watching, culminating in Martius and Aufidius crashing through a window of the bombed-out Volscian tenement block in which they are fighting. The pair continue to fight, only separating when blasted apart by the impact of stray artillery fire. The moment demonstrates further Fiennes's Hollywoodisation of *Coriolanus* through Logan's screenplay, replacing the play's language with action set pieces and violent imagery.

Just as Fiennes signposts his Hollywood action movie influences in the first scene of *Coriolanus*, so Wheatley makes clear *Colin Burstead*'s anti-Hollywood approach in the film's opening moments. Clint Mansell's instrumental score is a key element of establishing this aesthetic. Mansell has described the music for the film as being both 'Shakespearean' and 'Elizabethan', as well as 'pagan' and 'folky' (quoted in Bowman, 2018). His influences when composing the score included the psychedelic folk soundtrack of *The Wicker Man* (dir. Hardy, 1973), the 1970s ambient music of Brian Eno, and the soundtrack to Roman Polanski's *Macbeth* (1971) – the second and third of which were used by Wheatley as a temporary soundtrack before Mansell's soundtrack had been composed (ibid.). As Mansell's score is heard before the opening scene begins (it plays over the logo for Wheatley's production company, Rook Films), the audience is encouraged to view *Colin Burstead* through a lens shaped by both British history and cinematic nostalgia from the outset. Mansell's influences, and his resulting soundtrack, are also central not only to positioning Wheatley's film as a Shakespearean adaptation, but also more widely within the multiple genres and time periods the director evokes, often simultaneously.

Mansell's score also contributes to Wheatley's Shakespearean and cinematic disorientation, juxtaposing as it does with the distinctly British contemporary opening image: an establishing shot of the rear of Colin's suburban bungalow, with damp patio furniture in the foreground and the back door hanging open. Colin steps out onto the patio, places his coffee

cup on the table and, without speaking, proceeds to take a drag of his electronic cigarette. Commenting on Martius's unusual status amongst Shakespeare's heroes of having no soliloquies throughout the play, Smith suggests that '[j]ust as Coriolanus will not plead for the good opinions of the plebeians, so he won't give his audience a soliloquy. He won't work for the citizens' votes; he won't work for the audience's good opinion either' (2019, p. 278). Similarly, Wheatley's decision to open his film with a dialogue-free sequence of Colin alone, emphasised further by removing the diegetic sound from the scene, sets up Colin as the primary Martius figure of *Colin Burstead* straight away. As Colin begins to exhale, Wheatley cuts to a mid-close-up in slow motion, the e-cig vapour gradually drifting from his mouth. Still in slow motion, Wheatley cuts from the portrait shot of Colin to capture him in profile as the growing cloud of vapour swirls and obscures his face. Adam Nayman suggests that 'Wheatley conjures up images whose brevity belies their staying power in the mind's eye' throughout his films (2016: 1). Lasting less than a minute, the opening sequence of *Colin Burstead* offers one such image: Wheatley transforms the snapshot he presents of Colin's mundane morning routine into an arresting visual sequence, situating *Colin Burstead*'s adaptation of *Coriolanus* firmly within the director's existing oeuvre. The sequence also echoes the same sense of folk horror found in other Wheatley films such as *Kill List* and *A Field in England*. Mansell's music haunts the slow-motion image of Colin, the e-cig vapour taking on a sinister, monstrous appearance as it billows from and engulfs Colin's mouth. The image also creates further visual links to Colin's status as the primary Martius figure within the film, as the cloud erupting from his mouth brings to mind the dragon imagery used to describe Martius within the play – after he turns against Rome, Aufidius describes Martius as 'dragon-like' (4.7.23), and Menenius suggests '[t]his Martius is grown from man to dragon' (5.4.12-13).

The opening sequence of *Colin Burstead* is aesthetically and tonally reminiscent of two sequences in particular from Wheatley's past work. The first is an early scene from *Kill List*,

during which Wheatley briefly depicts Jay playing with his son Sam (Harry Simpson) and wife Shel (MyAnna Buring) in the back garden of their suburban home. The second is from *Sightseers* (2012), a black comedy which fuses the road movie genre with bloody violence. During a scene at the film's halfway point, Wheatley depicts serial killer Chris (Steve Oram) beating a pompous country rambler to death with a tree branch in the middle of a National Trust park. Like *Colin Burstead*'s opening, both sequences are shot in slow motion, and remove or significantly diminish the diegetic sound to emphasise the non-diegetic. Kevin M. Flanagan argues that 'Wheatley's methods, his aesthetic sensibilities, and the thematics of his movies uncover longstanding tensions … in cultural constructions of Englishness', and suggests that a number of Wheatley's films, including both *Kill List* and *Sightseers*, 'connect to the literal lost continent of Ancient Albion' (2016, pp. 16, 21). The slow-motion sequences from *Kill List*, *Sightseers* and *Colin Burstead* all demonstrate how each film, and Wheatley's filmography more widely, is haunted by England's historical and cultural past in some way. *Kill List*'s sequence features Jay and his son play-fighting with medieval-style toy swords and a shield, and is followed by Sam requesting a bedtime story about King Arthur from his father. Instead, Jay tells him a story based on his military service in Iraq in the style of a tale of knights of old, blending medieval and twenty-first-century England. The murder in *Sightseers* takes place within an ancient stone circle, evoking England's ancient heritage. However, the rambler's assertion to Chris that the land now belongs to the National Trust inexorably blends past and present once again. *Colin Burstead*'s blending of historical and contemporary England comes through Mansell's Elizabethan score juxtaposed with the film's modern-day bungalow setting, but is furthered through Maskell's self-righteous characterisation of Colin, who surveys his suburban back garden from his patio in the manner of a lord gazing upon his land. It is a touch which foreshadows his Martius-like hubris, setting up the character's tragic flaw that will ultimately lead to his downfall.

Wheatley not only conjures a sense of England's past blended with its present in all three sequences, but also undermines and mocks the Englishness he evokes. Whilst Wheatley is more subtle in *Kill List* – Arthurian legend is presented epically through the slow-motion play-fight, whilst also reduced to a childish game through the characters' cheap plastic weapons – in *Sightseers*, the effect is amplified to intentionally ridiculous levels. As Chris begins beating the rambler to death, the director shifts into slow motion and the diegetic sound is removed almost entirely as Elgar's 'Nimrod' – a piece which has become synonymous with Englishness to the point of cliché – begins to play. John Hurt then makes an uncredited voice cameo to read the first two stanzas of William Blake's 1808 poem 'Jerusalem', another text that has become inextricably, platitudinally linked with Englishness. The sequence provides a dark mirror to Danny Boyle's quintessentially English opening ceremony for the London 2012 Summer Olympics (also discussed in the introduction to Section 1). (Fittingly, *Sightseers* premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in May 2012 and was released in UK cinemas the following November, its releases occurring a few months either side of London 2012). In a parallel to *Sightseers*, the first part of Boyle's ceremony played out on the English countryside – a vision of the country as a 'green and pleasant land' inspired by Blake's poem – and, like Wheatley's murder sequence, featured both 'Nimrod' and 'Jerusalem' (Cain, 2012). In contrast to Boyle's idealised vision of English national identity – which he described as 'mythical' and 'ideal … like a childhood memory' – Wheatley's exaggerated use of patriotic music and poetry juxtaposed with Chris's brutality presents a blackly comic perversion of Englishness (ibid.).

This same subversive brand of Englishness can be observed in the opening moments of *Colin Burstead*. In his review for *Empire*, Alex Godfrey notes that the film 'begins epically' with Colin 'vaping for England in his sleeveless V-neck', describing Wheatley's aesthetic as 'kitchen-sink Sergio Leone' in which 'everything ordinary is afforded such glory' (2018). This subtly humorous, subversive approach echoes the sequences from Wheatley's earlier films.

The director takes elements which, in isolation, present a sincere vision of England's past and present: Mansell's Elizabethan-style compositions, Maskell's authentic performance, the typical suburban back garden. Instead, Colin is presented as a caricatured image of contemporary Englishness, as the earnestness of the score and the slow-motion filming transform the image of Colin vaping on his patio looking out over his garden into a ridiculously self-important act.

2.3 'One fire drives out one fire, one nail one nail' (4.7.54)

Whilst Fiennes and Wheatley offer distinct aesthetic and adaptive approaches to putting *Coriolanus* on screen, both directors continue the play's legacy in performance of reflecting times of intense political turmoil and disagreement. If *Colin Burstead* is a 'Brexit film', then Fiennes unequivocally positions *Coriolanus* as post-9/11 cinema. Fiennes notes that 'it was important that the film looked like today's world', but that he 'wanted the film to feel like it could be set in any city in the world' (quoted in Logan, 2011, pp. 117, 121). This is reflected in Logan's description of Rome in his screenplay:

> It might be Mexico City. Or Chechnya. Or El Salvador. Or Detroit. Or Baghdad. Or London.
>
> This Rome is a modern place. It is our world right now: immediately recognisable to us … Splendor and squalor sit side-by-side.
>
> It is a volatile and dangerous world. (2011, p. 2, original emphasis)

Logan's emphasis on *Coriolanus* being set in a recognisable version of the present day, as well as listing both modern Western metropolises and locations inextricably associated with conflict during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, creates a setting embodying the

international unrest characteristic of the post-9/11 world. Addressing why he made a film of *Coriolanus* as his directorial debut, Fiennes states that:

> The situations in *Coriolanus* are always with us all the time. Particularly this year, weirdly, with what's happening in the world, in the Middle East [the Arab Spring uprising], economically everywhere – the sense of deep uncertainty, these things that are happening in the streets. They all happen in *Coriolanus*. They always happen. The tensions between authority and the people need to be heard, especially when they are suffering and they can't eat. (Elmhirst, 2012)

The ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the Green Revolution in Iran, also provided 'background noise' to the production, influencing the setting, aesthetic and adaptational approach of Fiennes's film (ibid.)

This is most apparent in the military attire of the Roman and Volscian forces. Catherine Baker notes that '[t]he Romans wear identical uniforms in the US Army's 2004–15 Universal Camouflage Pattern', offering an unmistakeable visual connection to US forces during the post-9/11 conflicts (2015, p. 437). However, the uniformly British accents of the Roman soldiers makes them a composite of the two nations who led the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2002. A significant portion of *Coriolanus* was filmed on location in Belgrade, which, Baker argues, results in 'the film's landscapes recall[ing] … photographic and video images of the post-Yugoslav wars', an effect furthered by 'Fiennes' world-building [which] even uses "found footage" from the post-Yugoslav wars and the fall of Slobodan Milošević in 2000' (ibid., pp. 433, 430). However, '[t]he Volscian soldiers wear individualized camouflage or olive-drab uniform items, some with personal accessories such as bandanas, and carry AK-47s' (ibid., p. 437). This costume choice clearly evokes the attire of the armies of Middle Eastern countries invaded by the US and UK, without making the Volsce analogous to one particular

nation. As a result, *Coriolanus* is not directly aligned with films such as *The Hurt Locker*, which presents a fictionalised narrative situated within the historical Iraq war, but strongly echoes the conflict through the images it presents: both 'our world right now' and one step removed from it.

Fiennes also creates clear links to the post-9/11 War on Terror through his presentation of the Volscians and Aufidius in particular. The director establishes this connection early on through a sequence adapted from act 4 scene 3 of the play, but which is inserted into his version of act 1 scene 1. Logan adapts lines from the exchange between the Roman Nicanor and Volscian Adrian from the play into the interrogation and execution by Aufidius of a captured Roman soldier. Aufidius and a small group of soldiers enter a dark prison cell where the Roman soldier is being held. They set up a spotlight and video camera, and the Roman is tied to a chair. Whilst most of the interrogation is filmed as a series of shot/reverse shots, Fiennes cuts to a shot of Martius and other Roman officials moments before the soldier's execution, revealing that they have been watching the footage from the video camera on a large television in a military briefing room. The scene then cuts back to the video camera footage from the perspective of Martius. The Roman soldier stares into the camera as Aufidius puts a gun to his head and pulls the trigger; the shot then pans up to Aufidius's face, who stares intensely into the camera.

According to Logan, '[t]he idea was that the release of this video would shock complacent Rome, much as the release of images of modern atrocities can incite terror and action in moribund governments' (2011, p. 106). The style of the video camera footage of the Roman soldier's murder is strongly reminiscent of execution videos which have been released online by terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and Islamic State, providing a clear link to the War on Terror. Logan notes that the soldier's murder was 'written as a throat slashing, [but] we changed it to a gunshot right before filming' in order to '[give] an aural punch and exclamation

point to the vicious act' (ibid.). However, Ariel Koch notes how 'in the twenty-first century beheadings have gone mainstream', as 'IS-style gore propaganda, which has been distributed online since [the] early 2000s, is echoed on television, in film, and even in video games' (2018, p. 24). The throat-slashing as written would have been strongly reminiscent of a beheading, closely aligning the Volsce with groups such as Islamic State and al-Qaeda. Whilst the shooting of the soldier is still shocking and brutal, the change creates some distance between the Volsce and real-world terrorist organisations, as well as avoiding exploitation of this kind of brutality. The Volscian soldiers are also written as having 'their faces covered with ski masks', but in the film their faces are visible – a further change to the screenplay seemingly made to dissociate the Volsce from Islamic terrorists who regularly mask their faces in execution videos. In this way, Fiennes again clearly evokes the War on Terror through his cinematography and adaptive choices, whilst also creating differences between the US conflict with Islamic terrorist groups and Rome's conflict with the Volsce, creating a balance between cinematic escapism and politically charged drama.

Fiennes also uses the scene to further establish the relationship between Martius and Aufidius as that of an action movie hero and villain. John Ripley notes that the scene between Nicanor and Adrian in the play is '[f]requently cut [in performance] because it has no immediate relevance to the narrative', but suggests that '[t]his workaday exchange of information between a Roman traitor and Volscian patriot … brilliantly foreshadows the epic betrayal about to be enacted and offers an unsettling preface to it' (1998, p. 336). Thanks to the scene's relative obscurity in performance, Logan is more readily able to take Shakespeare's lines and significantly repurpose them to fit his newly created interrogation sequence than with a more well-known scene. By relocating the exchange to near the beginning of the narrative and reattributing it to an unnamed Roman soldier and the Volscian leader, Logan retains the sense of foreshadowing Ripley identifies within the scene as written in the play, but makes it a

preface not to betrayal but to Martius and Aufidius's first encounter in the film. The scene also exists as a parallel to the earlier scene of Aufidius watching the news bulletin, as Martius is now viewing his nemesis via a screen. The contrast between Aufidius's small television set in his gloomy, underground headquarters and the large flatscreen television in the modern, brightly lit Roman briefing room once again echoes the scene of Vanko watching Stark's press conference in *Iron Man 2*, providing a visual contrast which not only sets up the cultural differences between Rome and the Volsce, but also aligns action hero Martius with light and his nemesis Aufidius with darkness. The scene concludes with Martius surveying intently the paused image of Aufidius staring straight into the camera, as if the two men are already face to face, the murder of the Roman soldier making Martius's hostility towards Aufidius an individual vendetta to further embed the action genre trope of personal animosity between hero and villain.

Whereas Fiennes's *Coriolanus* overtly wears its post-9/11 political influences through its modern military aesthetic, *Colin Burstead*'s politics mirror the aftermath of the Brexit vote more implicitly. Nayman identifies 'recurring images of a universe out of moral and temporal order and [a] running theme of strained, fractured or otherwise imploding family units' within Wheatley's films, a pattern into which *Colin Burstead* undeniably fits (2016, p. 8). Nayman's description could equally be applied to the experience of many people in Britain during the aftermath of Brexit: a 2019 *New York Times* article notes how 'the 2016 Brexit referendum vote crystallized divisions between cities and towns, young and old, the beneficiaries of globalization and those left behind', but that 'rather than open feuding, a chilly silence has descended across parts of a population that is often adept at avoiding confrontations' (Castle, 2019). The way in which Brexit haunts the characters of *Colin Burstead* through the deeply personal grievances between them, whilst remaining almost entirely unmentioned, is firmly in keeping with Wheatley's oeuvre. *Coriolanus*, with its interwoven threads of family disharmony

and political turmoil in which personal and professional duties muddle and mutate, also fits aptly into both the post-Brexit British cultural moment and the narrative themes and ideas with which Wheatley regularly contends in his films.

Colin Burstead constantly feels as though it takes place in a tense and fractious environment, primarily crafted through the editing and cinematography employed by both Wheatley and his cinematographer Laurie Rose. Nayman highlights Rose as the director's 'most crucial recruit … whose background shooting documentaries was valuable … for capturing events on the fly' (2016, p. 34). Rose has worked as cinematographer on all but one of Wheatley's films to date, and his documentary aesthetic lends *Colin Burstead* an uncomfortable sense of intimacy and authenticity. Wheatley constantly cuts back and forth between events and conversations throughout *Colin Burstead*, splicing two or more scenes together through rapid edits, forcing the audience to experience the interactions of his characters broken into several pieces and jumbled together with each other. This not only evinces Wheatley's 'cinema of disorientation' as described by Lowenstein, ensuring the audience is never allowed to be comfortable in the presence of the Bursteads; but also reflects the fractured nature of the relationships themselves – so damaged that the camera can only capture them in fragments.

The technique also results in intersecting moments from two (or more) discrete scenes becoming acutely juxtaposed, each scene working to reframe and influence each other. A particularly effective example occurs during an argument between Colin and Gini about Colin's aggressive confrontation with David when telling him to leave, with Colin suggesting that Gini invited David to cause disharmony intentionally. This argument is intercut with a scene in which David, whilst returning to the party, has a conversation with his ex-wife Paula, whose car has broken down whilst she drives away from the party. Alongside Jimmy and Fran's earlier conversation, Colin and Gini's argument is also the only other scene in the film where

Brexit is (obliquely) referenced. Colin tells Gini that he 'can always count on [her] not to be counted on' for 'Project Family … You know, no more remoaning'. The line is a reference to both 'Project Fear', a term used by both the British media and the 'Leave' campaign to describe the 'Remain' campaign to suggest their primary tactic was scaremongering; and 'remoaner', a derogatory term which emerged following the EU referendum to describe 'Remainers' who remained steadfastly pessimistic about the result. Gini sarcastically retorts, 'Oh, is that what you think this is? Bringing us all together?', hinting at a rift in the family over the EU referendum, paralleling the real experiences of people in Britain growing distant from family and friends in the months and years following the 'Leave' vote (see Castle, 2019).

In contrast to Colin and Gini's heated interaction, David and Paula's encounter is characterised by quiet animosity. When David tells Paula he is sorry for 'all of it', she first asks him if he 'think[s] that's just going to fix it, just like that?', then tells him

> You feel shit, so you want me to say something, anything that you can cling on to, to take that feeling away. You'll be okay. The minute you walk away, you'll start to feel better, like when you left. Just got easier and easier every day, didn't it? Then in a week, a month or so, you didn't even worry about it.

By cutting back and forth between Paula's damning assessment of David's abandonment of their relationship and empty apology, and Colin and Gini's Brexit-fuelled confrontation at the party, the fractured nature and underlying themes of the two scenes blur into each other: the current argument between brother and sister echoes the past arguments between husband and wife; whilst the coldness between David and Paula foreshadows the potential for the distance and hostility between Colin and Gini to continue to grow. The oblique references to Brexit made by Colin in turn infect Paula's acerbic assessment of David's behaviour, reframing it as an analogy for the way in which those who supported 'Remain' viewed the 'Get Brexit Done'

manifesto and attitude of the Conservative government as self-serving and reckless, wilfully damaging Britain's economy and relationship with the EU in order to further their own political support with 'Leavers'.

The hostile relationship between Colin and David at the centre of *Colin Burstead* is a prime example of Wheatley's disorienting use of *Coriolanus*. As noted earlier, Colin is the primary Martius figure, which places David in the Aufidius role. However, David also bears some key Martius-like characteristics, perhaps most significantly his devotion to his mother Sandy (Doon Mackichan). This is a trait Colin certainly does not share, as demonstrated in a scene soon after he first arrives at the mansion. Sandy and Gordon arrive soon after with Nikhil and his wife Maya (Sudha Bhuchar). As Sandy steps through the front door, she trips and falls. All the characters rush to her aid except for Colin, who stands back as if he had been expecting his mother to create a scene. When Val berates Colin for not helping Sandy, he instead offers weary sarcasm: 'Ain't got to call an ambulance within thirty seconds of you turning up?'. Sandy milks her injury for attention and sympathy, and even spends the first part of the party using a wheelchair to get around. However, as she suddenly declares herself 'cured' later on, Colin's suspicions about her injury being fake are proven correct. In this sense, Colin becomes an inversion of Martius: he knows his mother intimately, but refuses to pander to her in order to please her in the same way that other characters do.

In contrast, David demonstrates a distinctly Martius-like devotion to Sandy. This is demonstrated through David's involvement in Gordon's financial troubles: he loaned his father money seemingly to make a bad property investment and, as he admits to his girlfriend Hannah (Alexandra Maria Lara), is now 'torturing' Gordon by holding the debt over him. It is only when Sandy confronts David about the debt towards the end of the film – the first time she is seen speaking to him throughout – that he almost immediately relents. He tells Sandy that he will 'take the building off [Gordon], if you want', then tells her: 'I'd do anything if it makes

him happy'. Although David refers to his father's happiness, this comes across as an insincere defence mechanism stemming from Sandy's anger at David (presumably for abandoning his wife and children and moving to Europe), hiding the fact that he is really doing what will make his mother happy. The exchange presents a stripped-down echo of Volumnia's persuasion of Martius to halt the Volscian invasion of Rome he leads in *Coriolanus*'s final act, further positioning David as a second Martius figure within *Colin Burstead*.

In Wheatley's ultimate disorientation of Shakespeare, the brothers occupy simultaneous Martius roles, their narratives playing out as the two halves of *Coriolanus* on top of each other, with each man occupying the Aufidius-like nemesis role in the other's story. Colin begins *Colin Burstead* at odds with his family, paralleling Martius's relationship with the Roman citizens, but is soon drafted in to confront David – who, in Colin's Martius narrative, presents the invading Aufidius figure. Once Colin prevails, however, Gini becomes the main agent who turns the rest of the family against him, her actions echoing the tribunes Brutus and Sicinius in the play. This leads to Colin's self-imposed expulsion from the party during *Colin Burstead*'s final scenes, the conclusion of his story being analogous with Martius's banishment at the end of act 3 of *Coriolanus*. In contrast, David's Martius narrative parallels the final two acts of the play: he invades the Burstead family after a five-year absence, returning from self-imposed exile in Germany. Just as Martius's leadership of the Volsce against Rome is rumoured at the end of act 4 before he reappears in act 5, David's arrival at the party is discussed by several members of the family before he is first seen around a third of the way into the film.

Whilst David does not suffer Martius's ultimate fate, he does have a final bitter altercation with Colin before his brother exits the party, during which their criticisms of each other highlight their respective Martius-like qualities. When David comes to Sandy's defence after Colin criticises her, Colin sarcastically describes David as 'the white knight … who's now sticking the arrow in me from the moral high ground'. David responds with unconcealed vitriol:

'You're an arrogant fucker, Colin. You think everything you do's perfect and your life's a paragon of perfection. And you're judging me for my misdeeds? It's fucking rich'. In response, Colin bitterly reveals to David and the gathered family that he is aware David had an affair with his wife. As Colin leaves the party with Val and Fran, the film remains at the party for one of the few extended scenes that Wheatley allows to play out without intersecting any others. The director switches to a less erratic editing style, signalling a sudden tonal shift from the tension which has characterised much of his film to idealised sentimentality. David demonstrates his Martius-like devotion to Sandy once again, first through a speech to the stunned Bursteads, and then through a mawkish song, complete with intertextual Shakespearean allusions: 'A rose by any other name is a rose, but Shakespeare never met Sandy or he'd have known, to compare Mum to a summer's day doesn't even come close, and yet I've hurt you more than most'.

Colin's explosive exit and the revelation of David's infidelity seemingly already forgotten, the song triggers an outpouring of musical performances and emotional declarations. Hannah sings a traditional song in her native German – the title of which, '*Die Gedanken sind frei*', offers a further Shakespearean echo, translating into English as Stephano's line from *The Tempest*: 'Thought is free' (3.2.123). Uncle Bertie (Charles Dance) then speaks to the group, initially seeming to deliver a speech he is seen rehearsing alone earlier about being terminally ill; instead, overcome with emotion and alcohol, Bertie gives an over-the-top speech declaring his love for the family. This is answered by the rest of the group singing 'For He's a Jolly Good Fellow' led by Sandy, followed by Gordon leading the countdown to midnight and a rendition of 'Auld Lang Syne'. The sequence is shot with documentary authenticity, Rose's cinematography capturing incidental moments of emotion and affection as the family comes together to celebrate the new year.

In contrast to the rest of the Burstead family's happy ending, the final scene of the film focuses on Colin and his family as they drive away from the party. Wheatley shoots with a handheld camera, placing the audience uncomfortably in the back seat of the car next to Fran as Colin hyperventilates in the passenger seat. Wheatley cuts to outside the car as Val pulls over, quickly cutting between the handheld footage and external shots to emulate the confusion experienced by all three characters. The director then forces the audience to pursue Colin, the camera following him as he clambers up a steep pebbled beach. As Val joins him, Colin disowns his extended family: calmly at first – 'Let's get as far away from these people as possible' – and then with unbridled anger as he yells out to sea: 'Fuck them!'. This concluding scene brings the several disorienting strands of Wheatley's film into one concentrated moment of trauma. The scene echoes the moment in act 3 scene 3 of *Coriolanus* as an enraged Martius reacts to his banishment from Rome. Colin's need to 'get as far away … as possible' resembles Martius's desire to find 'a world elsewhere' (3.3.134). Just as Martius dehumanises the Roman people as a 'common cry of curs' (3.3.119) – a line Fiennes roars with red-faced ferocity in his film – so Colin contemptuously reduces his relatives and friends to 'these people'. Maskell saves Colin's fury for his final expletive, which parallels Martius's retort to the Roman people: 'I banish you' (3.3.122).

Wheatley also overlays the scene with echoes of act 5 scene 6 of the play, in which Martius's execution is ordered by Aufidius. The final scene of the film is accompanied by Mansell's instrumental score, each piece of which is named after a stage direction from *Coriolanus*. The piece playing during the final scene is entitled '(a dead march sounded)' – the final stage direction of Shakespeare's play (5.6.157.1) – creating a correlation between Wheatley's closing moments and Martius's ultimate fate. As Colin's Martius narrative concludes with his self-imposed banishment, the character's fate remains unclear. Wheatley's overlapping of act 3 scene 3 and act 5 scene 6 disorients his ending, refusing to give the

audience a definitive conclusion. As well as presenting multiple *Coriolanus* echoes, the final image of Colin screaming out to sea in the middle of the night also offers the climax of Wheatley's vision of post-Brexit Britain. Colin's desire to 'get as far away from these people as possible' encapsulates the fracturing of relationships experienced since the referendum, both between the UK and the EU and between those who voted 'Remain' and 'Leave'; whilst the final words heard in the film – 'Fuck them!' – epitomize the anger and frustration of many on both sides of the argument.

On the surface, the final scenes of the film may seem to suggest an anti-Brexit slant, with Colin and David representing two possible paths for the UK. Furious and alone on the British shore, dragging his wife and daughter with him to face an uncertain future, Colin represents an isolationist UK separated from the EU. Supported by his German girlfriend espousing free thought, and surrounded by the extended Burstead family as they celebrate, David meanwhile appears to represent a much more positive image of unity. However, Wheatley's directorial decisions ensure that his film's message is not so clear cut. Colin ends the film wrathfully disowning his extended family, but earlier makes clear his commitment to his relationship with Val after revealing his knowledge of her affair with David: 'Luckily, we're pretty stable … You've got to tend to a relationship, haven't you? You can't lean on it or it breaks'. Sandy is taken in by David's saccharine song and is seen hugging him when the clock turns to midnight; but a brief uncomfortable moment between mother and son after 'Auld Lang Syne' finishes, which shows Sandy subtly refusing to hug David again, suggests both their reunion – and the wider positivity between the Bursteads – is likely to be temporary. The fragile, frayed endings for both of Wheatley's Martius figures parallels the unknowable outcome in 2018 of Britain's decision to leave the EU, reflecting the director's own bewilderment: 'You never can get to the bottom of what has actually happened. Even now with

Brexit so far on, it's very difficult to unravel what the fuck actually happened or who's responsible for it' (quoted in Thomas, 2018a).

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Describing what he sees as the 'political power shifting that goes on and on' in *Coriolanus*, Fiennes quotes a line spoken by Aufidius in the play – 'One fire drives out one fire, one nail one nail' (4.7.54) – to emphasise his point (quoted in Wallenberg, 2011). The director elaborates further:

> There's this sense of one force driving out the next — this continual, infinite swapping of political power that goes on ad nauseam forever and ever. I think Shakespeare is showing us that whoever is in power is turned over by the next person and by the next person and by the next person. And then the people are sort of left fighting to make sense of their lives. (ibid.)

This sense of the perpetually cyclical nature of power is emphasised in the final scene of Fiennes's *Coriolanus*, which presents the film's bleakest image. After being escorted away from Rome, Martius's assassination is carried out on an empty road at the Volscian border. Rather than being killed by two conspirators, Martius is instead surrounded by a gang of Volscian soldiers, who attack him with knives. As Martius stands bloodied and weakened, Aufidius draws the same dagger he is seen sharpening in the film's opening moments, then plunges it into Martius's stomach. The bookending of the first and final scenes of the film with Aufidius's ornate blade lends the film's ending a sense of inevitability – that Martius's life was always going to end this way. It also lends *Coriolanus* a cyclical nature: the ending Aufidius's dagger has brought about has tipped the balance of power back in his favour, but it could also be the beginning of a new struggle for supremacy in the world of Fiennes's film – a world that is recognisably ours. Martius's life ends not with the dignity he is given in the play – both his

lifeless body and his enduring memory are described as 'noble' (5.6.145, 155) – but by having his body 'awkwardly tossed into the back of an open truck', with '[n]o ritual or ceremony. No honor', an adaptational decision which underscores how pointless this fight for power is (Logan, 2011, p. 104). Logan describes how he and Fiennes 'wanted to leave the audience in a state of shock, still grappling with the dissonant emotions of the piece', allowing the audience no dramatic catharsis, but instead confronting them with the uncomfortable ugliness of modern warfare (ibid., p. 114).

Fiennes's suggestion that Shakespeare's play demonstrates how 'whoever is in power is turned over by the next person' is echoed a line spoken by Colin in Wheatley's film during his argument with Gini: 'I get the game: I turn over my brother, and youse lot turn me over'. The cyclical nature of power transfer is equally brought to life through the parallel Martius narratives of Colin and David. Having disowned his extended family and taken his wife and daughter with him into self-imposed exile, Colin ends the film where David was five years ago. David, meanwhile, is back amongst the Burstead clan – but, much like Colin's before him, his position is far from comfortable either for him or those around him. The sense that *Colin Burstead*'s transfer of authority from Colin to David may simultaneously be a trigger for the power to begin swinging back the other way is just as strong as in Fiennes's film, if not stronger. Just as Fiennes bookends his film with images of Aufidius's knife, so Wheatley begins and ends his film with close-up images of Colin's face looking out over a landscape: surveying his back garden with hubristic self-satisfaction; shouting out to sea with barely contained rage. Considered through the lens of post-Brexit Britain, with the Bursteads offering a parallel to the divisions across families, communities and generations still being keenly felt in Britain in the years following the referendum, Wheatley's ending suggests an uncertain future which offers complex questions rather than simple answers about what might happen next. With each man playing Aufidius to the other's Martius, Colin and David may be stuck in an endless loop of

bitter one-upmanship, with neither ever truly prevailing. British society, and the divisions that have been laid bare within it through the Brexit vote, may well find itself in a similarly perpetual cycle, with nobody ever ultimately coming out on top.

CHAPTER 3:

REWRITING *ROMEO AND JULIET* AND REFLECTING BRITISHNESS IN THE FILMS OF KELLY ASBURY AND CARLO CARLEI

Romeo and Juliet has been described as 'arguably one of Shakespeare's most transmutable works in terms of global cross-cultural reach' (Bladen, 2020, p. 92). This status has been played out on screens of all sizes across the world since the early twentieth century, with moving image adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* becoming ever more varied across media, genres and cultures. As a result, the play comes with far greater adaptational baggage than the *Henry VI* plays and *Coriolanus* focused upon in Chapters 1 and 2 – and indeed most Shakespeare plays – both in moving image media and beyond. Michael Anderegg describes cinematic adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* as 'a subgenre of the Shakespeare film, each version commenting on an earlier one, each working against the original flow of the play to draw on Shakespeare's construction of scenes and moments that virtually demand comparative treatment' (2004, p. 57). It is therefore essential to keep the wider 'subgenre' of *Romeo and Juliet* on screen in mind throughout this chapter as I consider how twenty-first-century screen adaptations of the play reflect British cultural and national identity.

This is demonstrated aptly by a short scene from action-comedy film *Hot Fuzz* (dir. Wright, 2007), in which police officers Nicholas Angel (Simon Pegg) and Danny Butterman (Nick Frost) attend a performance of *Romeo and Juliet* being put on by the Sandford Players, their village's local amateur dramatic troupe. The production is comically terrible. The director, Martin Blower (David Threlfall), also histrionically hams it up as Romeo – despite being

visibly much older not only than the tragic hero is traditionally considered to be, but also than his co-star Eve Draper (Lucy Punch), who plays Juliet in farcically unconvincing fashion. Blower and Draper perform in costumes reminiscent of Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes's iconic knight and angel fancy dress from the Capulet Ball scene in Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996). Decorated with lightbulb-adorned crucifixes, the set is also intended to replicate the neon grandeur of Juliet's final resting place in the cathedral of Luhrmann's Verona Beach. Juliet shoots herself in the head just as Danes does, with Draper shouting 'Bang!' in place of firing the gun. The stage cuts to black, then the lights come up again as the cast sing the chorus of The Cardigans' 1996 song 'Lovefool' – a further link to Luhrmann's film – to a music hall style piano accompaniment whilst dancing a jig. However, apart from Blower and Draper, the players are dressed in Elizabethan-style period costume, much to the bemusement of Angel, Butterman, and others in the audience.

Edgar Wright's production within his film offers a comic analogy not only of how each new version of *Romeo and Juliet* 'comment[s] on an earlier one', in Anderegg's words, but also the tensions present in British culture and identity in the twenty-first century, and how Shakespearean adaptation has the power to highlight those tensions. Blower's production is overtly influenced by Luhrmann's film, albeit as a comically low-budget rip-off, but his self-indulgent casting of himself as Romeo despite not being the appropriate age also recalls the casting of Leslie Howard in the role at forty-three years old for George Cukor's 1936 film. The inclusion of cast members in Elizabethan-style dress alongside Blower and Draper's Luhrmann-influenced lovers demonstrates the conflict between creating 'traditional', 'prestige' period drama adaptations of Shakespeare and the desire to make his work 'modern' and 'contemporary'. At the time of *Hot Fuzz*'s release, Luhrmann's film would have been the most recent major cinematic adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, but was still over ten years old,

making Blower's production absurdly both contemporary and behind the times, further highlighting how out of touch the director is supposed to be.

It is revealed in a later scene that Blower and Draper were murdered later the same night by Sandford's Neighbourhood Watch Alliance in order to protect the village's outward appearance of epitomising the perfect English rural community, to which Blower's 'appalling' acting was seen as a threat. 'You murdered him for *that*?', Angel incredulously asks the group, only to receive the nonchalant reply: 'Well, he murdered Bill Shakespeare'. Blower's attempts to modernise Shakespeare – however feeble and unoriginal they are – are seen as just as much of a threat to the village's quintessentially English identity, itself a façade created through its senior residents (both in age and influence) systematically killing anyone who is seen as putting this image in jeopardy. Whilst Stephen Purcell notes the performance in *Hot Fuzz* is 'dominated by cliché and hampered by talentless participants', he highlights that it 'suggest[s] something rather nostalgic and Anglophile about amateur Shakespeare, … taking place as it does in a rural English idyll' (2017, p. 393). 'Traditional' performance of Shakespeare, characterised by reverence for the playwright's historical and literary status, is tied to 'traditional' British values and cultural identity as a result. Neil Archer describes *Hot Fuzz* as 'deft in the way [it] both appeal[s] to, yet comically undermine[s], the stability of "national" images and representations' (2020, p. 216). Just as Blower's production offers a knowing parody of Shakespeare, so the Neighbourhood Watch Alliance's extreme reaction to it, and wider homicidal protection of Sandford's appearance as the perfect English village, offers an affectionately satirical reflection of 'traditional' Britishness in the twenty-first century.

This chapter takes the intertwinement of 'traditional' perceptions of Shakespearean performance and Britishness as its focus to explore two screen adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet*: Kelly Asbury's *Gnomeo & Juliet* (2011), a computer-animated feature which retells Shakespeare's play through the antics of sentient garden gnomes; and Carlo Carlei's *Romeo &*

Juliet (2013), a live-action period drama adaptation of the play. My analysis will consider both the ways in which each film shows reverence and irreverence to Shakespeare, and the British cultural identities they either uphold or undermine. Whilst Asbury's and Carlei's films may initially appear to have little in common other than their mutual source text, the aim of adapting Shakespeare on screen for young people shared by both films creates several links between the two. Moreover, this chapter will argue that, whilst Asbury's film may on its surface appear as an irreverent, child-friendly adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* – most clearly signified by the survival of its titular couple in place of Shakespeare's tragic conclusion – Asbury interweaves cinematic, cultural and Shakespearean influences throughout the film to earn its happy ending, rather than simply offering a bowdlerisation or Disneyfication of *Romeo and Juliet*. In contrast, whilst Carlei's film superficially presents itself as a more 'traditional' and faithful cinematic adaptation of the play, it in fact airbrushes and simplifies Shakespeare in a number of problematic ways.

3.1 'In fair Verona, where we lay our scene' (Prologue.2)

Shakespeare's prologues are, in their early modern form and function, inherently uncinematic. Indeed, the popularity of prologues has waned in English-speaking drama since the eighteenth century, arguably making them an obvious choice to be cut from a screenplay when translating a Shakespeare play from theatre to cinema. However, in the case of adapting *Romeo and Juliet* for the screen, filmmakers have consistently not only included the opening Prologue, but actively embraced it as a way to establish the tone and style of their film. Cukor opens his film with an extreme long shot of his cast positioned on a stage, initially motionless and stylised as if appearing in a painted tableau – 'a composed picture that evokes High Art without imitating any specific work' (Jackson, 2007, p. 129). Four trumpeters, situated at the sides of the screen,

play a fanfare; and the rest of the cast remain motionless as the Chorus (uncredited) stands centre stage and unfurls a scroll. The camera cuts to a mid-shot of the Chorus as he reads the first six lines of the Prologue, then back to the extreme long shot once he has finished; the image returns to its painted tableau aesthetic before fading into the setting of act 1 scene 1. Cukor's approach is indicative of Shakespearean film adaptation during the early years of sound cinema, presenting his *Romeo and Juliet* as a prestige picture with clear links to its theatrical history.

Renato Castellani's 1954 film moves away from Cukor's overt theatricality, but maintains the sense of literary heritage through John Gielgud's performance of the Prologue. Gielgud is initially seen holding a copy of the First Folio, the Droeshout portrait of Shakespeare visible on the title page. Whilst Gielgud is credited as the Chorus, the character's white ruff and distinctive facial hair, and the fact he stands in front of a writing desk in a room featuring a Tudor window, all give a strong indication that Gielgud is portraying Shakespeare himself – the playwright transcending death to be able to hold his collected works.[5] For his 1968 film, Franco Zeffirelli similarly chose a recognisable Shakespearean – this time Laurence Olivier – to deliver the Prologue. As the film opens, Olivier's voice can be heard over establishing shots of Verona, over which the opening credits and title card are also visible. This blending of Shakespeare's words with a distinctly cinematic visual style demonstrates a significant shift away from the overtly theatrical approach of Cukor three decades earlier. Similarly, having Olivier perform in voiceover in comparison to Gielgud's Shakespearean Chorus in Castellani's film is indicative of Zeffirelli's intended audience, shifting the emphasis towards *Romeo and Juliet* as a story both about and for young people.

[5] Gielgud reprised the role of the Chorus in Alvin Rakoff's 1978 adaptation for the *BBC Television Shakespeare*, performing both the opening Prologue and the second which occurs between acts 1 and 2, although his appearance was not reminiscent of Shakespeare.

Sixty years after Cukor, and nearly thirty after Zeffirelli, Luhrmann utilised the Prologue in a different manner once again in the opening minutes of *Romeo + Juliet*. The film begins with the first twelve lines of the Prologue delivered by a news anchor (Edwina Moore), who appears on a television set surrounded by a black void, the camera zooming into the television screen as she speaks. Moore's matter-of-fact delivery initially places Luhrmann's adaptation of the story in a recognisable version of late twentieth century America. As Moore completes her final line, the camera rapidly zooms into the television screen, which is then replaced with a fast-moving shot through a cityscape as an intertitle tells the audience they are now 'in fair Verona' (Prologue.2). Pete Postlethwaite, who plays Father Laurence, then takes on the role of the Chorus to deliver the first six lines of the Prologue a second time through voiceover over a montage of the film's characters and settings. Luhrmann also includes in the montage newspaper and magazine headlines using phrases from the Prologue to report the Capulet and Montague feud. The same six lines are then presented for a third time through rapidly changing intertitles as part of the end of the montage, the editing of which becomes increasingly quick to match the dramatic and fast-paced orchestral score. By presenting the words of the Prologue multiple times, in different formats, and removed from their original context, Luhrmann sets up the postmodern hyper-cinematic media-saturated world of his film.

A quarter of a century later, Simon Godwin's 2021 *Romeo & Juliet* – filmed in 2020 within the closed National Theatre building in London during the UK lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic – takes yet another approach to the Prologue. The film opens with footage of the cast arriving in a rehearsal room, presented as if capturing real life through documentary-style filming. In a parallel to Luhrmann's film, the actor who plays Friar Laurence, Lucian Msamati, then delivers the Prologue from the same space. Msamati is initially filmed in close-up, but Godwin cuts to a long shot after the third line to reveal the actor is addressing the company who are seated in a U-shape around him. This reframes the Prologue

as a plot summary delivered at the commencement of a rehearsal, with Msamati taking on the role of the director of the production-within-the-film. Godwin cuts back to a close-up of Msamati's face as he speaks 'A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life' (Prologue.4), his eyes moving to either side of the group; then cuts to slow panning shots first of Josh O'Connor, then of Jessie Buckley – the film's Romeo and Juliet respectively. Both shots are partially obscured by other company members coming between the actors and the camera, furthering the suggestion of documentary-style filming. However, once Msamati delivers his final line, Godwin suddenly shifts away from this realistic aesthetic to offer a rapid montage of key moments from the film, reminiscent of Luhrmann's machine-gun cinematography, accompanied by a dramatic violin score. By juxtaposing different styles within his version of the Prologue, Godwin captures the hybridity of both his film's world and its method of production – simultaneously real and unreal, cinematic and theatrical.

3.2 'And so the Prince has called a tournament / To keep the battle from the city streets'

The treatment and presentation of the Prologue in screen versions of *Romeo and Juliet* therefore offers a litmus test for the style and approach of the adaptation as a whole. This holds true for the two films upon which this chapter is primarily focused. Carlei in many ways emulates the style and approach of Zeffirelli, to the point that the 2013 film can to an extent be considered a remake of the 1968 film. Anthony Davies suggests that Carlei 'returned to Zeffirelli's Renaissance Italian aesthetic, and cast two leads unmistakeably reminiscent of [Olivia] Hussey and [Leonard] Whiting in Hailee Steinfeld and Douglas Booth' (2015, p. 339). The Prologue in Carlei's film is delivered as voiceover by Stellan Skarsgård, who plays Prince Escalus, a decision which parallels Olivier's voiceover as the Chorus in Zeffirelli's film. Davies notes

how Zeffirelli's film 'caught the fashionable waves of the 1960s and, championing the sincere innocence of the young amid inflexible parental attitudes, was immensely attractive to an adolescent viewing public' (ibid., p. 338). Julian Fellowes, screenwriter and producer for Carlei's film, describes his motivation for making the film as fulfilling 'a need for this generation's youth to have their own version of the story, pristine but classic', not only suggesting his desire to emulate Zeffirelli's success in appealing to a younger audience, but also distancing his adaptation from Luhrmann's, the last major cinematic adaptation primarily made for a teenage audience (2013b, p. vii).

At the time of Carlei's film's release in 2013, media outlets regularly placed Carlei's film in opposition to Luhrmann's – most often unfavourably. In his *Guardian* review, Peter Bradshaw declared: 'compare [Carlei's film] to the blazing passion of Baz Luhrmann's [film] … and it looks pretty feeble' (2013a). Susan Wloszczyna went further in her review for *RogerEbert.com*: 'this attempt to sell Shakespeare to the "Twilight" faithful is so ill-conceived, it makes me wish it were possible to give a retroactive Oscar to Baz Luhrmann's [film]' (2013). Wloszczyna's suggestion that *Romeo & Juliet* had been made for the same audience as the popular *Twilight* film franchise, based on the series of young adult fantasy novels by Stephanie Meyer, was echoed by a publicist for Carlei's film who described it as '"Romeo and Juliet" for the Twilight Generation' (Zeitchik, 2012). Carlei's notably young cast furthers the idea of *Romeo & Juliet* as aiming to be the natural next step for *Twilight* fans a year after the release of the final film, *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 2* (dir. Condon, 2012). However, Carlei's film struggled to find its audience. From its $17 million US budget, *Romeo & Juliet* achieved a worldwide gross of less than $3 million; in contrast, *Breaking Dawn – Part 2* made over six times its (admittedly much larger) budget of $136.2 million; whilst Luhrmann's film has now made over ten times its $14.5 million budget (Mueller, 2012; 'Romeo and Juliet (2013)', n.d.; 'The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn, Part 2 (2012)', n.d.; 'Romeo + Juliet

(1996)', n.d.). If Fellowes and Carlei hoped to emulate Zeffirelli's success, subvert Luhrmann's approach and appeal to 'the *Twilight* generation', then they failed on all three counts.

Fellowes's significant involvement in making and promoting Carlei's film is likely to be a key reason for this failure, particularly as his credentials as the creator of television period drama *Downton Abbey* were featured prominently in the film's marketing materials. *Downton* had an estimated global audience of 120 million people in 2013, so using the series to promote *Romeo & Juliet* makes sense in terms of its immense popularity at the time of the film's production and release (Cuccinello, 2016). However, *Downton*'s target audience is very different to that of the *Twilight* films: focusing on the series' success in the US, Nicoletta Gullace reports that *Downton* proved 'overwhelmingly popular with American women aged 35–49' and that it doubled the amount of middle-aged men watching PBS, the network which broadcasts the series in the US (2019, p. 23). *Romeo & Juliet* therefore has two distinct – and conflicting – audiences: young adults, particularly fans of *Twilight*, to whom the youthful cast are intended to appeal; and middle-aged viewers, for whom the *Downton*-esque Renaissance period drama setting has been created.

An official trailer released in July 2013 potentially demonstrates the reasons for the failure of Carlei's film to reach either of its intended audiences (Rotten Tomatoes Trailers, 2013). The trailer begins with the final couplet of the play – 'For never was a story of more woe / Than this of Juliet and her Romeo' (5.3.309-10) – spoken as an ominous voiceover in typical Hollywood blockbuster style by Skarsgård, with dramatic strings and piano music in the background to create further tension. Close-up shots of Steinfeld as Juliet and then Booth as Romeo appear as Skarsgård speaks each character's name, placing the focus on the youthful actors likely to appeal to the young adult audience. The hashtag '#FORBIDDENLOVE', included in the bottom right corner of the screen throughout the trailer, further signifies the film being aimed at a younger audience who are more likely to be active on social media.

However, after the close-ups on Steinfeld and Booth, the trailer then cuts to an intertitle promoting the film as 'adapted by Academy Award winner and creator of "Downton Abbey" [*sic*]' – a marketing device directly aimed at middled-aged *Downton* fans, but unlikely to appeal to the young adult audience. The music also changes to a piece reminiscent of *Downton*'s opening title theme, further connecting the film to Fellowes's period drama series. The music continues over the next shot, which depicts Carlei's adaptation of the Capulet ball in Renaissance period drama style – again shifting the focus away from younger audience members and towards older viewers.

The influence of *Downton* within Carlei's film goes beyond the film's period drama aesthetic, and is linked to the brand of Britishness which pervades *Romeo & Juliet*. Carlei's depiction of medieval Italy is reminiscent of Fellowes's simplified and nostalgic interpretation of early twentieth-century England and English society in the series. Gullace describes *Downton* as being '[l]ocated in an imagined past … seem[ing] to preserve in time a glittering world of aristocratic values like a butterfly caught in prehistoric amber', where '[t]he terrors of the past – poverty, human rights abuses, bankruptcy, rampant sexism, infertility and dirt – were conveniently airbrushed over by the show's creators to create a safe and humanistic historical context' (2019, pp. 9, 11). Fellowes's suggestion that he and fellow producer Ileen Maisel 'wanted to give the modern audience a traditional, romantic version of the story [of *Romeo and Juliet*], complete with medieval costumes, balconies and duels' evinces this sense of adapting Shakespearean drama in the same manner as he fictionalised English history in *Downton* (2013b, p. vii). The sense of Carlei's Verona as existing within a similarly 'imagined past' that is 'airbrushed' and 'safe' is established in the opening minutes of his film. The director closely follows the description of the first scene in Fellowes's screenplay, which sets the opening in 'a great mediaeval palace' where '[g]aily coloured stalls around the edge combine with the lavish costumes to form a picture of quintessential Renaissance Italy' (2013a, p. 117). The opening

scene depicts a tournament between the Capulets and Montagues, an extratextual event invented by Fellowes. Whilst the opening seconds of the film depict the two knights representing the opposing households charging out of a tunnel and jostling with each other, Fellowes's screenplay dictates 'no jousting' and 'no violence', with the knights instead competing to lance a ring suspended above the field, further sanitising and softening his vision of Renaissance Italy (2013a, p. 118).

The brawl of act 1 scene 1 is featured in a subsequent scene set in a Verona marketplace. However, most of the scene is filmed in either mid or long shots with little movement, removing any sense of mounting tension or peril. Aside from a moment in which Tybalt (Ed Westwick) points his sword at Benvolio's (Kodi Smit-McPhee) throat, there is no sense of the fight being genuinely life-threatening – just a lot of swords clashing together. Fellowes also cuts almost all of the Capulet and Montague servants' lines, with no words exchanged between the two pairs of men prior to weapons being drawn. As a result, the brawl is not caused by gradually rising tensions between the two factions as it is in the play, but begins immediately after one of the Capulets spits at the feet of the Montagues. It is a choice which, in theory, could have effectively depicted the feud as a powder keg ready to explode at any moment; in practice, however, Carlei's pedestrian filming choices render the fight inauthentic and inert. In comparison to the chaotic, energetic and bloody filming of act 1 scene 1 by Zeffirelli, or Luhrmann's transformation of the scene into a vibrant, hyper-cinematic petrol station gunfight, Carlei's version is innocuous and conservative – offering a 'Downtonisation' of *Romeo and Juliet*'s opening scene.

This Downtonisation of the play extends to Fellowes's adaptation of Shakespeare's text. Fellowes states that he and Maisel wanted the film to be 'immediate and accessible and new, and with all this in mind, it seemed right to clarify and at times to simplify the text to let that new [modern] audience in' (2013b, p. viii). However, this claim of wanting to make the

film accessible is undercut by Fellowes's arrogant and elitist comments in an interview with the BBC, in which he asserts that

> to see the original [play] in its absolutely unchanged form, you require a kind of Shakespearian scholarship and you need to understand the language and analyse it and so on. I can do that because I had a very expensive education, I went to Cambridge. Not everyone did that and there are plenty of perfectly intelligent people out there who have not been trained in Shakespeare's language choices. (quoted in Sweeney, 2013)

Fellowes's statement suggests that, rather than making Shakespeare accessible, he views himself (and presumably others who had a similar 'very expensive education' to him) as gatekeepers of Shakespeare who control access to his works, and judge who is capable of appreciating and understanding Shakespeare's language. In doing so, Fellowes perpetuates an especially harmful approach to both 'traditional' Shakespearean performance and Britishness, reenforcing old-fashioned class structures and the idea of Shakespeare as High Art that can only be disseminated to the masses by a ruling elite, who have dumbed it down for their consumption and betterment. The success of both Luhrmann's and Zeffirelli's films – and countless other mainstream screen and stage adaptations of Shakespeare plays – which use Shakespeare's language with far less alteration than Fellowes employs in his script, demonstrates how outdated and misguided Fellowes's elitist attitude is.

Moreover, Fellowes's Downtonised script and his reasoning for altering Shakespeare's language have received significant critical and academic derision. Davies describes the script as 'frequently cringeworthy', noting how Fellowes 'attempt[s] – sometimes subtly, sometimes blockishly, always inexplicably – to modernise the play's language'; whilst Victoria Bladen states that 'the impoverished quasi-Shakespearean dialogue deflate[s] the energy of the tragedy' (2015, p. 339; 2020, p. 96). Film critic Mark Kermode echoes Bladen's sentiment in

his *Observer* review of Carlei's film, describing the script as 'blingtastic rewritten cod-Shakespeare' (2013). Terms such as 'quasi-Shakespearean' and 'cod-Shakespeare' highlight a key issue in Fellowes attempting to emulate Shakespeare's style, rather than translate the language into modern English. Caitlin Griffin elaborates on this issue:

> Fellowes's adaptation, while poetic and set in the period of Shakespeare's play, is not using Shakespeare's language. … It's not that Fellowes loses Shakespeare's meaning, but rather that it's Fellowes's meaning and not Shakespeare's that will be playing out in this film. (quoted in Senley, 2013)

To use Fellowes's words once again, rather than making Shakespeare 'accessible … to let [a] new audience in', his adapted screenplay is very likely to have the opposite effect.

Analysis of Fellowes's script during the film's version of the Prologue exemplifies this issue. In the published screenplay, the first eight lines of the Prologue are written as voiceover spoken during the opening tournament. This choice parallels Zeffirelli's film, in which Olivier's voiceover concludes at the same point. However, the Prologue as spoken by Skarsgård in Carlei's film is altered further. Only the first four lines of Shakespeare's Prologue are used, followed by an additional non-Shakespearean section newly written by Fellowes, which maintains Shakespeare's iambic pentameter to create four new lines. Fellowes's continuation of Shakespeare's rhythm, and Skarsgård's delivery of the lines with poetic line breaks, conflates the original and invented language to form an alternative eight-line Prologue made up of one quatrain by Shakespeare and a second by Fellowes:

> Two households, both alike in dignity,
> In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
> From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
> Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.

> And so the Prince has called a tournament
> To keep the battle from the city streets.
> Now rival Capulets and Montagues,
> They try their strength to gain the royal ring.

The altered Prologue simply does not work poetically: Fellowes's new lines neither continue the ABAB rhyme scheme of the first four lines, nor emulate the CDCD rhyme scheme of the Shakespearean quatrain which they replace. The word 'they' has also been inserted clunkily by Fellowes at the start of his final line, presumably simply to fit the meter. Emma Smith notes how, in Shakespeare's play, '[t]he language … and the worldview of the Prologue stress the inevitability, the pre-scriptedness, the already-happenedness of the events that are still to unfold' (2019, pp. 68-69). Phrases such as 'fatal loins' (Prologue.5) and 'star-crossed lovers' (Prologue.6) demonstrate this, presenting Romeo and Juliet as victims of fate heading inexorably towards death before the first scene has begun. In contrast, Fellowes excises the poetic foreshadowing of Shakespeare's Prologue in favour of surface-level literalness, replacing references to fate and the tragic inevitability of Romeo and Juliet's relationship with a description of what is happening on screen – his invented tournament.

In terms of enabling access to Shakespeare, Fellowes's approach is problematic. He retains only four of Shakespeare's fourteen lines, inserts four of his own, and makes no attempt to differentiate the Shakespearean from the non-Shakespearean verse. As a result, the ersatz Shakespearean lines could potentially be mistaken by audience members unfamiliar with the play as being written by Shakespeare. Rather than making Shakespeare's text accessible, Fellowes is in fact creating further barriers to it. By making such considerable changes to Shakespeare's language and verse only four lines and under two minutes into Carlei's film, Fellowes also places himself in opposition to those already familiar with and invested in Shakespeare's works from the outset. The dearth of academic engagement with Carlei's film

in the years since it was released is the most notable indicator of Fellowes's alienation of this third audience.

3.3 'And now we are going to tell it again. But different.'

Just as Fellowes's rewritten Prologue and Carlei's directorial choices establish their film's approach to adapting *Romeo and Juliet* for the screen, which ostensibly upholds 'traditional', conservative Shakespearean performance and Britishness, Asbury's adaptation of the Prologue in *Gnomeo & Juliet* offers numerous indicators of the ways in which his film subverts both of these factors. The opening shot shows a proscenium arch stage with the curtains closed, over which the familiar sounds of a theatre auditorium can be heard: the hum of audience chatter, an orchestra tuning up, the conductor tapping his baton. In a parallel to the first scene of Cukor's film, the opening moments create an overt link to *Romeo and Juliet*'s status as a theatrical text, placing the viewer in the role of a theatre audience member. Following the baton taps, unseen audience members can be heard shushing their fellow patrons. This call for quiet suggests what Diane Paulus describes as 'the ritual of theatre' which 'is governed by an unspoken code of behaviour', in which 'the audience is expected to quietly receive the event, only making noise at solicited moments' and where '[s]ilence is a premium' (2006, p. 334). Paulus's 'ritual of theatre' extends particularly to the experience of those who viewed *Gnomeo & Juliet* in a cinema. Peter Kirwan notes how 'the film's original cinematic presentation in 3-D extends the shot implicitly to include the cinema audience in [the] activity' of the in-film audience's shushing, which signifies their 'prepar[ation] for the collaborative performance of appreciating Shakespeare's text' (2017, p. 174). Whilst the shushing is apparently coming from off-screen audience members in the unseen auditorium of the theatre, the inclusion of this sound effect has the secondary effect of the film itself apparently gaining sentience and

commanding its audience to be quiet. The opening moments of Asbury's adaptation initially therefore have a similar effect to those of Cukor and Castellani, in that they encourage those watching to approach Shakespeare with reverence and solemnity.

However, whereas Carlei's film is influenced by Zeffirelli with the intention to emulate and venerate a bygone era of filmmaking, *Gnomeo & Juliet* evokes *Romeo and Juliet*'s cinematic history to parody and subvert its reverence. Having established the sense of a 'traditional' theatrical and Shakespearean experience, Asbury dismantles it almost immediately. A small gnome with a large red hat walks onto the stage – one of several similar gnomes who appear in the film, credited as 'Red Goon Gnomes', who serve roughly equivalent roles to the play's Capulet servants. Taking on the role of the Chorus, the Red Goon stands centre stage holding a scroll, evoking Cukor's Prologue by emulating the positioning and actions of the Chorus in the 1936 film. The gnome also wears an Elizabethan ruff, which Ella Hawkins notes 'is used widely in popular culture to imbue … figures with "Shakespearean" qualities', becoming a visual shorthand for traditional theatrical performance (2021, p. 194). The ruff also creates a further link to Gielgud's appearance in Castellani's film. Absury not only visually references these earlier films, but subverts their sense of theatrical prestige through the Red Goon's humorous cartoonish appearance: his large round nose protrudes from under his hat, and his eyes are completely obscured. Before delivering Shakespeare's Prologue, the Red Goon offers a disclaimer:

> The story you are about to see has been told before. A lot. And now we are going to tell it again. But different. It's about two star-crossed lovers kept apart by a big feud. No one knows how this feud started, but it's all quite entertaining. Unfortunately, before we begin, there is a rather long, boring Prologue, which I will read to you now.

Kirwan suggests that the opening 'addresses comically … the pressure to be faithful to a text that even filmmakers may find "boring"' (2017, p. 174). Whether or not the Prologue is indeed 'boring' is subjective; however, by evoking the solemn, reverent approaches to Shakespearean screen adaptation of Cukor and Castellani, and by having the film itself shush the audience into silence, Asbury creates the sense of Shakespeare as something to be experienced passively and humourlessly – albeit with the main intention of parodying this approach. It is therefore more accurately the antiquated mid-twentieth-century method of filming *Romeo and Juliet* that Asbury via the Red Goon is suggesting is 'boring', rather than the text itself.

Following his disclaimer, the Red Goon proceeds to unroll his comically large scroll and begins to recite the Prologue, again evoking Cukor's Chorus. However, the gnome's performance of the Prologue is continually interrupted by a hook appearing from either side of the screen to drag him off stage, and the Red Goon ultimately drops through a trapdoor that unexpectedly opens below him. Kirwan argues that

> Having aligned the cinema audience with the overheard spectators, shushing each other in order to behave as they know they *should*, the audience is now encouraged to identify with the Rabelaisian stage hook that promises tantalisingly to end the tedium of the recited monologue. (ibid., p. 174, original emphasis)

Much like the shushing audience members, neither the wielder of the stage hook nor the trapdoor operator are ever seen, creating a second instance of the film itself appearing to take control. Just as it earlier commanded the audience to be quiet, the seemingly sentient film also removes the Red Goon from the stage – and the screen – bringing the gnome's 'boring' approach to an abrupt end and proceeding with the more interesting 'different' adaptation originally promised.

Once the Red Goon has fallen through the stage, the camera zooms through the theatre curtain to display the film's title above Verona Drive, a typical British suburban street where much of *Gnomeo & Juliet*'s action is set. Following the Red Goon's recital of two truncated versions of the Prologue – first in modern English, and then almost the first six lines of Shakespeare's Prologue – Asbury offers an opening montage which parallels the Prologue once again. In doing so, the director echoes Luhrmann's approach of offering multiple versions of the Prologue both aurally and visually. Shakespeare's description of '[t]wo households both alike in dignity' (Prologue.1) takes on a contemporary irony as the camera cuts to an establishing shot of the adjoining Capulet and Montague houses, which are copiously adorned with gaudy paraphernalia in their respective red and blue colour schemes. Once Mr. Capulet (Richard Wilson) and Miss Montague (Julie Walters) have left their homes, the scene cuts to their back gardens and the gnomes come to life. A series of visual gags sets the tone of Asbury's film, as well as establishing the 'ancient grudge break[ing] to new mutiny' (Prologue.3) through child-friendly slapstick pranks between the Reds and Blues rather than the plays 'civil brawls' (1.1.87). The spirit of Abraham and Gregory's opening wordplay is also retained through the exchange between Lord Redbrick (Michael Caine) and Lady Bluebury (Maggie Smith), respective leaders of the Red and Blue clans, which includes gentle double entendres ('Your tulips are looking a little limp this year, aren't they?') and malapropisms ('I don't like what you're incinerating!').

Asbury's opening sequence also establishes the most fundamental and obvious element of his adaptation: the main cast of *Gnomeo & Juliet* are garden gnomes (and, in a few cases, other ornaments). Whilst Abigail Rokison suggests that '[t]he attractive garden gnomes and their animal friends have an obvious allure' for a younger audience, this is only true of the characters' bright colours and cartoon aesthetic (2013, p. 210). 'What's in a gnome?', asks Juliet (Emily Blunt) at one point in *Gnomeo & Juliet* – a punning adaptation of the play's

'What's in a name?' (2.2.43), of course, but also a question worthy of consideration in relation to Asbury's adaptation. Unlike the toys that come to life in *Toy Story* (dir. Lasseter, 1995) or the fairytale characters of *Shrek* (dirs. Adamson and Jenson, 2000), for example, both of which have an overt and established appeal for children, garden gnomes are fundamentally a phenomenon with an adult attraction. Asbury demonstrates this fact through Mr. Capulet and Miss Montague, both of whom are adults of retirement age who live alone with no evidence of either children or grandchildren – their gnomes and other ornaments are assembled entirely for their own pleasure. Whilst Mr. Capulet and Miss Montague are seemingly peripheral to the film's narrative, the aesthetics of their respective gardens reveal the peculiarly English socio-cultural dynamics at play within the film. Kate Fox suggests that

> the design and content of an English person's garden is largely determined – or at least very strongly influenced – by the fashions of the class to which he or she belongs, or to which he or she aspires … As a rule-of-thumb, gardens lower down the social scale tend to be both more garish (their owners would say 'colourful' or 'cheerful') and more regimented in their appearance (their owners would call them 'neat' or 'tidy') than those at the higher end. (2014, pp. 208, 209-210).

Not only do the neighbouring gardens in Asbury's film fit Fox's 'garish' and 'regimented' criteria, but the director also comically exaggerates these traits. For example, Juliet's ornamental castle is the centrepiece of Mr. Capulet's intricate water feature, complete with fountains, music and a light show; whilst the dominant feature of Miss Montague's garden is a porcelain toilet used as a planter for a wisteria tree, over which Lady Bluebury is fiercely protective.

Garden gnomes first came to England during the Victorian era and were originally associated with upper-class gardens and country estates (Campbell, 2013, pp. 192-193).

However, Twigs Way notes that '[e]ven before the close of the nineteenth century gnomes were teetering on the fickle knife-edge of taste', and '[b]y the 1930s, gnomes were increasingly seen as suited more to suburban lawns and amusement parks than stately homes' (2010, p. 35). The release in 1937 of Walt Disney Production's first feature-length animation, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (dirs. Cottrell et al., 1937), had a further impact on the cultural standing of garden gnomes. Gordon Campbell suggests that, following the influence of *Snow White*, 'the gnome became a saccharine figure, and some people retreated in embarrassment', and that the film created 'a modern garden gnome that is culturally bland' (2013, pp. 194, 195). In contrast, Way suggests that the popularity of *Snow White* throughout the Second World War gave gnomes 'a new lease of life in the post-austerity period', noting that in some gardens 'a Bambi or Thumper would wander in from another Disney classic to keep the gnomes company' (2013, pp. 36-37). This mid-twentieth century shift is echoed in *Gnomeo & Juliet* through Fawn (Ozzy Osbourne), a deer ornament who serves as the sidekick of Red gnome Tybalt (Jason Statham), and the ornamental stone rabbits who inhabit the Capulet garden alongside the Blue gnomes.

The polarised opinions of Campbell and Way aptly demonstrate Eva Londos's designation of the garden gnome as

> a soldier at the front of the battle between good and bad taste in the garden. Or—to paraphrase Pierre Bourdieu, sociologist of culture—the antagonistic fight between different groups about the right to define good and bad taste, branding what is kitsch and non-kitsch. (2006, p. 295)

Londos's analogy is literalised in a 2013 television advertisement for furniture store Ikea, in which a couple's attempts to modernise their garden with Ikea furniture are opposed by an army of garden gnomes. London-based creative agency Mother, who devised the advertisement, describes its gnomes as 'the ultimate embodiment of everything that's tired and

dreary about British gardens' who 'will do anything possible to keep the garden the way that they like it – kitsch and dull' ('Ikea says it's time for change', n.d.). Whilst Mother uses 'kitsch' with negative connotations, Londos suggests that kitschness may only exist as an entirely subjective status in the postmodern era, where the divisions of High and Low Culture have been dismantled through movements such as pop art (2006, pp. 295-297).

It is this form of dismantling which is at play in Asbury's adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* into a story of warring garden gnomes set across neighbouring British suburban gardens characterised by knowingly exaggerated kitsch traits. Whilst *Gnomeo & Juliet* is aimed at children through its colourful, cartoonish style, the choice to make the characters gnomes is one which fundamentally shifts Shakespeare away from both its High Art status and 'traditional' performance. It also locates the film within a knowingly kitsch brand of Britishness which does not take itself seriously and gently pokes fun at the idiosyncrasies of the nation's culture and identity. For Asbury, the kitsch status of gnomes is something to be embraced and celebrated, making *Gnomeo & Juliet* a finely pitched, affectionate parody of both Shakespeare and British culture. Linda Hutcheon defines parody as 'imitation characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text' (1985, p. 6). Asbury adapts, exaggerates and subverts the features and conventions of both Shakespeare and Britishness, but always does so with warmth and sincerity rather than vindictively or cynically. Importantly, Asbury's approach is in direct contrast to that of Carlei: where Fellowes's screenplay condescendingly gatekeeps Shakespeare, *Gnomeo & Juliet* breaks down any barriers to make it accessible and welcoming for a wide audience.

The most prominent way in which Asbury subverts the narrative of *Romeo and Juliet* in particular is in his installation of a happy ending in place of Shakespeare's tragic conclusion. The idea of rewriting Shakespeare's tragedies to make them more palatable or give them a happy ending is not new. Nahum Tate's tragicomic adaptation *The History of King Lear* – in

which Lear lives and regains his throne, and the surviving Cordelia marries Edgar – is one of the most well-known. First performed in 1681, Tate's revision superseded both quarto and folio versions of Shakespeare's play and remained the standard performed text of *Lear* until it was finally laid aside in 1838 (Dobson, 2015, pp. 166-167). *Romeo and Juliet* was not immune to this trend either: Sir James Howard rewrote the play to give it a happy ending when it was revived during the Restoration, although the tragic ending was still performed every other night (Davies, 2015, p. 337). In 1818, Thomas Bowdler published *The Family Shakespeare*, a ten-volume edited version of Shakespeare's plays, which completed the 1807 twenty-play edition published anonymously by his sister. Bowdler's publication declared that 'nothing is added to the original text; but those words and expressions are omitted which cannot with propriety be read aloud in a family'. However, Bowdler in fact 'cut any passage which in his view smacked of obscenity', and '[b]y 1836 the verb "to bowdlerize" was current, with implications of crass and insensitive censoring' (Foakes, 2015, p. 116)

The installation of a happy ending when adapting a text is usually seen in the modern era as a way to make a story more suitable for children, a process popularised on screen most widely through Disney's animated releases throughout the twentieth century. As a result, the term 'Disneyfication' was coined to describe such adaptations, exemplified by '[t]he addition or acquisition of features or elements considered characteristic of Disney films' which lead to a 'simplification, sanitization, or romanticization' of the original work ('Disneyfication, *n.*', 2022). Disney inaugurated this concept through *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, which lightened many of the darker aspects of the fairy tale first published by the Brothers Grimm in 1812. Since then, both Disney and other animation studios have Disneyfied a wide range of literary sources – from Charles Dickens (*Oliver & Company*, dir. Scribner, 1988) to the Old Testament (*The Prince of Egypt*, dirs. Chapman et al., 1998) – when adapting them for the screen.

Most critics assessed *Gnomeo & Juliet* upon its release as an example of a Disneyfied version of *Romeo and Juliet*. Daisy Bowie-Sell described the film as 'a squeaky-clean garden gnome-influenced take on the *Romeo and Juliet* story which stays firmly in the under 6 age bracket' in her *Telegraph* review, typifying the manner in which the film was dismissed as a disposable children's version of the play (2011). Rokison suggests that 'the film abounds in elements that are clearly designed to appeal to young children', identifying 'the absence of swordplay and bloody deaths, cutting of the suicides of the protagonists, and alteration of Shakespeare's tragic ending to one of joy' as *Gnomeo & Juliet*'s 'most obviously child-friendly aspects', noting only that the film gives a 'nod towards an adult audience' (2013, p. 210). However, as has already been demonstrated through analysis of the kitsch elements of British culture carefully deployed by Asbury, accepting *Gnomeo & Juliet* on its child-friendly level alone is to dismiss the many cultural influences to be found beneath its 'U'-certificated exterior.

Whilst feature animation was almost entirely aimed at children throughout much of the twentieth century, *Gnomeo & Juliet* exists in a period of cinema history dominated by studios whose computer-animated releases are undoubtedly made for older viewers as much as younger ones. A significant example of this shift is DreamWorks Studios' successful *Shrek* film series, which is characterised by its blend of postmodern humour for both children and adults, with pastiches of traditional fairy tales, classic cinema and contemporary popular culture sitting alongside one another. The first film in the series was at one point to be Asbury's directorial debut until he left the project in 1997; he later returned to the series to co-direct the sequel, *Shrek 2* (dirs. Adamson et al. 2004) (Cherelus, 2021). Asbury regularly ensures *Gnomeo & Juliet* appeals to both children and adults in a manner similar to the *Shrek* films, demonstrated early on through his loose adaptation of the opening scene of *Romeo and Juliet* – a lawnmower race between the Red and Blue gnomes. Unlike the jousting tournament at the start of Carlei's film, which establishes Fellowes's Downtonised version of *Romeo and Juliet*

by sanitising and dumbing down the narrative and its setting, Asbury's opening race successfully demonstrates the multiple levels upon which *Gnomeo & Juliet* operates. Replacing the violence with a child-friendly competition allows Asbury to adapt the scene in a manner both appropriate for and appealing to a younger audience. Aesthetically, however, the lawnmower race is strongly influenced by the drag race sequence between two rival gangs in *Grease* (dir. Kleiser, 1978), itself a homage to similar scenes featured in films of the 1950s such as *Rebel Without a Cause* (dir. Ray, 1955). These references not only align Asbury's film to the teenage rebellion aesthetic of earlier film adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet*, such as Luhrmann's film and *West Side Story* (dirs. Robbins and Wise, 1961), but are also undoubtedly included for older and more cineliterate audience members to recognise and appreciate. The similarities between Carlei's and Asbury's respective extratextual competitions remain firmly on the surface, with *Gnomeo & Juliet*'s lawnmower race proving far more complex and cineliterate than *Romeo & Juliet*'s condescending and unnecessary jousting match.

Whilst the influence of DreamWorks's *Shrek* franchise is undoubtedly present in *Gnomeo & Juliet*, more significant are the ways Asbury's film is shaped by the approach of Pixar Animation Studios. Ellen Scott describes Pixar as a 'corporate auteur [that] has developed a sophisticated mode of address to adult viewers' through 'injecting an adult consciousness at the core of ostensibly childish films' (2014, pp. 151-152). Importantly, the studio has done this whilst largely shunning the pop culture references which dominate the *Shrek* films and other computer-animated franchises: 'Pixar realized the diminishing value of transient references in the creation of timeless classics and has mined an alternative set of "universal" pleasures' (ibid., p. 152). It is this move away from the ephemerality of postmodern pop culture references and towards something more consciously affective in Pixar's films that has continued to distinguish their output from that of other computer animation studios. A key example of this 'adult consciousness' appears in *Toy Story 2* (dir. Lasseter, 1999) during a flashback montage

depicting the tragic backstory of cowgirl doll Jessie (Joan Cusack), set to the song 'When She Loved Me' written for the film by Randy Newman and performed by Sarah McLachlan. Susan Smith notes the sequence's mature, emotional impact upon not only the audience but on fellow cowboy toy Woody (Tom Hanks): 'as the song draws to a close and the movie dissolves back to the present, Woody's astonished, transfixed stare at Jessie suggests that, along with us, he has heard it too (or, if not literally the song itself, something approaching its affective power)' (2017, p. 118).

The sequence in *Gnomeo & Juliet* which details the backstory of Featherstone (Jim Cummings), a plastic flamingo ornament – 'the much derided and yet equally beloved icon of kitsch Americana' – is clearly influenced by the earlier scene from *Toy Story 2* (Laban, 2019). Like Jessie's flashback, Featherstone's is also a montage detailing a tale of heartbreak: the breakdown of the romantic relationship between his former owners. The relationship's end led to both Featherstone's separation from his plastic partner, and the garden he inhabits becoming overgrown after the couple's house is abandoned. Paralleling Newman's original composition for *Toy Story 2,* the montage is set to one of two original songs recorded by Elton John for *Gnomeo & Juliet*, 'Love Builds a Garden'. Crucially, this removes the pop culture referentiality of the use of John's established hits in other scenes (the opening lawnmower race, for example, is set to his 1973 song 'Saturday Night's Alright for Fighting') and interpolated in the film's instrumental score. In a further parallel to Jessie's montage, and exemplifying Asbury's earnest approach to his kitsch characters and aesthetic, Featherstone's backstory is also played entirely straight with affective sincerity. The final moments show Featherstone watching the house crumble and the garden become untended over many years, followed by a fade to Gnomeo (James McAvoy) and Juliet standing with Featherstone in the present looking over the same scene. Just like Woody's 'astonished, transfixed stare', the two gnomes motionlessly observe the abandoned house and garden, giving the impression they have experienced the 'affective

power' of the sequence just as the audience has. Disneyfication was coined as a term to capture the sense of a story being simplified and sanitised for children, in much the same way as I have used the term Downtonisation in this chapter to describe the approach of Carlei and Fellowes. However, moments such as the conclusion of Featherstone's backstory demonstrate how feature animation has moved beyond Disneyfication. The influence of Pixar in encouraging studios to, in Scott's words, '[inject] an adult consciousness at the core of ostensibly childish films' to create a sense of affective sincerity beyond the *Shrek*-like postmodern pop culture referentiality, suggests a shift into a new era of 'Pixarfication' in animation.

3.4 'A plague 'a both your houses!' (3.1.108)

Gnomeo & Juliet's hybrid relationship to both the pop culture postmodernism of the *Shrek* franchise and, more importantly, the emotional maturity of Pixar, is mirrored in Asbury's incorporation of numerous Shakespearean nods and influences into his film. Whilst some of the references included are overt parodies of play titles and well-known lines, others are much more subtle – Ken Marks suggested in his *New Yorker* review that '[e]ven Elizabethan scholars may have trouble identifying all the Shakespeare jokes and references that pepper the clever screenplay' (2011). One such example is graffiti reading 'R3 3x3' seen momentarily in the background of one scene, a reference to a line from *Richard III*: 'Alas! You three, on me, threefold distressed / Pour all your tears' (2.2.86-87). The graffiti suitably appears during a sequence where Gnomeo is indeed 'distressed', being as he is first chewed and then buried by a stray bulldog. Just as homages to older films are included to appeal explicitly to cineliterate adult viewers, esoteric references to Shakespearean works such as this evidence a conscious decision to please audience members with considerable existing knowledge of, and investment in, Shakespeare's works.

As a result, like Carlei's *Romeo & Juliet*, Asbury's film has three clear audiences: children, to whom the bright colours, cartoon aesthetic and simplified plot appeal; adults, at whom the classic cinema, pop culture references and kitsch aesthetic are aimed; and Shakespeare aficionados, for whom the numerous subtle references to Shakespeare's works are included. In contrast to Carlei, however, Asbury arguably succeeds in reaching reaches all three of these audiences. Whilst the reasons for both the success of Asbury's film and the failure of Carlei's are manifold, when it comes to each director's approach to Shakespeare's language, the difference is identifiable in the attitude they have towards their audiences. Both films rewrite *Romeo and Juliet* in different ways, and both place young viewers – pre-teens in the case of *Gnomeo & Juliet*, teenagers in that of *Romeo & Juliet* – as their primary audience above adults and Shakespeare enthusiasts. Asbury installs a happy ending in place of Shakespeare's tragic conclusion, but does so by earning the right to do so through carefully interweaving Shakespearean, cultural and genre influences. Conversely, Carlei as director and Fellowes as screenwriter makes changes to Shakespeare's plot and characters which, whilst seemingly innocuous on the surface, reveal fundamental misinterpretations of the play, a misplaced arrogance about how to adapt Shakespeare successfully and coherently, and a lack of respect for their young audience's ability to understand and engage with *Romeo and Juliet* as written by Shakespeare.

The adaptation of Mercutio by Carlei and Asbury in their respective films offers a shared point of comparison to demonstrate the different attitudes of the directors towards their young audience. It is fitting that Mercutio provides a site of adaptational freedom considering that the character exists as one of Shakespeare's most significant adaptations from his main source text, Arthur Brooke's narrative poem *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet* (1562). Appearing only briefly in Brooke's poem, 'Mercutio's exuberance and his pivotal role in the play … make him a memorable triumph' as a character almost entirely of Shakespeare's own

creation (Weis, 2012, pp. 48-49). The character's spirited nature and wildcard status within the narrative have been memorably brought to life on screen in the twentieth century. John McEnery's Mercutio in Zeffirelli's film feels notably unhinged, making the character's behaviour seem genuinely unpredictable and adding to Verona's inherent volatility. Harold Perrineau brought a similar impulsiveness to Mercutio in Luhrmann's adaptation whilst emphasising his extroversion, encapsulated in the character appearing in sequin-studded drag to lead an exuberant dance routine to Candi Staton's 'Young Hearts Run Free' during the Capulet Ball. Mercutio's characterisation in *Romeo and Juliet* has its foundations in his linguistic flair and bawdy humour, demonstrated by the character during act 1 scene 4 through the 'Queen Mab' speech (1.4.53-95). Regarding Zeffirelli's film, Courtney Lehmann contends that 'McEnery's "Queen Mab" speech smacks of a barely-contained lunacy that no film actors have been able to master since' (2010, p. 145). This sentiment is echoed in James N. Loehlin's uncharitable assessment of Luhrmann's version as a 'clumsy copy' of Zeffirelli's, although Loehlin goes on to argue that Perrineau's drag performance at the Capulet Ball 'serves the structural function of the Mab speech, encapsulating the brilliancy, imaginative energy and homosocial bonding of Mercutio's world' and that it 'exemplifies Luhrmann's characteristic technique of replacing or supplementing the verbal text with a cinematic equivalent' (2000, p. 127).

In comparison with Zeffirelli's and Luhrmann's adaptations of the 'Queen Mab' speech, the scene in Carlei's film encapsulates both his and Fellowes's arrogance and condescension towards their audience and the shortcomings of the film as a whole. The sequence is shot without the vibrancy of Zeffirelli's or Luhrmann's film through a series of mid-shots and close-ups of Mercutio (Christian Cooke), Romeo and Benvolio. Cooke's performance lacks the spirited nature of McEnery or Perrineau, and any vivacity he does offer is flattened by Carlei's inert camera. A firepit in the background of the scene offers a visual

echo of Zeffireli's version, in which McEnery's face is partially obscured at times by a burning torch in the foreground of some shots. However, the link only serves to highlight how Carlei fails where Zeffirelli succeeds. The flames in Zeffirelli's film intrude on the shot, adding to the sense of Mercutio's fiery temperament and bringing to mind demonic possession (a sense furthered through McEnery's skull mask pushed up from his face). In contrast, the fire in Carlei's film remains firmly in the background, its warm light occasionally flickering on Cooke's face as he performs, lending the 'Queen Mab' speech the comfortable and nostalgic air of a fireside story rather than anything more spirited or bawdy. The scene is further sanitised by Fellowes's cutting of the speech from the play's forty-one lines to just twelve, removing not only much of Mercutio's poetry, but also the coarser imagery the character describes at the point at which Romeo cuts him off in the play.

The Downtonisation of Mercutio through Fellowes's adapted screenplay is furthered in Carlei's adaptation of act 2 scene 4, when the character learns from Benvolio of Tybalt's challenge to Romeo. In the play, Mercutio answers with characteristic flair:

> Alas, poor Romeo, he is already dead, stabbed
> with a white wench's black eye, run through the ear
> with a love song, the very pin of his heart cleft with
> the blind bow-boy's butt-shaft – and is he a man to
> encounter Tybalt? (2.4.13-17)

Mocking Romeo's lovestruck temperament, Mercutio suggests Romeo will be unable to answer Tybalt's challenge because Cupid has already defeated him. In the film, Fellowes shortens the speech to a single line: 'Alas, poor Romeo's already dead' (2013a, p. 151). This not only removes all of Mercutio's combat-themed wordplay, but also alters the meaning of Mercutio's answer. He is no longer joking about Romeo's infatuation with Rosaline, but

making a straightforward statement that Tybalt will kill Romeo should they duel. Benvolio's response is then lengthened from the play's 'Why, what is Tybalt!' (2.4.18) to 'Why? Who and what is Tybalt that he should be so sure of victory?' (Fellowes 2013a, p. 151). Mercutio's answer in the play lasts for sixteen lines, during which he ridicules Tybalt's ostentatious fighting style (2.4.19-26). In the film, Fellowes cuts Mercutio's response to just five lines:

> More than a prince of cats, I tell you now.
> He fights like a music player, all precision,
> And [keeps] his time and distance perfect play.
> With one and two and three and in your chest,
> He is a gentleman and a duelist.
> And none who fight him live to tell the tale. (2013a, p. 152)

The first four lines are adapted from the play, but remove both Mercutio's characteristic badinage and his mockery of Tybalt. The final line is an example of the quasi-Shakespearean language found throughout Fellowes's screenplay, and significantly alters the meaning of the speech from Mercutio's mockery of Tybalt to genuine fear of his skill as a swordsman – which Cooke delivers in a humourless fashion.

Fellowes's dumbing down of the complex relationship between Mercutio and Tybalt in the play into a simplistic rivalry in Carlei's film is instigated in the opening scene, as it is Mercutio who competes against Tybalt during the opening jousting tournament. Fellowes also overtly establishes at the outset that, in Carlei's film, Mercutio is a member of the Montague family. When the tournament ends in a Montague victory, Prince Escalus announces: 'We here declare Mercutio, of the House of Montague, our champion'.[6] It is a significant change from the play, in which Mercutio is a kinsman of the Prince and Paris who, despite his close

[6] The line as spoken in the film differs from that in the published screenplay, which also retains the alteration of Mercutio into a Montague (see Fellowes 2013a, p. 119).

association with the Montagues, is held in high regard by the Capulets. This is evidenced through the inclusion of his name (alongside that of his unseen brother Valentine) in Peter's list of guests to invite to the Capulet Ball in act 1 scene 2. In Carlei's adaptation of the scene, both Mercutio and Valentine's names are removed from the guest list, suggesting that Fellowes at least initially considers the ramifications of making Mercutio a Montague.

This is not the case later in the film, however, and is particularly evident in Carlei's adaptation of act 3 scene 1. Once again, Fellowes supplements lines from the play with quasi-Shakespearean invented lines of his own. Mercutio's dying lines in Carlei's film are:

> Down with the Montagues and Capulets,
> Whose angry war has stolen all my days.
> A plague on both your houses! (Fellowes 2013a, p. 165)

Fellowes's adaptation evidences his condescending attitude towards his audience, preceding a version of Shakespeare's repeated line – 'A plague a' both your houses' (3.1.101-102; 3.1.108) – with two newly invented lines that unnecessarily labour its meaning. Moreover, Fellowes's decision not only to retain the line but add further emphasis to it is nonsensical due to his decision to make Mercutio a member of the Montague family – one of the houses Mercutio is now wishing a plague upon. As a result, Mercutio's condemnation of the Montagues and Capulets as 'your houses' fundamentally no longer makes sense. Hypothetically, adapting the line as 'A plague on both *our* houses' would at least make logical and grammatical sense within Fellowes's adaptation, had the screenwriter chosen to be as indulgent in changing this particular line as he is to much of Shakespeare's language. The status of Mercutio's curse as one of the most recognisable lines from *Romeo and Juliet* is likely to be at least part of the reason behind Fellowes's decision to retain it. However, if this is indeed the case, Fellowes's retention of the line simply for its recognisability as a Shakespearean catchphrase – even

though it no longer makes sense in the context of his wider adaptation of the play – aptly demonstrates the significant flaws in his approach to adapting *Romeo and Juliet*.

Gnomeo & Juliet does not feature a character who can be considered a direct counterpart to Mercutio. Rokison notes that, as a result, 'Gnomeo is not culpable for the deaths of any of his friends' unlike Romeo, and that the only death in Asbury's film is that of Tybalt – decisions which help to lighten *Gnomeo & Juliet*'s narrative for its primary young audience (2013, p. 210). However, Asbury retains aspects of Mercutio through other characters within his film. The peace-keeping Benvolio of the play is adapted into the spirited and impulsive Benny (Matt Lucas), for example, whose role within the film's plot also mirrors that of Mercutio in the play at several points. It is Tybalt's attack on Benny that leads to Gnomeo seeking revenge and ultimately Tybalt being 'smashed' (the film's child-friendly equivalent of death). McAvoy has described Gnomeo as being an 'amalgamation between Romeo and Mercutio' and stated that, when playing the role, 'it was handy to have an appreciation of who Mercutio was as well and that weight of expectation not only to conform to what your family wants, but also just to show off for your blue pals' (quoted in Silverman, 2012). Gnomeo's Mercutio-like qualities are evident early on in Asbury's film. Whereas Romeo is introduced in the play as a lovesick teenager who distances himself from his family's feud, Gnomeo enthusiastically takes centre stage in the feud by competing against Tybalt in the opening lawnmower race. Whilst the race loosely parallels the brawl between the Montagues and Capulets in act 1 scene 1, Asbury also positions it as the latest episode in an ongoing personal rivalry between Gnomeo and Tybalt, paralleling the non-partisan enmity Mercutio has towards Tybalt in the play.

Asbury uses Gnomeo's Mercutio-like qualities to include other non-Shakespearean influences in his characterisation. The race against Tybalt inherently positions Gnomeo as an archetypal rebellious but good-hearted teenager in the mould of John Travolta's Danny in

Grease or James Dean's Jim in *Rebel Without a Cause*. However, Asbury also introduces parallels between Gnomeo and an explicitly British cinematic icon: James Bond. Gnomeo's nonchalant nods and winks to Tybalt during the race offer a parodic echo of the moment Bond does the same to an adversary during a car chase in *For Your Eyes Only* (dir. Glen, 1981), linking Gnomeo to the incarnation of Bond played by Roger Moore. The connection is established further in a later scene that spoofs the opening sequence of *The Spy Who Loved Me* (dir. Gilbert, 1977), in which Moore's Bond famously makes his escape using a Union Jack parachute. Gnomeo escapes the Capulet garden in a similar fashion by using a pair of correspondingly patterned underpants snatched from Mr. Capulet's washing line. Linking Gnomeo specifically to Moore's Bond creates another cinematic echo aimed at adults rather than children, whilst also further aligning *Gnomeo & Juliet* with the British cultural kitsch aesthetic embraced by Asbury, as Moore himself described his performance as Bond as being both 'tongue in cheek' and 'a ridiculous hero' (quoted in Field and Chowdhury, 2015, p. 224).

3.5 'To turn your households' rancour to pure love' (2.3.87-88)

Just as Asbury carefully selects cultural references from cinematic history to complement the choices he makes in drawing from Shakespeare's play, and ensures *Gnomeo & Juliet*'s relationship to twenty-first-century feature animation goes beyond depthless postmodernism, he also ensures his Shakespearean influences are not limited to *Shrek*-style throwaway references. The director creates links to Shakespearean comedy throughout his adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, most overtly through his installation of a happy ending as already noted. Following their survival, the director shows Gnomeo and Juliet fulfilling Friar Lawrence's desire to 'turn [their] households' rancour to pure love' (2.3.92) by getting married and uniting Red and Blue by riding over the horizon on a purple lawnmower. The sequence again visually

echoes the closing moments of Kleiser's *Grease*, in which reunited high school couple Danny and Sandy (Olivia Newton-John) magically drive Danny's hot rod into the sky. Just as Shakespeare's comedies often conclude with multiple marriages, Asbury romantically pairs up other characters too: Nanette (Ashley Jensen), the film's Nurse character, and Paris (Stephen Merchant) share a kiss; and Featherstone is reunited with his long-lost love. The director also includes a jig of sorts, with every character joining together for a song-and-dance party to John's 'Crocodile Rock'. Even Tybalt returns to join the dance having apparently been glued back together after being 'smashed'.

However, *Gnomeo & Juliet*'s Shakespearean comedy influences are seeded much earlier than this. Asbury embeds *Romeo and Juliet*'s acknowledged relationship to comedy throughout his adaptation, allowing the film's happy ending to feel earned rather than merely altered to make the story more suitable for children. Gnomeo and Juliet repeatedly escape their respective gardens to meet in secret at 'the old Laurence place', the overgrown garden where Featherstone lives. Asbury most clearly marks out his utilisation of Shakespearean comedy here, with the Laurence garden becoming the film's equivalent of the forest setting seen in comedies such as *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *As You Like It*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. As Catherine Bates notes:

> The forest does not necessarily specify an area of woodland but rather any wild or uncultivated place … even where specifically forest retreats do not feature as such, most of Shakespeare's comedies echo this sense of movement to and from some mysterious or sinister realm. (2006, p. 105)

The Laurence garden clearly fits this description, as well as providing what Bates also describes as the forest's function of being 'not only … an age-old locus for dalliance and fertility rituals, but more specifically (deriving from *foris*, "outside") a place that lies outside the jurisdiction

of the city' (ibid.). Whilst *Gnomeo & Juliet*'s 'U' certificate ensures no fertility rituals are performed by the pair in the Laurence garden, it is the place where Gnomeo and Juliet repeatedly meet in secret in order to carry out their child-friendly liaisons, as well as being outside the dominion of their neighbouring gardens and feuding families. When they first meet Featherstone, the pair put on a thin charade of being adversaries, rather than being 'on a date' as Featherstone correctly guesses, leading to the following exchange:

JULIET: He's a Blue!

GNOMEO: She's a Red!

FEATHERSTONE: And I'm pink! Who cares?

As Featherstone's nonchalance confirms, in the Laurence garden, Gnomeo and Juliet are freed from the enmity between the Red and Blue factions, just as the lovers in numerous Shakespeare comedies are released from the 'jurisdiction of the city' and allowed to happily pair up.

The Laurence garden is the place where Gnomeo and Juliet first meet, resulting in one of the most significant changes to the *Romeo and Juliet* story made by Asbury (alongside his happy ending): the choice not to include an equivalent to the Capulet ball of act 1 scene 5. This is a surprising choice considering the vibrant set pieces created by directors adapting the play for the screen in the past, such as the extravagant and well-populated parties put on by Zeffirelli and Luhrmann in their respective films. However, the change significantly allows Asbury to embed a further cinematic influence in his film – that of the romantic comedy genre. Gnomeo and Juliet's first encounter is transformed into a stereotypical rom-com meet cute: both characters reach for a Cupid's Arrow orchid at the same time, not realizing the other is doing so; their hands meet, and they look into each other's eyes for the first time. The design of the fictional flower is clearly inspired by *A Midsummer Night's Dream*'s love-in-idleness – 'Before milk-white, now purple with love's wound' (2.1.167) – creating a further link to Shakespearean

comedy. Penny Gay suggests that Shakespeare's comedies are direct ancestors of modern rom-com films and notes the connections between the two:

> From the wonderful 1930s films featuring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, which combined acerbic witty exchanges with sublimely sensual dance routines, to more quirky recent films such as *When Harry Met Sally* (Rob Reiner, 1989), or *My Best Friend's Wedding* (P. J. Hogan, 1997), where the romance has some unexpected turns and modern emotional complications, the audience expectation is that the two 'stars' will end up with each other, their charismatic performances often climaxing, just as in 1600, with a dance. (2008, p. 72)

Asbury's allusions to *Grease* therefore not only echo the rebellious teenagers of past screen *Romeo and Juliet*s, but also position *Gnomeo & Juliet* as a direct descendent of Kleiser's nostalgic musical rom-com. Moreover, as well as following the pattern of a Shakespearean comedy for at least its first two acts, *Romeo and Juliet* can also be considered to follow the archetypal rom-com plot arc for much of its duration. According to Kermode, films in the rom-com genre follow 'some variation on one of the oldest storytelling formulae: boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl back again, the end' ('The Rom-Com', 2018). All it would take is for Juliet to wake up before Romeo's suicide at the end of the play and this formula would be complete. By including influences from the rom-com genre within *Gnomeo & Juliet*, Asbury acknowledges *Romeo and Juliet*'s multiple comedic links and further justifies his comic reworking of the play's tragic conclusion.

Rokison states that the protagonists' suicides are cut from Asbury's adaptation, but this is not precisely true. Following his fight with Tybalt, Gnomeo is also presumed 'smashed', but is in fact unintentionally stranded in a park on the other side of the town – the equivalent of Romeo's exile to Mantua. Kermode notes that rom-coms regularly end with either one or both of the main couple 'running across town and into each other's arms to live happily ever after'

(ibid.). Whilst *Romeo and Juliet* almost allows its young lovers to complete this narrative only for Shakespeare to opt for a tragic conclusion, *Gnomeo & Juliet* adheres to rom-com conventions. After learning Juliet is in danger, Gnomeo races back to the Red and Blue gardens to find them both being destroyed by the out-of-control Terrafirminator lawnmower, acquired by Benny with the intention of avenging Gnomeo's assumed 'smashing'. Gnomeo beckons to Juliet to escape with him, presumably to start their new life building the Laurence garden on their own as they had previously planned in an earlier scene. However, Asbury prevents the narrative from returning to the comedic fantasy of the forest, seemingly forcing his protagonists to follow the tragic path determined by Shakespeare. After discovering Juliet has been superglued to her ornamental castle, Gnomeo attempts in vain to free her in a race against time as the Terrafirminator heads unstoppably towards her. Despite Juliet's forlorn plea for him leave her to her fate, Gnomeo tells her: 'I'm not going anywhere'. Just as in the play, the young couple choose to face their end together rather than live without each other. Only after allowing the pair to appear to have been 'smashed' for long enough for the Red and Blue gnomes to end their feud does Asbury reveal Gnomeo and Juliet's survival. If, as Smith suggests, *Romeo and Juliet* is 'a play that becomes, rather than is, tragic', then *Gnomeo & Juliet* skilfully exploits the comic elements of Shakespeare's play to undo the pivotal moments which turn it to tragedy (2019, p. 79).

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On the surface, the most notable point of contrast between Carlei's period drama and Asbury's computer-animated comedy is their significantly divergent cinematic genres and aesthetics. However, as this chapter has demonstrated, the differences between *Romeo & Juliet* and *Gnomeo & Juliet* run far deeper, placing their respective approaches to Shakespeare and British cultural values and identity at opposite ends of the spectrum. Returning to the analogy presented by *Hot Fuzz* discussed at the start of the chapter, Carlei's film – and the creative

vision of Fellowes which it puts across – aesthetically parallels the perspective on both Shakespearean performance and Britishness represented by Sandford's Neighbourhood Watch Alliance, who vehemently oppose anything not considered 'traditional'. It also upholds 'the exclusionist, ageing and essentialist mindsets of a Middle England that eventually proved important to the success of the Leave campaign in 2016', which Wright satirises through Sandford's controlling elite (Archer, 2021, p. 15). *Romeo & Juliet* cannot be considered to reflect Brexit in the same way as *Happy New Year, Colin Burstead* (dir. Wheatley, 2018) (discussed in Chapter 2). However, through Fellowes's Downtonisation of Shakespeare, it mirrors the harmful brand of British nostalgia and elitism which persists in the nation's culture and identity and which drove many to vote 'Leave' in the EU referendum. Much like each member of the Neighbourhood Watch Alliance, Fellowes is a hypocrite. He puts himself across as bringing Shakespeare to a wider audience and denouncing 'modern' adaptations in favour of his 'traditional' approach, but through arrogantly and unnecessarily rewriting *Romeo and Juliet*, Fellowes reinforces exclusionary and elitist attitudes in British culture.

In contrast, Asbury interweaves elements of Shakespearean comedy, the rom-com genre and British cultural kitsch into *Gnomeo & Juliet,* simultaneously celebrating and subverting them throughout his film. As a result, Asbury's film presents neither a crass bowdlerisation of Shakespeare's play, nor a misjudged attempt to modernise Shakespeare reminiscent of the Sandford Players' production in *Hot Fuzz*. *Gnomeo & Juliet* intelligently engages with both early modern and contemporary cultural influences to rework the story for children, adults and Shakespeareans alike. Whilst the film offers *Shrek*-style postmodernism through the pop culture referentiality on its surface, the director goes deeper by emulating the 'adult consciousness' and affective sincerity of Pixar's oeuvre when engaging with both his Shakespearean sources and British idiosyncrasies. As a result, *Gnomeo & Juliet* never presents a shallow Disneyfication of *Romeo and Juliet,* instead offering a sense of earnestness and

authenticity through Asbury's Pixarfication of both Shakespeare and contemporary British culture. *Gnomeo & Juliet*'s interweaving of DreamWorks-like pop culture referentiality and Pixar-influenced emotional sincerity provide an appropriate segue into the second section of this thesis, which considers how the twenty-first century structure of feeling oscillates between postmodern depthlessness and cynicism and a return to modern depth and affect. Through its approach to both Shakespeare and Britishness, Asbury's film offers an example of this cultural sensibility, which is explored extensively throughout the chapters which make up Section 2.

SECTION 2: CULTURAL SENSIBILITY

In the final years of the twentieth century, Shakespeare on screen was distinctly postmodern. Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) emerged as the poster child for this moment. Elsie Walker notes how critics derisively labelled Luhrmann's film '"MTV Shakespeare" … a bombardment of imagery and music; it is a postmodern assault on the senses' (2000, p. 132). This is evidenced in contemporary reactions to the film which referred to its 'postmodern razzmatazz', 'post-modern kitsch' and 'postmodern tomfoolery' (Johnson, 1996; Maslin, 1996; Welsh, 1997, p. 152). Alongside Luhrmann's film emerged other examples: *Richard III* (dir. Loncraine, 1995) featured a 'wide range of references to popular culture … [and] eclecticism and *bricolage* that mark it as a postmodern work rather than a period recreation'; *Hamlet* (dir. Almereyda, 2000) offered 'a very realistic cinematic representation of a postmodern world saturated with video technology'; and *Titus* (dir. Taymor, 2000) transformed *Titus Andronicus* into 'a quintessentially postmodern adaptation: playful, self-conscious, heterogeneous' (Donaldson, 2002, p. 244; Abbate, 2004, p. 82; Walker, 2002, p. 194).

Linda Hutcheon notes that '[f]ew words are more used and abused in discussions of contemporary culture than the word "postmodernism"' – which, by extension, is equally true of 'postmodern' as a label (2002, p. 1). It is worthwhile therefore to consider what is considered to constitute a postmodern work. Douglas Lanier suggests that postmodernism

> wilfully cross[es] boundaries between artistic styles and traditions, often mixing otherwise incompatible elements, including those drawn from high culture and pop culture. Pastiche is its dominant technique, and irony its dominant attitude: postmodern artists treat traditions, high and low, as vast collections of styles and allusions from

> which they can draw with equal abandon, juxtaposing traditions in ways that challenge received notions of greatness. (2002, p. 17)

Fredric Jameson argues that, of the 'significant differences between the high modernist and the postmodernist moment … [t]he first and most evident is the emergence of a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense', which he puts forward as 'the supreme formal feature' of late twentieth-century postmodernism (1991, p. 9). To illustrate his point, Jameson compares two pieces of art: Vincent van Gogh's modernist painting *A Pair of Boots* (1887), and Andy Warhol's postmodernist work *Diamond Dust Shoes* (1980). Timotheus Vermeulen effectively summarises Jameson's comparison:

> [*A Pair of Boots*] conveyed individual ideas, sensibilities, and social realities which continued beyond its borders. In contrast, [*Diamond Dust Shoes*] communicated neither an authorial voice, nor a personal attitude or affect, nor a sense of the world it supposedly represented. … If Van Gogh's painting of peasant shoes pulled the viewer into another world of poverty and misery, Warhol's photo of pumps pushed the spectator out back into his own. (2015)

Looking specifically at postmodernism in cinema, Carl Boggs and Thomas Pollard suggest that postmodern films share 'an irreverence for authority and convention', with common features including

> a rebellious spirit, dystopic views of the future, cynical attitudes toward the family and romance, images of alienated sexuality, narrative structures deprecating the role of old-fashioned heroes, and perhaps above all, the sense of a world filled with chaos. (2003, p. 10).

It is this sense of transgression, superficiality and irreverence which permeates not only the postmodern Shakespearean screen adaptations mentioned earlier, but Shakespeare on screen more widely in the second half of the twentieth century.

Whilst postmodernism was the dominant cultural mode during the late twentieth century, there is an increasing sense in the opening decades of the twenty-first century that this is no longer the case. Hutcheon suggests a shift away from postmodernism rather than its definitive conclusion, arguing that '[t]he postmodern moment has passed, even if its discursive strategies and its ideological critique continue to live on – as do those of modernism – in our contemporary twenty-first-century world', and concludes that '[p]ost-postmodernism needs a new label of its own' (2002, p. 181). In answer to Hutcheon's call, Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker have proposed 'metamodernism' as a term for the predominant cultural sensibility that has emerged since the turn of the millennium (2010, p. 2). Vermeulen and van den Akker describe metamodernism as 'a structure of feeling that emerges from, and reacts to, the postmodern', characterized by the return of historicity, affect and depth following the inauthenticity, detachment and depthlessness identified by Jameson as defining features of the postmodern Western world (2017, p. 5). They adhere to Raymond Williams's definition of a structure of feeling, which they explain as 'a sensibility that everyone shares, that everyone is aware of, but which cannot easily, if at all, be pinned down. Its tenor, however, can be traced in art, which has the capability to express a common experience of a time and place' (ibid., p. 7). British artist Luke Turner, a proponent of metamodernism, states that '[t]he metamodern generation understands that we can be both ironic and sincere in the same moment; that one does not necessarily diminish the other' (2015). This parallels Vermeulen and van den Akker's description of metamodernism as being 'characterised by an oscillating in-betweenness' which offers 'not a balance but a pendulum swinging between various extremes' (2017, p. 11). These include, but are not limited to, 'a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony, between hope

and melancholy, between naïveté and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity' (Vermeulen and van den Akker, 2010, pp. 5-6).

James MacDowell identifies 'the quirky' as a prevalent example of metamodernism in cinema, describing it as an aesthetic sensibility characterised by, amongst other conventions, 'a visual and aural style that frequently courts a fastidious and simplified sense of artificiality', 'a thematic interest in childhood and "innocence"', and 'a tone that balances ironic detachment from, and sincere engagement with, films' fictional worlds and their characters' (2017, p. 29). Quirky cinema is exemplified through the work of directors such as Wes Anderson, Michel Gondry, Spike Jonze and Miranda July, amongst others (ibid., p. 27). However, as MacDowell argues, 'the quirky … may be only one among *several* cinematic sensibilities prompted by a metamodern structure of feeling', and '[j]ust as those films or filmmaking approaches deemed postmodern could hardly be viewed as interchangeable or homogenous, so do we need to discriminate between different ways in which a film might be said to "be" metamodern' (ibid., pp. 29, 30, original emphasis). Following MacDowell's argument, just as late twentieth-century screen adaptations of Shakespeare embodied the postmodern sensibility in multifarious ways, the metamodern structure of feeling is likely to be reflected differently through examples of Shakespeare on screen in the opening decades of the twenty-first century.

Outside of my own research, the exploration of Shakespeare through the cultural theory surrounding metamodernism is to date virtually non-existent. In one of the sole examples, Ronan Hatfull deploys a metamodern lens to examine how various twenty-first-century BBC television programmes – including sitcom *Upstart Crow* (2016-) and mockumentary *Cunk on Shakespeare* (dir. Powles, 2016) – swing 'between sarcastic rejection of Bardolatry and sincere appreciation for Shakespeare's "genius"' (2020, p. 47). The metamodern sensibility in Shakespearean performance on screen or otherwise, however, has thus far gone almost entirely

uncharted. The next question, therefore, is what value such exploration holds. Lanier argues that 'Shakespeare's shifting place within the ever-changing hierarchy of cultural strata has always been open to the dynamics of history and the give-and-take of cultural struggle', and suggests that Shakespeare is 'a figure whose importance and survival depends upon skilfully navigating the ever-changing politics of the establishment and the street' (2002, p. 49). Moreover, Jan Kott argues that 'we can only appraise any Shakespearian production by asking how much there is of Shakespeare in it, and how much of us … What matters is that through Shakespeare's text we ought to get at our modern experience, anxiety and sensibility' (1965, p. 48). Kott's presentist reading of Shakespeare was influential upon postmodern performance and adaptation during the second half of the twentieth century, but his emphasis on Shakespeare as a channel for 'our modern experience, anxiety and sensibility' remains just as relevant and resonant in the proposed metamodern period of this century as it was during the postmodern period of the last. Exploring the presence and influence of the metamodern sensibility in the performance and adaptation of Shakespeare on screen therefore not only elucidates the position, influence and meaning Shakespeare holds in twenty-first-century culture; but also acts to crystallise the metamodern structure of feeling through adaptation of Shakespeare – an immovable cultural and literary object that has withstood being reshaped by the cultural sensibilities of the past.

The closing three chapters of this thesis analyse a range of screen adaptations from across the first two decades of the twenty-first century, using a metamodern lens to explore the ways they approach and transform Shakespeare to become artefacts of the cultural moment and conditions of their creation. Chapter 4 focuses upon two films which present *King Lear* not through direct adaptation, but as a performance occurring within each film's narrative. In both *The King is Alive* (dir. Levring, 2000) and *Lear's Shadow* (dir. Elerding, 2018), *Lear* becomes a conduit through which the characters channel their emotions in order to deal with traumatic

situations. Both Kristian Levring and Brian Elerding attempt to recover *Lear* from its distinctly postmodern depthlessness and cynicism on screen during the closing decades of the twentieth century by imbuing the play with renewed depth and affective sincerity. Chapter 5 explores two non-Anglophone Shakespearean films: *Makibefo* (dir. Abela, 2000), a Malagasy-language adaptation of *Macbeth* performed by inhabitants of Faux Cap, a remote Madagascan fishing village; and *Caesar Must Die* (dirs. Taviani and Taviani, 2012), an Italian-language version of *Julius Caesar* performed by inmates of Rebibbia prison in Rome. As well as textually and visually translating Shakespeare into the languages and cultures of their respective casts, both Alexander Abela and the Tavianis utilise a range of cinematic aesthetics, including documentary filmmaking and black-and-white cinematography, to blur the boundaries between fiction and reality, enhancing and undermining the sense of authenticity created in their respective films. Finally, Chapter 6 takes as its focus the performance of Shakespeare online under lockdown restrictions across the world during the COVID-19 pandemic. It focuses primarily on four lockdown digital productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, three of which were performed live via video conferencing software Zoom and streamed to YouTube – those of CtrlAltRepeat (dir. Phoenix, April 2020), Prague Shakespeare Company (dirs. Roberts and Huck, April 2020) and *The Show Must Go Online* (dir. Myles, June 2020) – and a fourth screen adaptation by the Back Room Shakespeare Project, which was recorded and edited in lockdown and released on YouTube in April 2020. Together, these productions demonstrate the ways in which adaptations of *Dream* – and Shakespeare more widely – were used to reflect the cultural moment of lockdown, and how the conventions of performing online during the pandemic resulted in metamodern oscillation between postmodern pop culture deconstruction and a return to depth, sincerity and affect.

The Shakespearean adaptations across the closing three chapters of this thesis are diverse in the cultural traditions and historical moments from which they come, as well as the

screens and aesthetics through which their performances are mediated. However, the cultural sensibilities manifested through these productions are distinctly metamodern in the ways they adapt Shakespeare. Together, they both contribute to, and create cultural artefacts of, the wider structure of feeling which has characterised the twenty-first century so far.

CHAPTER 4:

RETURNING DEPTH AND AFFECT TO *KING LEAR* IN THE FILMS OF KRISTIAN LEVRING AND BRIAN ELERDING

In one of the most well-known exchanges from *King Lear*, Lear asks his Fool: 'Who is it that can tell me who I am?' (1.4.222). The question is in fact a double question: Lear is asking not only about his own identity, but also the identity of the person who can give him the answer. The Fool replies: 'Lear's shadow' (1.4.223). His answer is characteristically ambiguous: the Fool is either answering by telling the king he has become a shadow of himself, or that his shadow can provide Lear the answer. This duality of both question and answer offers an analogy for the shifting identity of *Lear* since it was written. Emma Smith suggests that 'critics engage with the question of how bleak the play is on their own historical, cultural and aesthetic terms. They get the *Lear* they need, rewriting as necessary through adaptation, criticism and also through performance' (2019, p. 233). Just as the Fool tells Lear that his shadow can tell him who he is, whilst also telling him he is a shadow of himself, so those interpreting and adapting *Lear* through the centuries have been influenced by the bleak spectre the play casts over their particular cultural moment, whilst also creating echoes of Shakespeare's original through reinterpretation and reinvention – which in turn become the *Lear* of their time.

In the second half of the twentieth century, Jan Kott emerged as the critic whose interpretation of *Lear* became the most dominant. Kott reads *Lear* through the lens of the Theatre of the Absurd, which was established following the Second World War through the work of Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco and their contemporaries to offer 'a reflection and symptom of a society which has lost value and meaning', populated by characters who 'exist

in a perpetual state of meaninglessness' (Singleton, 2010, p. 3). Kott describes *Lear* as a play in which

> All bonds, all laws, whether divine, natural or human, are broken. Social order, from the kingdom to the family, will crumble into dust. There are no longer kings and subjects, fathers and children, husbands and wives. There are only huge renaissance monsters, devouring each other like beasts of prey. (1965, p. 121)

This consciously recalls some of the play's bleakest lines. Gloucester describes early on a world in which 'Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide: in cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond cracked 'twixt son and father' (1.2.107-110); and later, Albany's observes that 'Humanity must perforce prey on itself, / Like monsters of the deep' (4.2.50-51). Reflecting on Kott's reading, Smith suggests that 'as the twentieth century unleashed its mad cruelties at Passchendaele, Auschwitz and Hiroshima, *King Lear* … registered as the ultimate modern tragedy of desolation', and notes how '[o]nly in the mid-twentieth century could this play, long suspected of being unperformable, actually find its place on the stage' (2019, pp. 224, 231-232). *Lear*'s epic nihilism was equally, if not more, at home on the cinema screen as on stage. The closing decades of the twentieth century saw 'three truly pioneering versions of *King Lear* on film' – *King Lear* (dir. Brook, 1971), *Korol' Lir* (dir. Kozintsev, 1971) and *Ran* (dir. Kurosawa, 1985) – which 'not only represent the best versions of *King Lear* ever made but also rank among the most important Shakespeare films of all time' (Lehmann, 2020, pp. 161-162). Peter Brook, Grigori Kozintsev and Akira Kurosawa offer visually, thematically and culturally discrete adaptations of *Lear*, but their films are also related in the ways they embrace Fredric Jameson's concepts of postmodern depthlessness and waning of affect, resulting in nihilistic screen versions of the play aligned with Kott's Beckettian interpretation.

Brook's film offers an exemplary realisation of Kott's postmodern Absurdist interpretation of *Lear*. The cinematic adaptation was born out of the director's 1962 Royal Shakespeare Company production, which in turn was influenced by Brook's reading of Kott (Leggatt, 2004, p. 55). Daniel Rosenthal suggests that the film 'numbs where it should move, extinguishing any of the hope inherent in the courageous, humane interventions of Edgar, Kent and, belatedly, Albany' (2007, p. 82). Courtney Lehmann describes Brook's *Lear* as 'sparse, abstract and decidedly self-conscious in its camera work, becoming a veritable study in cinematic alienation effects', highlighting the director's metacinematic postmodernism in rendering *Lear* as a depthless work of cinematic artifice (2020, p. 162). Where Brook's film appears to take place in an Absurdist void where depth and affect have never existed, Kozintsev's is set in a world rendered meaningless by the action (or inaction) of the characters populating it. R. B. Parker suggests that 'Kozintsev's countryside is as harsh and cruel as that of Brook', but also argues 'what is *empty* in Brook, is *stony* – barren – in Kozintsev; the countryside seems inhospitable less because that is what Nature is inevitably like than because man has neglected to cultivate it' (1991, p. 82, original emphasis). Kozintsev himself nihilistically describes the setting of *Korol' Lir* as 'an unfriendly, ruined, distorted world' governed by 'a mean cruel and heartless nature' in which '[t]he torments of men have surrendered to the torment of the material world' (quoted in Mackintosh, 1977, pp. 130-131). Kurosawa's nihilistic perspective is evident from *Ran*'s title alone, which Rosenthal notes 'can mean "chaos", "rebellion" or, more aptly for *Lear* and this adaptation, "desolation of the soul"' (2007, p. 87). In contrast to the overtly cruel environments of the films of Brook and Kozintsev, Parker suggests that '[f]ar from seeming inhospitable and brutal, the aloof indifference of Nature's beauty is contrasted to human savagery' in Kurosawa's film (1991, p. 87). Whilst Gloucester laments in *Lear* that the gods 'kill us for their sport' (4.1.39), Kurosawa implies that *Ran* takes place in a world where the gods are either powerless or indifferent to man's

suffering. This is epitomised in the film's final image: an extreme long shot of the blind Tsurumaru (Mansai Nomura), who appears as a motionless stick figure helplessly stranded on a cliff edge, dwarfed by the bleak landscape which has been devastated by the events of the film.

Just as *Lear* became the defining cinematic Shakespeare play for the postmodern Western world of the second half of the twentieth century, so the opening decades of the twenty-first century have given rise to films which attempt to reclaim *Lear* from its postmodern depthlessness and cynicism. This chapter considers *The King is Alive* (dir. Levring, 2000) and *Lear's Shadow* (dir. Elerding, 2017) as examples of metamodern cinematic appropriations of *Lear*. Both films use the concept of characters performing the play as a way of dealing with – or distracting themselves from – the wider bleak situation in which they find themselves. *The King is Alive* focuses on a group of tourists stranded in a ghost town in an unnamed desert in Africa. Surviving on a diet of tinned carrots and dew collected at night, the group spend their time rehearsing *Lear* under the direction of Henry (David Bradley), a former theatre actor turned Hollywood script reader who transcribes the play from memory. *Lear's Shadow* takes place shortly after a car accident in which theatre company director Jack (Fred Cross) was severely injured, resulting in short term memory loss. Whilst the details are never explicitly stated, it becomes apparent that the accident resulted in the death of Jack's daughter Janine. The film begins as Jack arrives at his company's rehearsal room with no recollection of either the accident or Janine's death. Stephen (David Blue), an actor in the company, arrives soon afterwards looking for him, and the two men begin performing scenes from *Lear* whilst Stephen waits for Jack's other daughter Rachel (Katie Peabody) to arrive.

Both Kristian Levring and Brian Elerding acknowledge the postmodernistically depthless and emotionally barren interpretation of *Lear* championed by Kott and embraced by twentieth-century filmmakers, even utilizing it themselves at times. However, their films also

represent an attempt to shift towards authentic depth and affective sincerity and away from superficiality and cynicism. As they shift both towards and away from postmodern cinematic approaches to *Lear*, embracing and rejecting the ideas of Kott, both *The King is Alive* and *Lear's Shadow* exhibit metamodernism's 'oscillating in-betweenness', swinging between various 'poles' on the metamodern 'continuum' (van den Akker and Vermeulen, 2017, pp. 10, 11).

4.1 'I cannot heave / My heart into my mouth' (1.1.91-92)

The King is Alive was the fourth film to be made according to the Dogme95 Manifesto. Written in 1995 by Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg, the Manifesto was an attempt to move cinema away from being dominated by what the authors describe as 'the superficial movie' in which filmmakers 'wash the last grains of truth away in the deadly embrace of sensation' to create '[a]n illusion of pathos and an illusion of love' (2000, p. 227). In defining the Dogme95 aesthetic of *The King is Alive*, Thomas Cartelli and Katherine Rowe draw from Lear's description of Edgar disguised as Tom O'Bedlam as '[u]naccommodated man' (3.4.107) to coin their own term, '"unaccommodated" filmmaking', which they describe as 'a Lear-like stripping down of the apparatus of Hollywood cinema, as a way of restoring a purer kind of cinematic experience that will get us back to human truth, "the thing itself"' (2007, p. 144). The language of superficiality, artifice and emotional detachment used by von Trier and Vinterberg to describe late twentieth century mainstream Western cinema positions Dogme95 as a filmmaking movement attempting to move away from the Jamesonian idea of the postmodern. The Manifesto concludes by outlining the Dogme95 'Vow of Chastity' – a list of ten rules which any director making a Dogme95 film must follow – which states that the director's 'supreme goal is to force the truth out of [their] characters and settings' (von Trier

and Vinterberg, 2000, p. 228). Whilst its inception predates Vermeulen and van den Akker's conceptualisation of metamodernism by fifteen years, Dogme95 is theoretically aligned with metamodern concepts and principles through its emphasis on truth, depth and authenticity.

Whilst *Lear's Shadow* is not a Dogme95 film, Elerding's directorial approach feels similarly 'unaccommodated'. The film's narrative is entirely contained within one location – a rehearsal room – and much of the action is presented through steady images shot with a long lens, creating an aesthetic of naturalness and realism by minimising the sense of directorial intervention. Many of Elerding's choices, whilst not aligned precisely with Dogme95's Vow of Chastity, are in the same spirit of creating cinematic truthfulness. For example, the director uses non-diegetic incidental music sparingly, so that long stretches of the film take place with only diegetic sound, increasing the sense of authenticity and realism. The events of *Lear's Shadow* also unfold in real time, a choice which stems from the film's status as a close adaptation of Elerding's 2017 stage production of the same name ('About', 2017). However, it is also a choice by Elerding when adapting the play for the screen which amplifies the sense of the film authentically capturing a continuous period in the lives of its characters, positioning the audience as fly-on-the-wall observers.

Whilst Levring creates depth and affect in *The King is Alive* through a sense of cinematic authenticity, he also echoes the *Lear* adaptations of Brook, Kozintsev and Kurosawa by approaching *Lear* through a postmodernistically nihilistic lens. Levring's decision to use *Lear* as the play performed within *The King is Alive* was distinctly influenced by Kott's reading: 'I'd thought of [using] Beckett's *Endgame*, partly because it's *Lear* paraphrased. But in the end, *Lear* was right … it's probably the first Absurd drama. It's about a man being stripped of everything, which is parallel to our story' (quoted in Kelly, 2000, p. 50). The way in which Levring uses his filming location – Kolmanskop, an abandoned mining town in the Namibian desert – is also influenced by his postmodernist view of the play. The director

rejected using the 'wonderful big houses' and 'wonderful theatre' on one side of the town in favour of the 'plain dwellings … just full of sand' on the other side because they were 'more like a concentration camp, or a stage-set out of Beckett – like *Endgame*' (ibid., p. 51). The derelict buildings and endless expanses of desert in which *The King is Alive* takes place are reminiscent of the harsh, featureless voids of Brook's *King Lear*, the barren and neglected landscape of Kozintsev's *Korol' Lir*, and the castle ruins in Kurosawa's *Ran.* Levring's nihilistic view of *Lear* also filters into the film's script, co-written by the director with Anders Thomas Jensen. During a conversation between two of the stranded tourists, Ray (Bruce Davison) asks his wife Liz (Janet McTeer) about the plot of *Lear*. Using the opportunity to characteristically snipe at her husband, Liz ends her brief synopsis with a bleakly cynical observation: 'You don't have to worry, you know. Nobody has to fall in love, and everybody gets to die in the end'.

In contrast, *Lear's Shadow* consistently comes across as an attempt to move beyond the influence of Kott and Beckett. Elerding describes the original stage version of *Lear's Shadow* coming out of a desire 'to work on a simple story about the love between friends' and his idea that 'it would be really quite poignant to take *King Lear*, one of Shakespeare's greatest tragedies, and turn it into a story that begins at tragedy and ends at the start of new hope' (quoted in 'About', 2017). The film of *Lear's Shadow* is therefore rooted in affective sincerity, with Elerding's script and direction returning the emotional depth stripped out of *Lear* through earlier postmodern film adaptations. Unlike in the films of Brook, Kozintsev, Kurosawa and Levring, there is never a sense in *Lear's Shadow* of the characters existing in an Absurdist world devoid of meaning. Even in instances where the characters interact both with *Lear* and each other from potentially cynical perspectives, Elerding ensures that his film comes from a place of sincerity. The director approaches *Lear*, and by extension his own film, not as a nihilist

allegory for the purposelessness of existence, but as a story populated by real human beings with all the genuine depth and emotion that comes with that status.

Mark Thornton Burnett notes how the different quarto and folio versions of *King Lear* 'have traditionally been thought of as embodying "corrupt" forms of an "original", and thereby "perfect", play', and argues that

> *The King is Alive* honours its mythology of the play's origins by revealing characters that conflate, extemporise and omit: it thereby establishes *King Lear* not only as a Shakespearean text that can be adapted but as a body of work for which there is a legitimate precedent for ghostly reinvention. (2007, p. 115)

This is primarily achieved in the narrative of the film through Henry's script, which the character describes as being 'as much as I can remember of [*Lear*], or what I think I can remember'. This choice allows Levring to subtly alter lines to better reflect his own meaning, rather than being shackled to the Shakespearean 'original' (or, rather, originals). In a parallel to the 'disorientation' of Shakespeare in Ben Wheatley's 2018 film *Happy New Year, Colin Burstead* (discussed in Chapter 2), characters from *Lear* and the wider Shakespearean canon are reflected, refracted, multiplied and overlapped both through the changing cast of Henry's production and through their shifting behaviour and motivations.

Even before he has the idea of staging *Lear*, Henry takes on a Lear-like role through his relationships with Gina (Jennifer Jason Leigh) and Catherine (Romane Bohringer), whom he attempts to cast in Cordelia roles not just literally within the play, but also through his relationship with them. When Henry hands Catherine Cordelia's lines for the first time, she mistakenly asks: 'C'est *Othello*?', emphasising her otherness within the group through both her reference to that play in particular and the fact that she asks the question in her native French. Catherine's reference to *Othello* also recalls the duplicitous relationship between Iago

and Othello, paralleled by her own mounting jealousy of Gina after she is cast as Cordelia and grows close to Henry. Like Othello, Gina remains unaware of Catherine's resentment and believes they are friends. This in turn aligns Catherine with Edmund, secretly plotting against both Henry and Gina who take on oblivious Gloucester and Edgar roles respectively. Catherine turns down the part of Cordelia after reading only a single phrase – 'I cannot heave / My heart into my mouth' (1.1.91-92) – which offers a characteristically metamodern use of Shakespeare's language, simultaneously authentic and ironic. Whilst Cordelia's meaning in the play is one of honesty – she is unable to put her affection for her father into words with the same artificiality as her sisters – the lines take on the opposite sense when spoken by Catherine, a character either unable or unwilling to speak 'from the heart' throughout the film in favour of a cynical perspective, encapsulated in her rejection of both the play and of Henry.

Elerding demonstrates a similar 'ghostly reinvention' throughout *Lear's Shadow*, with the opening moments of the film ghosted just as much by the wider Shakespearean canon. As Stephen sits despondently on the edge of the stage in desperation at Jack's inability to recall the traumatic events that have occurred, Jack offers the first line of Shakespeare heard in the film by drawing not from *Lear* but from *King John*: '[W]herefore do you droop? Why look you sad?' (5.1.44). To Jack, this is a throwaway quotation, but the line takes on greater resonance when its context within *King John* is taken into account, spoken as it is by the Bastard after telling John of the death of his nephew Arthur. The moment parallels Catherine's invocation of *Othello* in *The King is Alive*, as the light-hearted citation of *King John* by Jack simultaneously disconnects the line from its original context, whilst also poignantly echoing Jack's own recent loss, gaining still greater depth and pathos through his obliviousness to its resonance.

Whilst Jack is the primary Lear figure and performs the role in most scenes, Stephen is in fact the first to perform the part of Lear, and does so at a few significant points throughout

the film. More often, however, Stephen plays multiple parts in the same scene to create a comparable sense of overlapping to that felt in *The King is Alive*. Whilst the division between Shakespeare's scenes and the dialogue written by Elerding is overt, the director regularly blurs the boundaries between Jack and Stephen and the *Lear* roles they play. During a sequence in which the two men perform sections of act 1 scene 4 – with Jack as Lear and Stephen alternating between the Fool and Goneril – Jack becomes increasingly enraged as he delivers Lear's reply to Albany (not present in Jack and Stephen's version). As Jack yells the final words of the speech – 'Away, away!' (1.4.282) – Stephen looks visibly moved by his anger, unable for a few seconds to respond or even to comprehend Jack's outburst. Elerding leaves it ambiguous, however, as to whether Stephen's reaction is in role as the Fool, or as Goneril, or simply his own reaction outside of the play. Moments such as this allow *Lear* to shift away from the depthless, nihilistic shadow it became during the late twentieth century and take on renewed depth, sincerity and complexity.

4.2 'Does Lear walk thus, speak thus?' (1.4.218)

Whilst both *The King is Alive* and *Lear's Shadow* present the characters and narrative threads of *Lear* in fractured and multiplied forms, both Levring and Elerding establish a primary Lear figure in Henry and Jack respectively. Levring describes Henry as

> a very cynical man at the outset. He has lost a daughter, rejected his own life with his wife and child; that's his Lear story. […] And when he finally cries for Gina [after her death], and does the 'Howl, howl' speech, something has changed profoundly in him. The cynicism in his heart is somehow… exorcised. (quoted in Kelly, 2000, p. 211)

Henry's initial cynicism is laid bare during a scene which takes place the morning after the group's first night in the desert. After waking up in the intense desert sunlight, Henry puts on

his sunglasses and watches the rest of the tourists go about their morning. Levring cuts between close-ups of Henry and long shots from his point of view, allowing the audience to share his perspective intimately at this point. As he watches the group – including Charles (David Calder) practicing his golf swing, Paul (Chris Walker) and Ray using rusted metal sheeting to repair one of the dilapidated buildings, and Catherine staggering to her feet hung-over from the previous night's party – Henry speaks at length for the first time in the film, delivering one of the most cynical and nihilistic speeches of any character:

> Arseholes. Fucking arseholes. Repairing a roof out here in dead man's land. It won't be long before we'll be fighting each other over a drop of water, killing for a carrot. Some fantastic striptease act of basic human needs.

Cartelli and Rowe identify this as the point where the film 'migrates from the pragmatic optimism of the swashbuckling Jack to the despairing pessimism of the witnessing Henry' (2007, p. 150). However, my reading of both characters diverges considerably from this assessment. Jack (Miles Anderson) initially takes charge of the group, giving them 'five rules for surviving in the desert' then setting off alone to find help, providing the tourists with a sense of purpose and hope of rescue. However, Jack never returns, and his dead body is eventually discovered in the desert by Ray towards the end of the film. As Maurizio Calbi suggests, '[t]hat Jack's body is found not so far away from the mining settlement retrospectively proves his self-confidence as a would-be explorer … to be a sham and his "five rules" to be inadequate if not risible' (2013, p. 55). Levring corroborates Calbi's interpretation, describing Jack as 'an idiot' who talks 'complete bullshit' (quoted in Kelly, 2000, p. 214). The revelation towards the end of the film of Jack's death renders any 'pragmatic optimism' he offers the group as ultimately being superficial. Until his fate is discovered by Ray, Jack is only mentioned following his departure when characters invoke his name rhetorically to emphasise feelings of hopelessness – notably in the repeated phrase: 'Where the fuck is Jack?'.

Similarly, Cartelli and Rowe's assessment of Henry's 'despairing pessimism' would be accurate only if his speech ended with his description of the group's situation as a 'fantastic striptease act of basic human needs'. Instead, Henry turns his head to see Ashley (Brion James) emerging from one of the houses dancing an impromptu jig. As he watches Ashley, Henry speaks the first line from *Lear* heard in the film – 'Is man no more than this?' (3.4.103) – followed by: 'It's good old Lear again. Hah, perfect'. Ashley is the member of the group Henry first casts as Lear in his production of the play – a decision that initially appears to be influenced by Ashley's earlier Lear-like reaction to being stranded in desert, which is characterised by self-important rage. Watching Ashley dance in the desert, however, Henry recognises that he has shifted away from the solipsism of Lear at the start of the play to a state of authentic optimism in the face of despair, sparking both the idea of *Lear* in Henry's mind and his casting of Ashley as 'good old Lear'.

Henry himself also takes on a Lear-like quality in this moment. Witnessing Ashley dancing out of the neglected building into the burning sun of the desert, Henry echoes Lear watching Edgar disguised as Tom O'Bedlam as he emerges from the hovel into the storm during act 3 scene 4. Seeing the previously self-aggrandizing Ashley transformed in this moment into the carefree '[u]naccommodated man' (3.4.107) Lear sees in the disguised Edgar, Henry too takes on the characteristics of Lear in the storm. He shifts away from his previous bitter cynicism, evidenced in his gentle smile and sincere chuckle upon seeing Ashley's dance. Henry also takes a small but significant step towards becoming 'unaccommodated' by removing his sunglasses, an accessory he uses to keep an emotional distance from the rest of the group throughout the film. In contrast to the 'despairing pessimism' described by Cartelli and Rowe, the scene demonstrates a pivotal moment at which *The King is Alive* shifts away from cynical detachment and towards affective engagement. Henry casts Ashley as Lear not because of his earlier arrogance whilst ranting at Jack, but because he sees Ashley's capacity

to shift from self-consciousness to dancing in the desert free from inhibition. Similarly, the moment at which Henry most powerfully parallels Lear is not during his nihilistic denunciation of the group, but when he moves away from this superficial cynicism to affective sincerity. For Henry in this moment, *Lear* becomes the 'perfect' play for the tourists to perform not because of the bleakness of the landscape or the futility of their situation, but because he recognises in Ashley the tourists' capacity to migrate from being 'fucking arseholes' – their selfish, superficial selves – to authentic depth and emotional connection.

Just as the scene in which Henry first has the idea of performing *Lear* is characterised by a shift from cynical detachment to affective engagement, the moment in *Lear's Shadow* at which Stephen first goes along with Jack's belief that they are staging *Lear* occurs when he begins to move away from apathetic detachment and towards sympathetic engagement with Jack's memory problems. At the start of the film, Stephen is still coming to terms with the aftermath of the car accident and refuses to engage emotionally with what has happened. Jack meanwhile is stuck in an affectively detached loop created by his short-term memory loss. He has no recollection of either the accident or Janine's death, preventing him from engaging with these events in any way. Jack's mind is also unable to retain more than a couple of minutes at a time, leading him to ask repeatedly where Janine is as if she is still alive. When Jack first asks about Janine, Elerding's script for the stage version of *Lear's Shadow* describes how 'Stephen stops cold at [her] name' (2017, p. 3).[7] This is demonstrated in the film by the character silently dropping his head and shifting his gaze to the floor, refusing to make eye contact or even look at Jack. When Jack again asks where Janine is moments later, Stephen still refuses to engage with him. Instead, he cruelly asks Jack a simple question he knows he will be unable to answer – 'What's the date today?' – intentionally confusing and humiliating

[7] Elerding did not produce a separate screenplay for his film, making notes on his play script instead to transform it into a shooting script (2018). I am very grateful to Brian Elerding for sharing the unpublished play script with me to reference within this chapter.

Jack to give himself the upper hand. At this point, Stephen's mindset parallels that of Henry in *The King is Alive* as he denounces the other tourists' morning activities, cynically gaining an artificial sense of superiority. However, just as Henry's perspective shifts when he sees the dancing Ashley, so Stephen 'softens' when he witnesses Jack's 'muddled and difficult' thoughts (Elerding, 2017, p. 4). At this moment, like Henry seeing Lear's '[u]naccommodated man' in Ashley, Stephen recognises in Jack the 'foolish, fond old man' who is 'not in [his] perfect mind' (4.7.60, 63) after being rescued from his own storm – the accident that killed Janine. As a result, like Henry, Stephen shifts away from his previous insensitivity, affectively engaging with Jack by choosing to go along with his belief that they should be rehearsing *Lear*.

4.3 'Thy truth then be thy dower' (1.1.109)

The first performances of scenes from the play in both *The King is Alive* and *Lear's Shadow* present adaptations of act 1 scene 1, and are initially characterised by depthlessness and detachment in both films. Levring precedes the first rehearsal scene of *The King is Alive* with a montage of the tourists preparing for the rehearsal accompanied by narration from Kanana (Peter Kubheka), a native who spends the entire film observing the group from a battered sofa housed in a dilapidated wooden shelter. Kanana's passive observer role, and his inexplicable survival in the middle of the desert, lends the character an Absurd, godlike presence within the film. Whilst he intently watches and narrates the tourists' activities, Kanana importantly remains separate and never becomes involved. Even when he occasionally appears to want to intervene, Kanana seems unable to do so, echoing the world in which Kurosawa's *Ran* takes place where the gods are either powerless or indifferent to man's suffering. Delivered at several points throughout the film, Kanana's narration aligns with Levring's Absurdist perspective on *Lear*, continually emphasising the meaninglessness of the tourists' activities to him. This is

accentuated further through Levring's choice to present this and other accompanying montages out of focus and in slow motion, a breach of the Dogme95 Vow of Chastity which transforms the tourists into surreal hazy abstractions of themselves.

Delivered in his native African language, Kanana's narration emphasises the emotional detachment of the group – 'I can say they were afraid but they didn't hold each other' – then describes the first rehearsal in starkly depthless fashion.[8] Speaking no English, and presumably having no knowledge or understanding of Shakespeare as a historical or cultural entity, Kanana describes *Lear* as nothing more than 'words', stripping the play of any depth or meaning. Kanana also suggests that rehearsing the play not only serves as a distraction for the tourists from their situation – 'Words made them forget' – but also that it allows them to remain emotionally detached from one another, speaking the 'words' of the play 'without talking to each other'. After a brief shot of Kanana watching the group from afar in his shelter, the director initially shows the first rehearsal from the observer's point of view as an extreme long shot, making the audience feel as physically and emotionally detached from the survivors as Kanana clearly does.

The rehearsal itself is characterised by a lack of authenticity, at times to comical effect. Ashley's stilted and monotone reading of Lear's opening monologue emphasises his complete lack of literal or emotional comprehension. The rest of the tourists also make no attempt to put any emotion into their roles. Refusing to take part, Charles and Catherine individually observe the rehearsal with cynical aloofness. For example, after Liz, playing Goneril, misreads the word 'felicitate' (1.1.75) as 'facilitate', Levring cuts to reaction shots first of Charles smirking, then of Catherine condescendingly shaking her head. Levring's first version of act 1 scene 1 soon

[8] All translated English subtitles for Kanana's dialogue throughout the chapter are taken from the 2001 Region 2 DVD edition released by Pathé. The precise language Kanana speaks is not listed in the DVD release, and I have been unable to find this information elsewhere. I have therefore opted for the more general descriptor 'African' when referring to the language he speaks.

comes to an abrupt halt, as Ashley collapses under the effects of delirium tremens. As some of the group attend to Ashley and move him to shelter, Liz emotionally breaks down, at first showing concern for Ashley and then for the whole group, but as her tirade escalates it soon becomes clear that her primary concern is for herself: 'We have to get [Ashley] to a doctor … We can't just sit here and eat these fucking carrots! Look at me! I need a wash, you know, I stink like a pig! I really need a bath!'. When Charles replies with characteristic disdain – 'What do you want?' – Liz's solipsism shifts to nihilism: 'Get a grip! We're all going to fucking die out here! Are you insane?'. She ends her outburst screaming 'Where the fuck is Jack?' to emphasise her despair. Levring's sudden shift from the emotionless first rehearsal of act 1 scene 1 to the raw emotions brought to the surface by Ashley's collapse demonstrates the affective state of the group at the start of their relationship with *Lear*. Whilst none are able to put any authenticity of feeling into their performances, the tourists quickly allow themselves to be consumed by negative emotion driven by cynicism, nihilism and solipsism when the reality of their situation is actualised in front of them.

Just as seeing Ashley dancing in the desert earlier caused Henry to shift from cynical detachment to affective engagement, so witnessing his chosen Lear become incapacitated and the subsequent breakdown of the rehearsal results in Henry swinging back towards his previous mindset. Speaking to Gina following the rehearsal, Henry questions the point of putting on *Lear* and whether any of the tourists in fact want to take part. However, Gina's earnest enthusiasm for performing causes Henry to shift once again towards an optimistic state of mind. As a result, he affectively reconnects with *Lear* whilst also beginning his surrogate paternal relationship with Gina. A subsequent scene between Henry and Catherine confirms this further. After watching Henry connecting with Gina from a distance, Catherine surreptitiously looks through Henry's belongings and happens upon his tape recorder. She hears a recording of Henry speaking as if to his own estranged daughter, which suggests he has not seen her since

she was young and that Henry was not a particularly attentive father. The recording ends with Henry's admission that his previous emotional detachment from his daughter has shifted towards affective engagement since becoming stranded in the desert: 'These past days I've been thinking of you more and more. I should have done that a long time ago'. When Henry arrives and discovers Catherine snooping around, his interaction with her is in stark contrast to the affective connection he has recently created with Gina, furthering the Lear-Goneril echoes between Henry and Catherine. When she takes pleasure in telling Henry his 'plan failed' as he no longer has 'a king', Henry's consciously offhand response –'Well, I'll work something out. Might even do it myself' – simultaneously demonstrates his growing aloofness towards Catherine and her cynical way of thinking, and his increasing engagement with *Lear* by taking on the title role.

Despite his shift towards affective engagement with *Lear*, Henry uses his directorial duties to deflect away from performing as Lear during the second rehearsal the following day, suggesting they 'skip [his] lines and go straight to Goneril' to keep himself detached from the role at this point. In contrast to her entirely unfeeling recital during the first rehearsal, Liz delivers an exaggerated performance as Goneril, loaded with artificial emotion, which draws further open derision from both Catherine and Charles. However, Liz's lack of authenticity echoes that of Goneril's empty expressions of love to Lear in the scene, creating a connection to the character as a result – albeit one grounded in artificiality. Following Liz's speech, Henry again misses his cue, staring distractedly into the desert rather than take on either the role of Lear or director. Frustrated by this, Liz tells Henry that she needs to know 'who [Goneril] is and where she comes from' in order to play the character. Henry responds not by giving this information, but by performing the speech in which Lear disowns Cordelia (1.1.109-127). Before he begins speaking, Henry removes his sunglasses as he did when watching Ashley dance in the desert, linking this moment to his earlier state of affective engagement. Henry also

stands up, positioning himself to speak whilst looking directly into Liz's eyes, implying a level of sincerity not seen in the rehearsals prior to this point.

Levring frames Henry through a medium close-up as he begins his speech, bringing the audience close enough to the character to connect emotionally with him, but not so close that the shot loses its sense of realism. Henry is positioned to the right of the image, his eyeline also off to the right looking at Liz, creating the effect of the audience standing next to her. Importantly, Levring chooses not to position the audience *as* Liz and have Henry deliver his speech directly into the camera, avoiding undermining the naturalism of the rehearsal scene a postmodern fourth wall break of this kind would cause. Describing Henry's performance of the speech, Levring states:

> It's not done at all as it should be in the play, where Lear is very hard and angry. Henry puts in far too many emotions, far too much of himself. But it's not about giving a great reading of Lear, it's about Henry finding himself in this text. (quoted in Kelly, 2000, p. 213)

This is not the case at the start of the speech, however. Henry delivers the opening lines with precision and understanding, but without the emotion the director describes. This is evidenced in the reaction shots of the variously bored or disengaged tourists. Levring also shows Henry's hand beating out the lines as he speaks, emphasising that this is initially a performance from memory and not of emotion. It is only when he speaks the line 'Here I disclaim all my paternal care' (1.1.114) that Henry begins to put 'far too much of himself' into his speech. The reference to renouncing fatherhood in Shakespeare's play acts as an affective conduit for Henry, recalling for him and the audience his neglect of his own daughter. Levring cuts away from Henry's beating hand and back to the medium close-up on his face as he delivers the lines 'And as a stranger to my heart and me / Hold thee from this forever' (1.1.116-117). Henry pauses for a

few seconds between the final two words, his lower lip quivering and face contorting slightly as he struggles to hold back his genuine emotional response. Levring chooses this moment to cut back and forth between Henry's face and a second series of reaction shots quite different to the first, making it clear that the group are visibly affected by Henry's emotional performance. Significantly, this includes the two most cynical members of the group: Catherine now sits perfectly still, captivated by the speech; and Charles stares melancholically into the desert, tears gathering in his eyes.

After uttering his final line, 'So shall my grave be my peace, as here I take / Her father's heart from her' (1.1.126-127, adapted), Henry stares contemplatively into the desert before turning with tears in his eyes back to Liz. His altered version of the speech does not change the fact that Lear is banishing Cordelia at this point in the play. The way in which he delivers the passage, however, divorces the words from their original meaning, transforming the speech into a channel for Henry's emotional reconnection with his own 'sometime daughter' (1.1.121). By permeating the role with his own sincere feelings and not the hard-heartedness of Lear in the play, Henry not only shifts *Lear* away from Kanana's depthless 'words', but also transforms act 1 scene 1 into a scene of affective reconciliation. Calbi suggests that 'Gina is the one who seems to be most affected by Henry's speech' and that, as the Cordelia figure, 'she responds with her body to words that repeatedly inflict wounds upon her' (2013, pp. 45-46). Whilst Gina moves to get a better view of Henry as if hypnotised by his performance, rather than wounding her reaction suggests an intense affective connection. Gina presumably has no knowledge of Henry's own estranged daughter (as far as the audience is aware, only Catherine has learned of this), but she clearly understands that his performance has come from authentic personal emotion. Both in her role as Cordelia reacting to Lear and as Henry's surrogate daughter, it is not hard to imagine a reunion between father and daughter at this point rather than the banishment which ensues in the play.

In the moments of silence which follow the end of Henry's speech, the group are unified in collective empathy for the emotion he has channelled through Lear. None of the tourists have anything other than surface-level knowledge of who he is or where he comes from, to paraphrase Liz's question about Goneril. They nonetheless experience a shared return to affect through their connection to Henry's sincerity. Whilst the second rehearsal comes to a sudden halt like the first, the emotions which initially characterise this ending represent a significant shift away from the nihilism and solipsism which the group manifested following Ashley's collapse. However, just as Henry's speech allows Levring's film to move significantly away from the shallow artificiality of the start of the rehearsal, so Charles acts as an agent of cynicism to facilitate a swing back the other way. In an earlier scene, Charles is seen striking an obscene sexual bargain with Gina in return for his participation in Henry's production. Once the rehearsal of act 1 scene 1 ends, he leads Gina away from the rehearsal space to have sex with her. The rest of the group are left stranded in a metamodern limbo as a result, unable to react to Charles and Gina's exit with either affective sincerity or detached cynicism.

In a parallel to Henry, Jack is initially reluctant to take on the role of Lear in *Lear's Shadow*. Stephen is the first of the pair to attempt Lear's opening monologue, starting from 'Know that we have divided / In three our kingdom' (1.1.36-37). However, whilst Stephen's performance is technically proficient, it lacks depth. When Stephen begins reading Lear's speech, rehearsing the play is a means to an end for him: Jack's memory problems following the accident mean that he believes *Lear* is the play the theatre company are meant to be rehearsing (the printed scripts on the rehearsal tables are for *Romeo and Juliet*), and Stephen recognises it as a subject he can use to prevent Jack's mind from wandering to Janine's whereabouts, a topic with which Stephen refuses to engage. *Lear* therefore becomes a pragmatic tool: it will keep Jack occupied until Rachel arrives, and it will prevent Stephen from having to emotionally deal with Janine's death. Stephen finally convinces Jack to recite Lear's

monologue by challenging whether he knows the whole play by heart. Jack's first performance offers an inversion of Ashley's reading during the first rehearsal in *The King is Alive*, however, which results in *Lear* being rendered similarly depthless. Ashley's reading of the lines is laboriously slow, without any apparent understanding of the words he is saying. In contrast, Jack's recital of Lear's opening speech is exaggeratedly hurried, proving to Stephen that he has the words committed to memory but putting no feeling into them. Unlike Ashley's lumbering Lear, Jack's high-speed performance lacks depth not because of a lack of understanding, but because at this point he (like Stephen) is emotionally detached from the play. *Lear* is once again stripped of its depth and affect, reduced to a series of words that can be learned by rote.

Jack's second attempt at the monologue is very different – 'grounded, moving and present' – which results in a shift away from the depthlessness and detachment of both Stephen's attempt and Jack's recital (Elerding, 2017, p. 9). Elerding emphasises this shift through a change in his shooting style. In the shot before Jack begins his 'moving' version of Lear's monologue, the director shows a long shot of the rehearsal room captured in the same way as the majority of the film up to this point. The image is steady and shot with a long lens, so that everything is in focus – traffic can clearly be seen going by outside through the room's windows. Elerding creates a sense of documentary realism so that at this point the audience feel as though they could be watching authentic footage of a rehearsal between two actors. Elerding also uses the framing of the shot to emphasise the emotional distance that exists between the two men: Jack sits on his stool at the far left of the frame, Stephen on his at the far right. After cutting to a mid-shot of Jack as he begins his second attempt at the speech, Elerding then cuts to a reaction shot of Stephen as he watches Jack's performance. The director switches to a closer wide-angle lens, bringing Stephen into focus whilst the room behind him moves out of focus. The director also subtly changes from the earlier steady shot to handheld camera

footage, giving the audience the impression that they are sitting next to Stephen looking directly at him.

The theatrical production of *Lear's Shadow* had audience members seated at the rehearsal tables, involving them in the performance, which Ellen Dostal suggests lent 'an acute intimacy to the scenes' (2017). Elerding has stated that, in adapting *Lear's Shadow* to film, he 'really wanted to give the viewer the same feeling as the playgoers had, sitting around the rehearsal tables, like flies on the wall' (2018). The director's shift from the earlier documentary style to a wide-angled handheld camera in close-up in one respect imitates the theatrical production's sense of closeness. For example, it allows the audience to perceive the understated reaction Stephen gives to Jack's affective engagement with Shakespeare's play – an almost imperceptible but genuine smile. However, a film adaptation will never be able to truly replicate the intimacy of audience members sitting at rehearsal tables to become silent participants in the events of the play. The director therefore uses the mediator between audience and actor – the camera – to emphasise this key difference between the film and the theatrical production. Jack earlier describes the opening scene of *Lear* as being 'like a fairy tale', and the softened focus on the background of the images feels like the film taking on this 'fairy tale' quality and losing some of its previous sense of realism. Elerding's conscious change in cinematography therefore creates a shift towards sincerity through enhancing the sense of intimacy the audience feels with the characters, while simultaneously undermining his previous sense of documentary realism and reminding the audience of the camera's presence.

Initially, Stephen retains his detachment from the play after Jack takes on the Lear role. Stephen begins to deliver Goneril's first speech when prompted by Jack, but only reads the first three lines (1.1.55-58) before cutting himself off with a juvenile 'Blah, blah, blah, blah!'. Jack then detaches himself from the play further in the same way as Stephen, cutting out much of Lear's response to Goneril with a dismissive 'et cetera, et cetera'. Stephen's reading of

Regan's speech that follows parallels Liz's exaggerated performance as Goneril in *The King is Alive*, relishing the opportunity to overplay Regan's artificiality. However, the film shifts back towards sincerity at the point at which Jack as Lear begins speaking to Cordelia. Jack pauses, his eyes resting on a point in the distance as if Lear has suddenly caught sight of his youngest daughter, before addressing her – 'now our joy' (1.1.82) – his earnestness and affection contrasting with the stately address he gave moments before to Stephen as Goneril and Regan. As Stephen takes on the role of Cordelia, Elerding brings in a musical soundtrack for the first time since the film's opening moments. Ryan Moore's melancholic score of strings and piano emphasises the shift towards emotional sincerity as Jack and Stephen perform Lear and Cordelia's dialogue, whilst also moving the film further away from its former documentary authenticity and towards the cinematic 'fairy tale' previously suggested by the cinematography. When Stephen switches role from Cordelia to Kent, he narrates the change before speaking his first line in the new role. Unlike earlier, Jack does not react as himself and instead remains in role as Lear, suggesting his connection with the play has intensified since performing Lear's dialogue with Cordelia. After Stephen delivers his final line as Kent, the background music suddenly ends, signifying a shift back to the realism seen previously as both men abruptly come out of role.

Having connected with the role of Lear, Jack begins his own Lear-like arc, shifting from his previous self-importance and pride in knowing the text of *Lear* by heart towards humility through his admission that he has always 'wished [he] could just do the main plot' in order to develop his 'understanding [of] the character of Lear'. This is reminiscent of Henry in *The King is Alive*: although he may be able to recall enough of *Lear* in order to write down each role for the group to perform, it is only when he takes on the role of Lear himself and forges an emotional connection with the play that Henry begins his shift towards sincerity and affect. The relationship both Henry and Jack have with *Lear* at the start of Levring and

Elerding's respective films is superficial, reducing the play to words that can be recited or transcribed; by the time both characters have taken on the role of Lear in their respective performances of act 1 scene 1, they – and by association the play – have begun to metamodernistically oscillate away from this depthlessness towards authenticity and affect.

4.4 'Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say' (5.3.323)

After Henry's relationship with Gina becomes fractured thanks to her sexual bargain with Charles, Henry shifts away from taking on the role of Lear, suggesting he has disconnected from the sincerity and affect of his performance and swung back towards cynical detachment. Whilst he continues to direct the rehearsals seen throughout the film, Henry does not perform Lear's lines again until Levring's fragmented appropriation of act 5 scene 3 during the fireside vigil seen at the very end of the film. Before he resumes the Lear role, Henry (and the rest of the group) experiences three deaths, and his different reaction to each demonstrates his shift both towards and away from affective sincerity during the film's final act. The first death is that of Jack, not seen since the start of the film when he walked into the desert to find help, who has apparently been dead for some time and made it only a short distance from the deserted town in which the tourists have been living. Henry's reaction to Jack's death is emotionally numb, as is that of the rest of the tourists. Whilst several of the group head out into the desert to bury Jack's remains, this is done with detachment, as the group resignedly carries out the task without speaking to each other or showing any emotion. As Moses (Vusi Kunene) marks the grave with a makeshift cross, a brief shot shows Henry watching with a vacant expression behind his sunglasses.

Gina is unable to join the group for Jack's burial after Catherine, overcome by Goneril-like jealousy, secretly poisons her with a can of contaminated carrots. Charles also does not

attend the burial, presumably choosing not to go in a characteristically selfish manner. An earlier scene depicts the poisoned Gina scathingly rejecting Charles's affections and offers of comfort. Whilst the rest of the group bury Jack, Charles takes revenge by standing over the semi-conscious Gina and urinating into her mouth, accelerating her death as a result. When Henry returns from the desert and sees Gina's body, his reaction is notably and understandably different to his emotionless detachment from Jack's death seen moments earlier. Henry kneels beside Gina and slowly lowers his head to kiss her on the cheek, barely holding back his grief. As he kisses her, Henry finally breaks down, overcome with emotion.

The impact of Gina's death on other members of the group is also markedly different to that of Jack's. Catherine is presumably the first to discover Gina's body, as she kneels beside the lifeless Gina when Henry enters the house as if seeking atonement for her offences. However, Catherine's vacant expression and lack of reaction to Henry's anguish suggest her continued affective detachment, which is reciprocated by Henry's apparent obliviousness to Catherine's presence. The scene therefore offers both a return to affect in Henry's tragic reconnection with Gina, further paralleling Lear's own reconciliation with Cordelia and his emotional response to her death; and a shift back towards detachment through the severance of any remaining connection between Henry and Catherine, echoing Lear's lack of emotion upon hearing of the deaths of Goneril and Regan in the play. As Henry drags Gina's body out of the house, Levring offers a final close-up on Catherine's face as tears begin to well in her eyes, suggesting a potential shift towards emotional engagement for the character. However, unlike Goneril, whose confession to poisoning Regan and subsequent suicide are reported by the gentleman in act 5 scene 3, Catherine lacks both the emotional detachment not to care about her actions and the affective connection to speak of her wrongdoings. Notably, she is the only surviving member of the group not to appear at the closing vigil around Gina's body.

Having played his own part in Gina's death, Charles is revealed in the final shot of the scene to have hanged himself from the roof of the house where Gina's body lies. Levring's cinematography echoes Albany's cold dismissal of the news of Edmund's death, reducing Charles's death to 'but a trifle here' (5.3.294) as the character's lifeless body hangs as an incidental detail in the gloomy background of the shot. Charles's fate is further stripped of any emotion by the indifference of the other characters, as neither Henry nor Catherine reacts to or even acknowledges Charles's body at any point during the scene. The scene's final shot of the hanged Charles and kneeling Catherine – the last time they are seen in the film – suggests that neither character is ultimately able to escape the isolation of their own cynicism. Whilst their respective narratives within the film end at the same time and in the same space, they remain affectively detached both from each other and from the rest of the group. The tableau-like image of Charles and Catherine lends the characters an Absurd conclusion reminiscent of Beckett, bereft of feeling, depth or meaningful resolution – for both the audience and the rest of the tourists, who never mention them again, they simply cease to exist beyond this point in the narrative.

Unlike the other scenes from *Lear* seen in the film, the fireside vigil which offers Levring's adaptation of act 5 scene 3 is not a rehearsal. Galvanised into a new affective state by Gina's death, members of the group appropriate lines spoken by their respective characters to communicate with each other with affective sincerity, recalling Henry's emotional performance of Lear's speech to Cordelia during the rehearsal of act 1 scene 1. As a result, *Lear* is transformed from its previous depthless status – Kanana's 'words' – into an emotional conduit for the characters to connect with one another. However, whilst Henry's engagement with Lear's speech allowed him to shift towards affective connection with both the group and the memory of his estranged daughter, the tourists' assumption of their *Lear* roles at the fireside vigil instead only allows them to express their descent into postmodern nihilism. This is

highlighted further in a sequence preceding the vigil, in which the group tear down and burn the structures they built to collect dew, their only source of water, thereby resigning themselves to death in the desert. The appropriation of the Fool's line by Amanda (Lia Williams) which precedes the fireside 'performance' of act 5 scene 3 – 'This cold night will turn us all to fools and madmen' (3.4.77) – serves as a comment on this nihilistic act and a summation of the group's collective mindset at this point.

When Henry finally begins to speak Lear's lines again during the fireside vigil, Levring at first focuses not on Henry but on Ashley, his head down. Ashley appears to be wordlessly playing Lear whilst Henry speaks the lines, in a manner reminiscent of the way Calbi suggests Gina 'silently *plays*' Cordelia during Henry's speech in the second rehearsal of act 1 scene 1 (2013, p. 45, original emphasis). In contrast with both Ashley's emotionless reaction to Jack's death and his earlier depthless performance as Lear during the first rehearsal, Gina's death and Henry's performance finally allow Ashley to affectively connect with *Lear*. As Levring cuts to Henry, the director creates an inverted version of the sequence depicting his speech from act 1 scene 1. The earlier speech was shot during the harsh sunlight of the desert daytime, whilst this speech takes place at night lit only by the nearby fire. The director again opts for a medium close-up of Henry's face, but he is now positioned to the left of the image rather than right as he was during the opening shot of his act 1 scene 1 speech, the inversion of Levring's earlier cinematography representing the character's shift away from his previous affective engagement and optimism.

Whilst in the earlier scene Henry transforms Lear's hard-hearted banishment of Cordelia by allowing himself to become overcome with authentic emotion, here he removes the emotion from what in the play is arguably Lear's most emotional speech. Henry performs 'Howl, howl, howl, howl!' (5.3.255) as a slow and initially indiscernible growl, transforming the words into a primal and threatening noise, and continues the speech in the same menacing

tone. He only allows emotion to show for a brief moment when saying 'heaven's vault should crack' (5.3.257), the phrase reminding Henry of the reality of Gina's death. Just as in the second rehearsal of act 1 scene 1, Levring cuts to a series of reaction shots as Henry speaks. In contrast to the connection the group felt to his earlier emotional performance, we see Ashley, Liz, and Ray all sitting with their heads down, either unwilling or unable to engage with Henry. Ray is the only one to respond – 'Is this the promised end?' (5.3.261) – both taking on his role as Kent responding to Lear, and, like Amanda speaking the Fool's line earlier, offering a nihilistic comment on the group's situation.

Across his final three lines, Henry ends the film oscillating between poles within his own metamodern limbo, caught between sincere paternal affection for Gina and cynical detachment from the rest of the group. Henry's cold delivery of Lear's curse – 'A plague upon you murderers, traitors all' (5.3.267) – is reminiscent of his earlier scathing appraisal of the group as 'fucking arseholes'. 'I might have saved her; now she's gone forever' (5.3.268) is spoken vacantly with a thousand-yard stare. He then slowly turns his head to the lifeless Gina to deliver 'Cordelia, Cordelia' (5.3.269) as a hauntingly depthless vocalisation of his traumatised state. Henry then shifts back once again to the affective depth seen during his performance in the second rehearsal of act 1 scene 1 as he embraces the Lear role once again for the final three words of the line – and the last words spoken by any of the tourists in the film – his voice cracking with sincere emotion as he pleads for Gina to 'stay a little' (5.3.269). The final words of *The King is Alive* go to Kanana, whose brief and enigmatic epilogue – 'They are not here. Now they are gone.' – reduces the fate of the tourists and their very existence beyond the timeframe of the narrative to the nihilistic 'nothing' of Shakespeare's play. As a result, Levring's film ultimately returns once again to postmodern depthlessness reminiscent of the Theatre of the Absurd and Kott's Beckettian reading of *Lear*.

As in *The King is Alive*, the performance of act 5 scene 3 in *Lear's Shadow* is preceded by pivotal events in the film's narrative. Jack and Stephen run through the reunion of Lear and Cordelia from act 4 scene 7 twice – first with Jack as Lear and Stephen as Cordelia, then switching roles – with both rehearsals breaking down into an argument after around twenty lines, contrasting the affective sincerity between Lear and Cordelia with the emotional detachment of Jack and Stephen. When Rachel arrives at the rehearsal room soon after the second run-through of act 4 scene 7 has fallen apart, Jack and Stephen have returned to the detached state they occupied at the start of the film. Elerding demonstrates this by closely mirroring an earlier sequence. When asked by Rachel if he would like to come home with her, Jack responds irritably that he wants to start the same rehearsal he believed should be taking place at the film's opening, again asking 'Where's Janine?'. Stephen reacts in the same hopeless manner as he did earlier, refusing to engage with either Jack, Rachel or the mention of Janine's name. After Rachel's attempt to get Jack to come home only results in more questions from him, she uses *Lear* in the same way as Stephen both to distract her father and avoid having to engage with the death of her sister.

With Jack once again stuck in his depthless loop of short-term memory loss, and Stephen at his most cynically detached, Elerding's subsequent adaptation of act 5 scene 3 oscillates the film towards affective sincerity once again. After Stephen flatly refuses to perform act 4 scene 7 with Jack again, Rachel suggests to her father that he perform Lear's entrance at the end of the play. Jack humbly suggests that Stephen should play Lear instead, which Stephen guardedly agrees to do. Much like earlier, Stephen's performance is initially one of theatrical artifice lacking emotional connection. Cordelia is represented by a thick piece of fabric, and Stephen's unconvincing first performance of 'Howl, howl, howl, howl!' (5.3.255) is soon interrupted by Jack. Elerding precedes Stephen's first attempt at the speech with a brief long shot of all three characters: Stephen sits on the floor to the left of the image,

Rachel stands to the right, and Jack perches on a stool near the centre of the shot – the space between the characters once again paralleling their current affective detachment from each other. Elerding's use of a long lens enhances this further. All three characters are in focus but appear to be different sizes to each other – Rachel, closest to the camera, appears almost twice the height of Jack, furthest away – giving the sense of three people not only separated by space but also by their own dimensions. This subtle departure from reality is countered by Elerding's choice to have the corner of one of the rehearsal tables take up the bottom left corner of the screen, maintaining the idea that the audience are covertly watching an authentic performance from a position within the rehearsal room.

After halting Stephen's first attempt at Lear's speech, Jack directs Rachel to lie in Stephen's arms as Cordelia. The physical connection between the two characters galvanises the affective depth missing from Stephen's first performance: he sits with Rachel in his arms for a few seconds, then silently begins to cry before slowly delivering Lear's speech with sincere feeling. Just as Henry's performance as Lear at the end of *The King is Alive* allows him to reconnect with Gina following her death, so Stephen's second attempt at the speech is the point at which he finally allows himself an authentic response to Janine's death. Whereas Henry's animalistic performance of 'Howl, howl, howl, howl!' (5.3.255) shows his contempt for the people around him, Stephen's performance takes on greater emotional depth with each repeated word. Stephen's affective reconnection with Janine simultaneously shifts *Lear* away from the superficiality of his first performance, imbuing the play with renewed depth. The return to a wide-angle handheld shot as Stephen speaks contrasts with the static long lens image seen earlier, aesthetically shifting the film towards depth at the same time as both the characters and the play. Just as Levring shows us the reactions of the other tourists to Henry's performance of Lear's speech at the fireside vigil in *The King is Alive*, so Elerding briefly cuts twice to Jack's reaction to Stephen's second performance of the speech. The first cutaway shows a mid-

shot of Jack absorbed by the emotion of Stephen's speech. In contrast to the shot of Stephen and Rachel, Elerding shoots this using a long lens, suggesting Jack has not yet shifted towards the same affective connection. The second cutaway moves closer to Jack, shooting him with the same wide-angle handheld camera style as Stephen, the actor's performance causing an affective response in Jack reminiscent of that of the tourists in *The King is Alive* during Henry's heartfelt performance of Lear's act 1 scene 1 speech. Unlike earlier in the film, Stephen does not switch from one character to another to deliver the whole scene; he moves seamlessly from 'Why then she lives' (5.3.261) to Lear's next line 'This feather stirs' (5.3.263), cutting Kent, Edgar and Albany's lines, his affective reconnection with Janine allowing him to create an unbroken connection with the Lear role.

Stephen's performance ends only a few lines later, however, as he becomes overcome with emotion and breaks down into uncontrollable sobs of grief. At this point, Rachel opens her eyes to look at Stephen, then reaches up to embrace him and begin crying herself. Viewing Rachel and Stephen as actors affectively moved to the point of breaking character, the moment depicts two people finally united in their grief over the loss of a loved one. Viewing them in their Lear and Cordelia roles at this point, Elerding presents a rewriting of the final act of the play, in which Cordelia awakes from death and is emotionally reunited with her father. Much like Gina being both affectively and physically moved by Henry's emotional performance of Lear's act 1 scene 1 speech in *The King is Alive* suggests for a moment the hope of a reunion between Lear and Cordelia, so Rachel reacts physically to the authentic grief demonstrated by Stephen in the Lear role. Moreover, this briefly glimpsed happy ending does not feel artificial due to the sincere emotion of both Stephen and Rachel, captured in the awkward naturalness of their hug: Rachel's right arm becomes trapped between their bodies, her hand helplessly flailing as they embrace, uncertain of what to hold on to.

The affective power of Stephen and Rachel's performance also causes Jack to shift for the first time in the film to a state of emotional connectedness which transcends his short-term memory loss. Elerding cuts to Jack for a third time as '[c]oncern washes over [his] face. A new look we haven't seen' (Elerding, 2017, p. 34). The character quietly calls Stephen's name then asks 'Where's Janine?' once again, '[e]xcept something is different than the way he's asked it before. He remembers' (ibid., p. 35). The question shifts at this point from being the depthless refrain of Jack's broken mind to a sign of his recollection of recent events and affective reconnection with the death of his daughter. As a result, Jack takes up the Lear role from where Stephen's performance ended, the absent Janine playing Cordelia in death in a similar manner to Gina's body at the end of *The King is Alive*. The moment oscillates between the nihilistic and affective language of *Lear*'s final scene: Jack's tearful repetition of 'no' parallels Lear's 'Never, never, never, never, never' (5.3.307); and his distraught question, 'Why did I survive?', echoes both Lear's plea to Cordelia's body, 'Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life / and thou no breath at all?' (5.3.305-306), and Kent's bleak assertion that Lear 'hates him / That would upon the rack of this tough world / Stretch him out longer' (5.3.312-314).

As Jack begins to sob, Rachel tearfully rushes to kneel in front of him as her father questions her about the events surrounding Janine's death, the two characters reconnecting in shared grief and trauma. Viewing Jack and Rachel respectively as Lear and Cordelia figures, the moment also continues Elerding's rewriting of *Lear*'s ending as if Cordelia returns from death and is reunited with her father. Jack as Lear simultaneously reconnects with both of his Cordelia-like daughters. As a result, the film oscillates between echoing Shakespeare's tragic conclusion through Jack's mourning of Janine, and continuing Elerding's authentic 'happy ending' by having Rachel, the film's other Cordelia figure, reunite with the Lear figure. When Jack asks Rachel to explain what happened to Janine, both Stephen and Rachel again attempt to deflect away from the issue, but Jack's affective reconnection to Janine and impassioned

assertion that they answer him prevents them from being able to do so. The sequence then parallels Stephen and Rachel's performance of act 5 scene 3 with Jack and Stephen exchanging roles: Stephen becomes the audience watching Jack/Lear and Rachel/Cordelia's affective reconnection, which eventually breaks down as father and daughter are overcome by their shared grief and trauma. Just as he did with Jack during Stephen and Rachel's performance, Elerding briefly cuts away to Stephen three times to show him becoming increasingly affected by Jack and Rachel's affective reconnection.

Whilst Jack's emotional engagement with both Janine and Rachel represents a shift towards affect and depth in *Lear's Shadow*, Elerding rapidly shifts back towards depthlessness once again by having Jack almost immediately lose his reconnection to Janine and Rachel thanks to his short-term memory loss. Jack's final words in the film – 'Where's Janine?' – shift the question away from the emotional depth it gained only moments earlier to become a depthless repeated phrase once again, suggesting Jack has moved back to the same detached position at which he started the film. Rachel's statement that she 'can't do this again' during Jack's brief recollection of Janine's death suggests that it has happened at least once before prior to the events seen in the film. Jack is consequently trapped in a metamodern temporal loop: he periodically shifts towards affective depth and humility through emotionally recalling Janine's death and connecting with Rachel, only to swing back towards depthlessness and detachment as his injured mind causes him to forget the events and revert to his arrogant disposition once again.

Ending the film at this point would frame the events of the film as just one of many iterations of the same scenario played out between Jack, Stephen and Rachel, rendered meaningless due to Jack's inability to retain any of the emotional connections he forges with the other characters. However, as Jack speaks his final depthless question, Rachel looks despairingly at Stephen, heartbroken that her father's mind has so quickly erased his

reconnection with both her and Janine. Stephen's response to both Jack's question and Rachel's reaction are markedly different to earlier in the film, however. Elerding describes him in the play script as 'no longer cringing at Janine's name' and notes that he 'connects with Jack' (2017, p. 36). In the film, this connection is extended to Rachel: his words are spoken just as much to her as they are to her father, as Stephen maintains eye contact with Rachel while he answers Jack's question. Elerding's subsequent shot of Stephen, Rachel and Jack as a unified group for the first time in the film – beginning with Stephen and Rachel's hands resting together on Jack's shoulder, then moving up to show Stephen and Rachel looking directly at each other – offers a significant contrast to his earlier shot of the three characters separated by both space and dimension.

Stephen's response to Jack's question – 'It's a long story. I'll tell you the whole thing' – offers neither a cynical sense of hopelessness, nor an idealised conclusion that everything is going to be okay, swinging instead between these two poles. As the final line spoken in the film, Stephen's response corresponds to the closing speech in *Lear* in which either Albany or Edgar (in the quarto and folio versions respectively) promise to '[s]peak what we feel, not what we ought to say' (5.3.323). Stephen's answer consists not only of what he 'ought to say' to Jack, but also a subtext of what he now 'feels'. The 'long story' of his answer refers not only to the events that have led the three characters to this point, but also to the emotional path they will take together as they recover from the grief and trauma they have experienced. In contrast to his earlier detachment, Stephen has shifted to a position of affective sincerity, allowing him not only to come to terms with 'the whole thing' of the past, but also to support both Jack and Rachel through 'the whole thing' of their passage together into the future.

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Whilst neither film ends on an unambiguously happy or unhappy ending, it is fair to say that *The King is Alive* is far closer to upholding Kott's Beckettian reading of *Lear*, and maintains the bleak tragedy of the play's ending. Conversely, *Lear's Shadow* allows hope to puncture its tragic arc, and in its final moments encapsulates the 'pragmatic idealism' Vermeulen and van den Akker identify as a defining feature of metamodern sensibility (2010, p. 5). The two films were released eighteen years apart, and this separation in time is reflected in their different approaches to *Lear*. Lehmann describes *The King is Alive* as taking place in a world where 'the predatory instincts of late capitalism have been globalised' (2019: 171). As a result, Levring's characters ultimately 'prey on [themselves], / Like monsters of the deep' (4.2.50-51), resulting in an Absurdist, nihilistic conclusion in which they become 'nothing'. In contrast, despite their emotional detachment from one another throughout *Lear's Shadow*, Elerding's characters choose to love, protect and support each other in the end. Consequently, Elerding both upholds *Lear*'s tragedy whilst earning the right to allow his characters the sense of an existence beyond the film's final frame, and even the possibility of a happy ending. If Smith is right in her assertion that cultural periods through history 'get the *Lear* they need', then Levring and Elerding's respective films reflect two distinct points in the shift from the postmodern to the metamodern sensibility (2019, p. 233). *The King is Alive* offers an early attempt to shift *Lear* away from Kottian postmodernism through its Dogme95 aesthetic and Henry's central narrative, but in the end succumbs to the still-dominant grip of late twentieth-century cynicism and affective detachment. In contrast, *Lear's Shadow* succeeds in recuperating *Lear* on screen, offering a renewed sense of depth and affective sincerity to present a cinematic version of the play that speaks to the metamodern cultural sensibility which, by the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century, was significantly more dominant than at the turn of the millennium.

CHAPTER 5:

ARTIFICE, AUTHENTICITY AND DOCUMENTARY (UN)REALISM IN THE FILMS OF ALEXANDER ABELA AND PAOLO AND VITTORIO TAVIANI

Judith Buchanan argues that 'archived performances, even film-recorded ones, are not sealed and immutable', but 'bowl through history as portals to the past and invitations into the ever self-renewing present' (2020, pp. 355-356). She puts forward Kit Monkman's 2018 film adaptation of *Macbeth*, which includes footage from a short silent film of *Macbeth* (dir. Caserini, 1909) as part of Monkman's own cinematic adaptation of the play, as an example of this phenomenon. According to Buchanan,

> Watching the 1909 film bump up against, work alongside, act as analogue to, proxy for and collaborator with the action and dramatic world of the 2018 film, there is no doubting that it is an intervention with interpretive consequences, unsettling old readings and provoking new ones. (ibid., p. 355)

Whilst neither *Makibefo* (dir. Abela, 2000)[9] nor *Caesar Must Die* (dirs. Taviani and Taviani, 2012), the two films upon which this chapter primarily focuses, includes an archival production in the same way as Monkman's *Macbeth*, they draw on the cinematic archive more broadly to continually create and uncreate specific forms of both authenticity and artifice inherent within their films – at times paradoxically in the same instant. Buchanan's idea of past adaptations

[9] The release date of *Makibefo* is variably cited as 1999, 2000 or 2001 by different sources. Daniel Rosenthal notes that, although *Makibefo* received its first limited theatrical run in France in 2001, Abela completed post-production on the film the previous year (2007: 114). I have therefore listed *Makibefo*'s release date as 2000 in line with Rosenthal.

'unsettling old readings and provoking new ones' therefore offers a fitting starting point for my own analysis.

Buchanan's reading of the way in which Monkman incorporates Caserini's film into his own adaptation of *Macbeth* can also be interpreted as a metamodern filmmaking approach. In comparing the structure of feeling within postmodern and metamodern works, Robin van den Akker and Timotheus Vermeulen argue that 'postmodernists "recycled" popular culture, canonised works and dead Masters by means of parody or pastiche', whereas metamodernists engage in 'the "upcycling" of past styles, conventions and techniques' in which they 'pick out from the scrapheap of history those elements that allow them to resignify the present and reimagine a future' (2017, p. 10). This chapter explores the ways in which both Alexander Abela and brothers Paolo and Vittorio Taviani engage in processes of metamodern 'upcycling' in their respective films, drawing on different cinematic styles, genres and aesthetics to 'resignify' *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar* respectively for the twenty-first century.

Makibefo is an adaptation of *Macbeth* performed by inhabitants of Faux Cap, a remote fishing village in Madagascar, in their native Antandroy language; whilst *Caesar Must Die* presents an Italian-language adaptation of *Julius Caesar* performed by inmates of Rebibbia high-security prison in Rome. Arguably the cinematic modes both films 'upcycle' most significantly are those of documentary filmmaking and the related fictional subgenre of 'found footage' films. Whilst the latter predates its boom from the late 1990s onwards, the release of *The Blair Witch Project* (dirs. Myrick and Sánchez, 1999) has been described as 'partially, if not completely, responsible for the rise in popularity of found footage horror since the turn of the century' (Reyes, 2015, p. 123). Whilst *The Blair Witch Project*'s online viral marketing campaign was undoubtedly key to its financial success and far-reaching attention, Stephen King captures the essence of what made the film so effective: 'One thing about *Blair Witch*: *the damn thing looks real*. Another thing about *Blair Witch*: *the damn thing* ***feels*** *real*. And

because it does, it's like the worst nightmare you ever had' (2010, p. xiv, original emphasis). Myrick and Sánchez's commitment to documentary authenticity ensured that audiences in 1999 truly questioned whether the footage they were watching had actually been found in the woods a year after the disappearance of three film students in the mid 1990s, as stated in *The Blair Witch Project*'s promotional materials. Whilst the film's influence has primarily been felt within the horror genre, it has also gone beyond this. For example, *Cloverfield* (dir. Reeves, 2008) and *Chronicle* (dir. Trank, 2012) use found footage techniques to present narratives in the science-fiction disaster and superhero genres respectively.

5.1 'On your imaginary forces work' (*Henry V*, Prologue.18)

The Blair Witch Project has been described as 'an inflection point for the movie industry' and 'a ubiquitous part of pop culture, spawning myriad imitators and spoofs, in turns inspired by and mocking' the found footage aesthetic it epitomises (Kring-Schreifels, 2019). The description can arguably also be applied to Shakespeare's presence and influence in cinema in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when 'Shakespeare adaptations, spin-offs and citations on film and television … continued to gallop apace, and Shakespeare … continued to race at the forefront of new cinematic technologies' (Burt and Boose, 2003, p. 1). However, despite their being two of the defining mainstays of both mainstream and indie cinema of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, crossover between Shakespearean and found footage cinema has been incredibly scarce – an arguably unsurprising fact. Alexandra Heller-Nicholas argues that found footage 'seeks … to create a space where spectators can enjoy having their boundaries pushed, where our confidence that we know where the lines between fact and fiction lie are directly challenged' (2014, p. 4). By their very nature, Shakespeare's plays are not intended to present naturalistic representations of the world. A performance of *Macbeth*, for

example, might draw an audience member into the dramatic world of the play (if the performance is successful enough to achieve this), but is extremely unlikely to blur their perception of what is real and what is not to the point that they question whether they have genuinely witnessed a husband and wife plotting and then committing regicide.

Moreover, Shakespeare at times explicitly draws attention to the inherent artifice of his plays. In the Prologue of *Henry V,* for example, the Chorus instructs the audience:

> Into a thousand parts divide one man
> And make imaginary puissance.
> Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them
> Printing their hooves i'th' receiving earth. (Prologue.24-27)

The playwright knows he cannot literally create thousands of soldiers on horseback within a theatre, and the audience knows this too. When adapting Shakespeare on screen, however, there is scope to create such scenes in naturalistic ways: there is no need for audiences to 'think … that [they] see' horses or an entire army, when both horses and people can hypothetically be assembled and filmed for a battle scene shot on location. Despite the scope to take this approach, screen adaptations of Shakespeare have nonetheless regularly embraced the overt artifice of the plays. *Henry V* (dir. Olivier, 1944) initially presents not a straightforward film version of Shakespeare's play, but a cinematic portrayal of a theatrical performance. Laurence Olivier begins in a recreation of the Globe, with Leslie Banks as the Chorus performing the Prologue on stage. The film then increasingly brings to life the 'imaginary forces' (Prologue.18) of the Globe audience: the opening scenes continue to be presented as a stage performance, but the adaptation becomes more and more filmic as it goes on. Kenneth Branagh's 1989 film of *Henry V* opens with Derek Jacobi in modern dress performing the Prologue on a film set, drawing attention to the filmmaking process as he walks past lights and

cameras. Jacobi then walks through a large set of double doors, at which point Branagh shifts to the cinematic aesthetic used for much of the rest of the film. Both Olivier and Branagh return to their respective opening framing devices for their adaptation of the Chorus's epilogue at the end of their films, intentionally breaking the 'imaginary forces' of the viewer once more. Thea Sharrock's adaptation of *Henry V* for the first series of *The Hollow Crown* (2012) eschews this approach, including the Prologue as a voiceover performed by John Hurt, the overt artifice of the language at odds with the series' period drama aesthetic. However, Sharrock cannot resist undermining the audience's 'imaginary forces' at the end of her adaptation: Hurt delivers the epilogue directly into the camera, breaking the fourth wall to address those watching the episode in its final moments.

In a similar fashion to the found footage subgenre, both Abela and the Tavianis 'directly challenge' the audience's perception of the boundary between fiction and reality through evoking a sense of documentary authenticity in their respective films. Whilst the events in *Makibefo* and *Caesar Must Die* are not presented as 'found footage', both films offer a documentary authenticity similar to that of films within that subgenre through the stylistic and aesthetic choices made. However, the directors also make choices which destabilise the verisimilitude of their respective films, drawing attention to either their dramatic or cinematic artifice to echo Shakespeare's acknowledgment of the overt performativity inherent to his plays. The two films also have other common elements. Both *Makibefo* and *Caesar Must Die* present non-Anglophone adaptations of Shakespeare, and both are presented through a black-and-white aesthetic (Abela shoots entirely in black and white; whilst the Tavianis bookend their film with colour sequences, their film is predominantly black and white) which contributes further to each film's blurring of the boundary between reality and fiction.

It is the simultaneous upholding and undermining of documentary authenticity which is key to the metamodern structure of feeling present in both *Makibefo* and *Caesar Must Die*.

The non-Shakespearean film *Computer Chess* (dir. Bujalski, 2013) offers a similar sensibility, resulting in the film's 'metamodern approach to the representation of history' (Klomp, 2015). Set in the early 1980s, *Computer Chess* depicts a chess tournament taking place in a roadside motel in Middle America which pits human players against chess-playing computer programs. At numerous points throughout, Bujalski's film oscillates between a modern and authentic presentation of historical reality and an ironically postmodern science-fiction fantasy, to the point that it is impossible to distinguish where one ends and the other begins. *Computer Chess* undoubtedly fits into the quirky sensibility identified by James MacDowell as a metamodern mode of filmmaking (discussed in further detail in the introduction to Section 2), albeit doing so from the opposite angle to that described by MacDowell. Where identifiably quirky directors such as Wes Anderson aim for fastidious artificiality in their films, Bujalski achieves fastidious authenticity in recreating an artefact of early 1980s America. In his review of *Computer Chess* for the *New Yorker*, Richard Brody stated that '[t]he most striking thing about the movie is its amazingly detailed and precise reconstruction of the styles of the day—the haircuts, the clothing, the eyeglasses, and the furnishing; the classic computer, down to the blinking C.R.T. cursor and the dot-matrix printer' (2013).

This meticulousness in historical recreation is furthered through Bujalski's choice to film using antiquated filming equipment. Mike D'Angelo describes how 'Bujalski went to the trouble of digging up vintage black-and-white Sony tube cameras, giving the movie a dull antisheen that genuinely makes it look like an industrial training film from that era' (2013). Ruud Klomp argues that Bujalski's 'usage of consumer-grade cameras and leaving in errors and glitches … enforces on us, the viewer, the notion of an authentic experience. It is as if we are watching actual archival footage that had been shot, forgotten, re-emerged and recut by Bujalski into the film we are seeing' (2015). By filming a narrative set in the early 1980s with camera equipment from the period with documentary authenticity, Bujalski achieves a blurring

of reality and fiction similar to that achieved by Myrick and Sánchez in *The Blair Witch Project*, echoed in James Mottram's assertion that audience members who 'walk into a screening of *Computer Chess* without any prior knowledge [will] likely think … this is a real documentary about tech nerds from the 1980s' (2013). Whilst neither *Makibefo* nor *Caesar Must Die* are examples of quirky cinema, the 'ironic detachment from, and sincere engagement with, films' fictional worlds and their characters' described by MacDowell are present through the ways in which both films create fastidious authenticity through their documentary aesthetic, whilst simultaneously undermining this through either cinematic or theatrical artifice through approaches similar to those of Bujalski in *Computer Chess* (2017, p. 27).

The authentic documentary aesthetic of *Makibefo* is one of the film's defining characteristics. Mark Thornton Burnett notes that Abela himself has encountered audience members who have mistaken his Shakespearean adaptation for an anthropological film, suggesting that 'an ethnographic component is apparent at the level of sound and image' within *Makibefo* which is 'most powerfully felt in the suggestions of documentary realism with which the film is suffused' (2013, p. 27). That this sense of documentary realism is deliberate on the part of the director is further evidenced through the written message with which Abela ends his film. The closing intertitles emphasise not only that '[t]he majority of the actors … have never acted before in their lives', but also that they have 'little knowledge of the outside world' and that most 'have never seen a television let alone a film'. Abela's explicit communication of the non-professional nature of the performers, and his emphasis on their lack of cultural awareness of the moving image text their performances will become intentionally evokes a sense that *Makibefo* is just as much a document of Antandroy life as it is a Shakespearean adaptation. However, whilst there are elements of Abela's film which undoubtedly exhibit documentary style and execution, *Makibefo* is in fact closer to Bujalski's uncannily accurate recreation of 1980s America in *Computer Chess* than a true documentary. Daniel Rosenthal describes

Makibefo as 'a costume drama, with the villagers wearing simple clothing of a type last worn by their ancestors more than fifty years ago (today they wear jeans or T-shirts)' (2007, p. 116). Burnett goes further, suggesting that 'the clothing decision, coupled with Abela's preference for black and white cinematography, encourages an illusion of a society at a pre-modern stage of development' (2013, p. 27).

The opening scene of *Caesar Must Die* could easily be mistaken for the beginning of a documentary, depicting as it does the closing moments of an Italian-language stage performance of *Julius Caesar* in an authentic, true-to-life manner. The directors continue in this documentary style as the theatre audience leave the auditorium and the actors are led back to their cells, revealing for the first time that the men are in fact prisoners. The film's documentary realism is further enhanced by the Tavianis' choice to use real Rebibbia inmates as the cast for their film (albeit those with acting experience through the prison's theatre programme run by Fabio Cavalli, who also appears in the film as the director of the stage production). *Caesar Must Die* has been compared to 'the strongest neorealist films of the Forties and Fifties', connecting the film to the mid-twentieth-century movement within which the Tavianis first began making films, which 'embodied a rejection of both traditional dramatic and cinematic conventions, most often employed on-location shooting rather than studio sets, and made original use of nonprofessional actors or documentary effects' (Pipolo et al. 2012, p. 44; Bondanella, 2001, p. 31). The Tavianis too 'felt [they] were working with the same simplicity and spontaneity of [their] early features', highlighting the sincerity and naturality of *Caesar Must Die*'s documentary aesthetic and narrative approach (quoted in Iannone, 2013, p. 36).

Nevertheless, *Caesar Must Die* in fact offers a blend of documentary authenticity and cinematic artifice similar to that of both *Computer Chess* and *Makibefo*. The Tavianis' choice to cast Rebibbia inmates led to a number of media outlets describing the film as a 'docudrama'

in an attempt to condense the Tavianis' approach and aesthetic into a single word (see Roxborough, 2012; Andrews, 2013; Bradshaw, 2013). In response to this description, the directors stated that they 'scripted the whole thing' and that '[n]othing was improvised', but also acknowledged that elements of the prisoners' personal lives were included in the finished film (Bennett, 2012). Academic assessments of the film have defined the film more tentatively. Shaul Bassi describes *Caesar Must Die* 'less as a *docudrama* on prison Shakespeare … than as an artistic interpretation of this special event'; whilst Maurizio Calbi simply claims it is 'a film that defies easy categorization' (2016, p. 182; 2014, p. 235). Like *The Blair Witch Project*, *Computer Chess* and *Makibefo*, *Caesar Must Die* is a film which directly challenges the audience's perception of where fiction ends and reality begins. This is evidenced in Dave Calhoun's review of the film for *Time Out*, in which he observes the film 'isn't a documentary, but at times it feels like one, which adds to a nagging sense of uncertainty about what it is we're watching', and notes how 'the boundary between the play and the prisoners' world always remains blurred' (2013). Writing for *Sight & Sound*, Philip Kemp similarly notes the Tavianis' 'teasing penchant for blurring the line between artifice and reality' (2013). It is this 'blurring' of boundaries between reality and fiction, continually and obscurely shifting between the two, which leads to *Caesar Must Die*'s metamodern status oscillating between documentary authenticity and cinematic artifice.

5.2 'Let not light see my black and deep desires' (*Macbeth*, 1.4.51)

I have argued elsewhere that '[b]lack and white can … act as a conduit for metamodern cinema … simultaneously augment[ing] and undermin[ing] the authenticity of the world the director creates – somehow too real and not real in the same moment' (Broadribb, 2022, pp. 56-57). This is evidenced in twenty-first-century Shakespeare films more widely. The use of black-

and-white cinematography in *Much Ado About Nothing* (dir. Whedon, 2012) has been described by the film's cinematographer Jay Hunter as 'a cool way to tell the story in a modern setting and also throw it into this alien universe of monochrome. Taking a text that's hundreds of years old, bringing it into the modern world, then sending it back another 40 years' (quoted in Patches, 2013). Similarly, in *The Tragedy of Macbeth* (dir. Coen, 2021), the 'sense of artificiality is additionally emphasized by the fact that the film has locked into place a distinctively pearly black and white palette rather than a realist colour one' (Semenza, 2022, p. 310). This simultaneous realness and unrealness is evinced in both *Makibefo* and *Caesar Must* Die, and the choice by their respective directors to film either predominantly or entirely in black and white is key to each film's metamodern sensibility.

Abela creates *Makibefo*'s black-and-white aesthetic in a manner similar to that of *Computer Chess* through his choice to use a stripped-down shooting set-up and simple technology. As Anne-Marie Costantini-Cornède describes, the director wanted

> to shoot a film enhancing visuals and including only very few and simple dialogues, a way for the director to return to the basics and pay his homage to silent cinema … Aesthetics were to be as sober as possible, with a black and white filmic image shot with only very few camera movements. The technician crew was deliberately reduced to three … [and] rushes were only to be seen at the end of the shooting period. (2013, p. 237)

Abela's approach has a similar effect to that of Dogme95, which looked to shift filmmaking away from superficiality and cinematic artifice to present raw and unaccommodated films (discussed in further detail in Chapter 4). By filming on location with outdated technology, *Makibefo* echoes *Computer Chess*'s visual aesthetic, in which 'Bujalski's employment of antiquated technology … conjure[s] up a truthful historical experience' (Klomp, 2015). Whilst

infusing his film with greater authenticity, however, the primitive equipment used by Abela simultaneously highlights the artifice of the filmmaking process – simply put, the audience is more aware they are watching a film. The grainy monochrome images are a constant reminder of this in a way that high-definition photorealistic footage would not be. In addition to the black-and-white aesthetic, the camera also regularly creates more overt visual reminders of its mediating presence through the glitches and idiosyncrasies inherent to its outdated technology.

This is evidenced early in the film during the scene in which Makibefo (Martin Zia) is introduced. Following a prologue delivered by the narrator (Gilbert Laumord), the screen fades to black to display the first of the opening credits. The picture then fades quickly from black to white, remaining white for a few seconds before a man – later revealed to be Kidoure (Boniface), the film's Cawdor figure – is seen emerging from this apparent void. It is only then that it becomes apparent that the scene is in fact an establishing shot of the desert, the bright sky and pale sand initially indistinguishable from one another through Abela's primitive black and white aesthetic. The white void is created by the technical limitations of Abela's camera equipment failing to clearly differentiate between sand and sky in the bright sunlight, lending the shot sincerity through its authentic creation. Abela transitions to the establishing shot of the desert using a simple fade-in from a black screen; but, due to the desert's appearance as a completely white space, it simultaneously exists as a fade to white. Jacob T. Swinney argues that fades to white 'create a sense of ambiguity', and 'are often used to express disorientation and euphoria' (2015). Placed opposite the more conventional fade to black seen at the end of the narrator's prologue, the fade to white suggests that the move from the narrator to the start of *Makibefo*'s main narrative is one which shifts from a realistic to a fantastical setting. However, by being created through the technical limitations of Abela's camera, the fade to white simultaneously presents both a realistic *and* fantastical view of the world of the film. The transition from the black screen to the desert scene exists as both a fade into an establishing

shot *and* a fade to white at the same time, with the documentary authenticity of Abela's low tech aesthetic and the cinematic dreamlike quality of the fade to white being created concurrently through the same action.

The Tavianis also use their chosen black-and-white aesthetic to visually undercut the documentary realism they create from very early on in *Caesar Must Die*, albeit in a different way to Abela. Having used colour to shoot the opening documentary-style sequence of the prisoners' stage performance of *Julius Caesar*, the directors switch to black and white as the film shifts back in time six months to when work on the production began. The Tavianis have explained the reasons behind this choice:

> We wanted it to be clear to the public that the story happened six months earlier—it was a flashback, nothing new. But the real reason was that for us—maybe we're exaggerating—black and white is unreal and color is naturalistic … we thought of it as a sort of violence against naturalism, which would be a good way to enter into the prison with a different, more expressive instrument. (Pipolo et al., 2012, p. 45)

The transition to monochrome marks a move away from the realism seen during the opening minutes of the film. Calbi suggests that *Caesar Must Die* 'uses stark, high-contrast black and white to great effect to draw attention to its own status as a cinematic artifact', paralleling the way in which *Makibefo* draws attention to the camera's mediating presence (2014, p. 236). As a result, the shift to black and white for the majority of the running time undercuts the film's inherent sense of documentary authenticity created through its prison setting and prisoner cast, consciously moving *Caesar Must Die* away from realism and towards artifice.

Moreover, at the same time as the shift to black and white, the cinematography employed by the Tavianis also begins to move away from that of documentary realism seen in the opening colour section. The black and white section opens with an establishing shot of a

prison building exterior, which demonstrates Bassi's description of Rebbibia within the film as a 'very real and yet artistically transformed prison' (2016, p. 188). The Tavianis shoot the building from a low angle to immediately displace the realism through which we initially see the prison with a more artistic representation of the same place. The directors also create a distinct line of symmetry down the middle of the screen, causing the building's dark windows to create an even geometric pattern against the lighter brickwork of the walls and presenting the prison in a notably more abstract manner. They further reinforce the carefully arranged nature of this establishing shot by superimposing a caption – 'Sei mesi prima' ('Six months earlier') – in the centre of the screen. The use of precise symmetry in the crafting of the shot creates a parallel between *Caesar Must Die* and the 'fastidious and simplified sense of artificiality' which MacDowell notes as a hallmark of quirky cinema (2017, p. 29). He argues, for example, that there are shots within the films of Wes Anderson that 'feel almost confrontational in their rigidly posed symmetry' which 'cannot help but encourage us to notice that they have been constructed especially for the camera … forthrightly asking us to appreciate their staged and artificial nature' (MacDowell, 2010, pp. 5, 6). Whilst the Tavianis' intention is not to imbue *Caesar Must Die* with a quirky sensibility reminiscent of Anderson's oeuvre, the effect of presenting the establishing black-and-white shot of the prison with meticulous symmetry is comparable. The audience is forced to see the world of the film through the abstract artifice of the Tavianis' camera angle, causing *Caesar Must Die* to oscillate away from the documentary authenticity of the colour section. However, the directors ensure that a sense of the realism of the film's opening sequence is retained, as the prisoners can still be seen and heard behind the prison windows. As a result, this establishing shot functions in a similar manner to *Makibefo*'s opening fade to white, instigating *Caesar Must Die*'s metamodern aesthetic by establishing Rebbibia as a simultaneously realistic and fantastical setting.

5.3 'In every point twice done, and then done double' (*Macbeth*, 1.6.16)

Costantini-Cornède argues that *Makibefo* 'shows the same dual quality' in adapting *Macbeth* as *Throne of Blood* (dir. Kurosawa, 1957), in being 'both a local construction and one bearing universal, mythical tones, both a powerful personal vision and one in oblique correspondence with the play's essential themes' (2013, p. 237). However, whilst Kurosawa creates distinct characters with their foundations in those of the play (for example, Macbeth becomes Washizu, Banquo becomes Miki, and King Duncan becomes Lord Tsuzuki), Abela retains more of the original identities of Shakespeare's characters through the creation of Malagasy versions of their names. This consequently blurs the distinction between the character of Makibefo as an adaptation of Macbeth and a 'mythical figure in his own right' (Hinz, 2008).

The identity crisis between Makibefo and Macbeth is established in the film's opening scene. As the audience hears Makibefo's name spoken during the pre-credits prologue spoken by the narrator, the name becomes caught somewhere between 'Makibefo' and 'Macbeth', as Laumord makes the 'i' sound notably unstressed and omits the final 'o' sound in his native Guadeloupean French accent. Makibefo's name is first spoken by a character within the narrative when he and Bakoua (Randina Arthur), the Banquo figure, return to the village with Kidoure as their prisoner. A young girl hails their return with a chant, translated in the subtitles as 'Here's Makibefo, here's Makibefo…'.[10] However, the girl's pronunciation sounds considerably closer to 'Macbeth' than 'Makibefo'. Burnett describes the film as 'the reimagining of the play derived from a non-textual encounter with Shakespeare' and notes that 'Makibefo's name is pronounced in different ways through the film, suggesting a varying index of a heard English signifier' (2013, p. 26). Whilst this offers a technical semiotic explanation, the oscillation between different pronunciations of the character's name creates a distinctly

[10] All English subtitles from *Makibefo* throughout the chapter are taken from the 2008 Region Free DVD edition released by Scoville Film.

metamodern effect. As the audience reads 'Makibefo' in the subtitles but hears 'Macbeth' spoken by the girl, the character becomes *both* Makibefo *and* Macbeth in that moment. The distinction between the two is further complicated through the excerpts from *Macbeth* read by the narrator throughout the film, which function as spoken intertitles between the regularly dialogue-free scenes played out by Abela's cast. Moments before we hear the girl hail Makibefo's return, Laumord delivers the third witch's line, 'All hail Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter' (1.3.50), using unaltered Shakespearean language to frame Makibefo's encounter with the witch doctor (Victor Raobelina) the audience has just witnessed. As a result, Makibefo is positioned as connected to, but distinct from, Macbeth. However, when the audience hears the girl chant Makibefo's name as 'Macbeth', the distinction between the two characters becomes considerably less clear. Zia consequently plays *both* Makibefo *and* Macbeth simultaneously throughout the film, the audience's interpretation of his character continually swinging between the two from one moment to the next.

Just as Shakespeare dedicates much of act 1 scene 2 of *Macbeth* to emphasising Macbeth's virtuousness at the beginning of the story, particularly through lines such as 'brave Macbeth (well he deserves that name)' (1.2.16) and 'O valiant cousin, worthy gentleman' (1.2.24), Abela initially sets up Makibefo in a similar manner. After the narrator describes Makibefo as 'good and true' above all others in his village during the film's prologue, Makibefo is shown capturing the fugitive Kidoure in loyalty to Danikany (Jean-Félix), the Duncan figure. Whilst Makibefo injures Kidoure in doing so, 'Abela shows that "the milk of human kindness" initially flows through Makibefo's veins by having him gently salve Kidoure's spear wound', dedicating a notable amount of screen time to this one act to emphasise Makibefo's compassion (Rosenthal, 2007, p. 116). However, Abela also includes contradictory elements at the same time which foreshadow Makibefo's emergent malevolence. The sequence following Kidoure's capture begins with two close-ups. The first shows

Makibefo's hand holding a spear, clearly emphasising his status as a warrior. However, the second shot of Makibefo's chest carries connotations significantly less obvious to a Western audience. As Burnett explains, Makibefo 'sports a talisman representing a crocodile's tooth, a superstitious adornment which associates him both with the diabolic and with … the dynastic class of rulers who dominated Madagascan society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' (2013, p. 30). By choosing to focus upon this element of Makibefo's appearance, Abela provides evidence very early on of the character's desire for power and willingness to gain it by nefarious means.

The song which plays over this scene, 'Olo ty tadidy' ('We will remember a man'), performed entirely in Malagasy, has a similar function and serves as a prologue to the story ('The songs of Makibefo', 2008). As Hinz notes, '[u]nbeknownst to an audience unfamiliar with the actors' language, *Macbeth* is thus appropriated into the Antandroy's aural history in the form of songs akin to oral traditions', further blurring the film's distinction between cultural authenticity and dramatic artifice (2008). Translated lyrics state that Makibefo 'was proud for having brought a lot of violence' and that 'with much violence / He and his wife made themselves king' ('The songs of Makibefo', 2008). In combining scenes, symbols and music which simultaneously present Makibefo as sincerely moral and fundamentally immoral, and which use both widely recognisable and culturally esoteric elements, Abela creates an oscillation between the two. Makibefo thus metamodernistically embodies the witches' paradoxical declaration from the play's opening scene: 'Fair is foul, and foul is fair' (1.1.9)

Whilst much of *Makibefo* is unaccompanied by a non-diegetic soundtrack, 'Olo ty tadidy' reappears at points throughout, becoming a recurring motif for Makibefo's connection to Antandroy cultural tradition. However, the use of the piece during Abela's version of act 5 scene 8, in which Makibefo fights Makidofy (Jean-Noël), the Macduff figure, and a number of other villagers who are rebelling against his rule, is key to this sequence offering a particularly

powerful example of the character's oscillation between being 'a mythical figure in his own right' and an adapted version of Macbeth. For much of the film, the narrator is the only person to deliver any part of the play directly, separating Shakespeare's language from the Malagasy lines spoken by the cast. However, moments before he is killed by Makidofy, Makibefo speaks lines which translate into English as: 'Makidofy, you of all men I have avoided. My soul is too much charged with your blood already. And you are not of a woman born'. Makibefo's speech here is far closer to Shakespeare's language than any other dialogue spoken by him, or indeed any other character aside from the narrator, closely echoing Macbeth's lines to Macduff in the play:

> Of all men else I have avoided thee.
> But get thee back, my soul is too much charged
> with blood of thine already.
> […]
> And thou opposed, being of no woman born. (5.8.4-6, 31)

Having Makibefo speak near-direct translations of lines from the play causes the character to shift further towards being an adaptation of Macbeth. However, Abela also fades in an instrumental version of 'Olo ty tadidy' as Makibefo speaks these lines. As a result, just before the character dies, the audience witnesses Zia speaking lines closely related to those spoken by Macbeth whilst also hearing music associated with Makibefo as a mythical Antandroy figure. Zia's character ends his story existing as both Makibefo *and* Macbeth, oscillating between the two as the narrative draws to a close.

Whilst the opening thirty minutes of *Makibefo* are shot in bright sunlight, the scenes leading up to and following Danikany's murder are distinctive in being shot at night. Abela's choice to shoot in very low levels of natural light maintains the documentary authenticity of

these scenes, an approach reminiscent of Dogme95's rules against using special lighting and optical filters (discussed in further detail in Chapter 4). However, similar to the way in which the bright sky and white sand create the effect of a fade to white in the opening scene, Abela's primitive camera technology simultaneously lends the scenes a postmodern surreality. The first scene of the night-time sequence – in which Makibefo is seen sitting alone on the beach and is then joined by his wife, Valy Makibefo (Neoliny Dety), the Lady Macbeth figure – adapts the key plot points of act 1 scene 7. Makibefo withdraws to the beach to wrestle with his conscience; Valy Makibefo arrives to convince him to go ahead with their plan; and Makibefo ultimately leaves the beach in order to kill Danikany. However, the scene can at the same time be viewed as a nightmarishly expressionist and fantastical adaptation of Macbeth's dagger soliloquy (2.1.33-64) – a speech otherwise conspicuous in its absence, as no part of it is spoken during the film in either its original form or as a Malagasy translation. This ambiguity – or rather duality – is augmented by the sequence playing out without any dialogue, closely linking it to Abela's desire to return to the simplicity of silent cinema whilst also laying it further open to interpretation.

As the audience first sees Makibefo sitting alone on the sand, the low light levels cause Zia's face to appear as an almost completely black silhouette with only the hint of some indistinct features. In contrast, the sand upon which Makibefo sits, the dunes in the background and the cloudy twilit sky all appear much more clearly, giving Makibefo's appearance an unsettling uncanniness as he becomes the 'walking shadow' (5.5.23) of another of Macbeth's famous speeches. When Valy Makibefo enters, her face also appears as a completely black silhouette just like her husband's. She holds out a dagger for Makibefo to take, stabs it into the wet sand at his feet when he does not, then crouches a few steps away from him. Reading the scene as a silent adaptation of act 1 scene 7, her wordless actions echo such phrases as 'When you durst do it, then you were a man' (1.7.49) and other examples of Lady Macbeth's goading

of Macbeth into carrying out their plan. As a postmodern expressionist adaptation of Macbeth's soliloquy from act 2 scene 1, however, this moment becomes a visual reinterpretation of the opening lines of the speech: 'Is this a dagger which I see before me, / The handle toward my hand?' (2.1.33-34). As Abela cuts to a close-up to show Valy Makibefo stabbing the dagger into the sand by Makibefo's feet, the blade of the dagger changes from one shot to the next to also appear completely black. This lends the weapon the same dark surreality as the characters, as if it has become infected by the evil for which it is about to be used. Whilst Makibefo remains motionless, his clasped hands resting upon his knees cast a shadow upon the sand which, during the close-up shot, looks as though it is reaching out for the dagger, echoing Macbeth's command for the dagger to 'let me clutch thee' (2.1.34). The dagger is both real and a 'false creation' (2.1.38), as are Makibefo's hands and their shadow simultaneously resisting and reaching out for it, as Abela blurs the lines between the real and the fantastical.

The couple sit apart from each other motionless for several seconds. Valy Makibefo then walks back towards her husband to retrieve the dagger, then heads to Danikany's hut with the intention of carrying out the murder herself. Her face is once again completely obscured by darkness, whilst the silhouette of her hair – four protrusions from the top of her head – gives her a demonic appearance as she moves towards her husband. At this point, Valy Makibefo metamodernistically inhabits two roles, oscillating between a physical character and an uncanny representation of Makibefo's nefarious intent. She continues to embody Lady Macbeth towards the end of act 1 scene 7, her actions encouraging Macbeth to 'screw your courage to the sticking place' (1.7.61), but her shadowy and demonic appearance through Abela's primitive black and white cinematography causes her to also become a personification of Macbeth's 'dagger of the mind' (2.1.38). Just as Macbeth states that the dagger 'marshall'st me the way that I was going' (2.1.42), so the 'walking shadow' of Valy Makibefo leads Makibefo to Danikany's hut to carry out his murder.

The scene then cuts to an external shot of the hut in which Danikany is sleeping. Abela's primitive camera transforms the dark doorway to the hut into a completely black shape. In an inverse parallel to Kidoure emerging from the white void at the beginning of the film, Valy Makibefo seemingly disappears into a black void as she enters the hut, shifting the scene towards abstract surreality. The moment also echoes Kurosawa's adaptation of act 1 scene 7 in *Throne of Blood*, particularly a stylised moment in which Lady Washizu (Kurosawa's Lady Macbeth figure) slowly enters a doorway that similarly leads into a black void, disappears completely into the blackness for a few seconds, then reappears with a jar of wine to drug Lord Tsuzuki's guards. In *Makibefo,* the scene is lent further surreality once Abela cuts to an interior shot, as the hut is brightly lit by candles and a burning torch, creating a dreamlike dissonance between the exterior and interior perspectives. Danikany lies sleeping in the foreground with his head to the right of the picture, with an unseen source of light emanating from offscreen. Daylight shining through a few of the hut's timbers confirms that the murder scene was shot at a different time of day to the exterior shots – a continuity error which reveals that the scenes both inside and outside the hut were filmed with documentary authenticity. However, Abela's choice to preserve this visual dissonance within the film augments the surreal aesthetic further – especially as when Abela cuts back to the exterior of the hut again after Danikany's murder, it is night time once again. The unexplained light surrounding Danikany's head contrasts with Makibefo's featureless darkness in the previous scenes. Just as Valy Makibefo earlier embodied the darkness growing within Makibefo, the light associated with Danikany emphasises Makibefo's destruction of honour and nobility. Just as Shakespeare tells us that 'Macbeth does murder sleep' (2.2.37), Abela's aesthetic choices suggest that Makibefo murders light. The nightmarish dumbshow abstracted from Shakespeare's themes and characters in this sequence in particular is distinctly metamodern. The use of low levels of natural light through the black-and-white lens of Abela's primitive camera equipment

deliberately creates surreal images which consistently retain documentary realism. As a result, *Makibefo* remains consistently sincere in its presentation of Malagasy culture whilst also creating a fantastical postmodern aesthetic, the characters oscillating between intimately human and unsettlingly surreal versions of themselves.

Makibefo's most striking image, which was featured on posters promoting the film on the festival circuit, is that of the title character holding aloft the decapitated head of a zebu. Costantini-Cornède describes the shot as

> a powerful example of Abela's *épure*, a sober, refined style and minimalist aesthetics. The zebu's head, ostensibly brandished by Makibefo high above his head, the huge dark horns standing out on the bright sky, is the most direct, simple way to mark the beginning of an evil reign and the primeval quest for power. (2013, p. 240)

The shot comes at the end of one of the most metamodern sequences within the film, in which Abela presents a near-wordless adaptation of act 3 scene 3, depicting the murder of Bakoua, which is intercut with the ritual slaughter of the zebu. Abela includes a statement at the very end of the film's credits about the animal's death: 'The Zebu ox in the film was sacrificed in our honour according to the customs of the Antandroy people and was distributed to the families involved in the making of *Makibefo*'. As well as being a sacrifice in honour of the filmmakers, the killing of the zebu was also not pre-scripted (Rosenthal, 2007, p. 116). As a result, the sequence surpasses the documentary authenticity seen elsewhere in *Makibefo*, offering real scenes of an animal being put to death as part of the fictional narrative.

The sequence begins with the zebu being led out of an enclosure by several men, who then bind its legs and prepare it for slaughter. Abela's use of unsteady handheld camerawork, the indistinct and unsubtitled Malagasy conversation between the men, and the moaning and puffing of the distressed animal all serve to enhance the realism of this section. Abela then cuts

to Bakoua walking along the beach and stopping when he sees the two murderers appear. In contrast to the zebu sacrifice, this parallel sequence is shot far more cinematically. The director uses traditional steady camerawork and opens with an establishing shot of the shore, cutting to a shot of Bakoua before showing a shot looking out to sea from Bakoua's point of view. The director also plays with perspective when introducing the murderers: a static shot shows Bakoua walking away from the camera; one murderer enters the shot in the distance and the second moves into shot very close to the camera, emphasising Bakoua's entrapment between them. Once Bakoua stops walking after noticing one of the murderers, the instrumental version of 'Olo ty tadidy' begins to play, not only signifying Bakoua's realisation that Makibefo is behind his murder, but also increasing the cinematic nature of the sequence through one of the few examples of the use of non-diegetic music in the film.

Once the second murderer has knocked Bakoua to the ground, Abela then cuts back to the slaughter of the zebu and reverts once again to the realism of the unsteady camera. However, the music continues to play over images of the men preparing to cut the zebu's throat, blurring the lines between the reality of the zebu sacrifice and the cinematic depiction of Bakoua's murder. The director rapidly cuts back and forth between shots of the zebu's throat being cut and the murderers executing Bakoua on the sand, at times showing only a second of one sequence before cutting back to the other. Abela's editing during this sequence causes his film to oscillate rapidly between the documentary authenticity of the zebu sacrifice and the cinematic artifice of Bakoau's murder, the two becoming metamodernistically entwined. The background music continues throughout the sequence, stopping when one of the murderers delivers the fatal blow to Bakoua with his spear. Abela then offers an extreme long shot of the two murderers standing over Bakoua's body, adding the sound of the zebu's dying moan as the screen fades to black, again blurring the lines between reality and artifice by juxtaposing the authentic sound of a slaughtered animal with the fictionalised death of a character within the

narrative. After returning fully to the documentary aesthetic to shoot the slaughterers hacking off the zebu's head, Abela again moves back to the fictional narrative as he cuts to Makibefo ceremoniously holding the decapitated head aloft, declaring 'I am your new king'. Just as the sacrifice of the zebu parallels the killing of Bakoua, so its head stands in place of Bakoua's own head, which Makibefo is unable to sever and hold aloft in triumph. However, the most notable severed head within the play is Macbeth's – 'th'usurper's cursed head' (5.9.21) as it is described by Macduff as he presents it in the final scene. Whilst Makibefo is ultimately not decapitated at the film's conclusion, his action ironically foreshadows his own demise in recalling the fate of his progenitor.

As well as echoing scenes and images from *Macbeth*, the sequence also draws influence from past cinema outside of Shakespearean adaptation. Rosenthal highlights the connection to *Apocalypse Now* (dir. Coppola, 1979), describing the scene as 'reminiscent of the assassination of Colonel Kurtz and the slaughter of the water buffalo' in particular (2007, p. 116). The echoes are felt through Abela cutting back and forth between the zebu sacrifice and Bakoua's murder, which parallels Coppola's editing style in the sequence in his film. Moreover, just as in *Makibefo,* the killing of the water buffalo in *Apocalypse Now* was also an authentic ritualistic slaughter carried out by a local tribe, which Coppola filmed without direction for inclusion within the film (Mandell, 2019). Abela's depiction of real animal slaughter also connects *Makibefo* to *Cannibal Holocaust* (dir. Deodato, 1980), a horror film considered to be an ancestor of the found footage subgenre popularised by *The Blair Witch Project* (Heller-Nicholas, 2014, p. 6). Deodato 'interweaves … scenes of faked human carnage with scenes of the all-too-real killing of animals … clearly intended to intensify, by a process of association and osmosis, the verisimilitude of the scenes in which humans are apparently mutilated and killed' (Petley, 2005, p. 179-180).

However, Abela succeeds in separating *Makibefo* both ethically and aesthetically from these earlier films. The earnest acknowledgement following the credits of the zebu sacrifice as genuine distances his film from the intentionally horrific authenticity of the killing of animals in both *Apocalypse Now* and *Cannibal Holocaust*, and the information regarding the animal's body being 'distributed to the families involved in the making of *Makibefo*' makes it overtly clear to the audience that the zebu's death was purposeful beyond its inclusion in the film. Abela juxtaposes the authenticity of the zebu sacrifice with the cinematic artifice apparent throughout Bakoua's death, an approach in direct contrast to that of Deodato in *Cannibal Holocaust*, where '[a]ctual and simulated mutilation of the body are presented through identical stylistic modes in order to equalize their perceptual effect' (Jackson, 2002, p. 42). Abela's metamodern approach shifts away from the amoral cynicism of both *Apocalypse Now* and *Cannibal Holocaust*, ensuring the inclusion of footage of real animal death in his film is never exploitative, lending the sequence greater depth and sincerity as a result.

Ultimately, Abela's adaptation of act 3 scene 3 metamodernistically oscillates between several different poles. Firstly, both the sacrifice of the zebu in honour of Makibefo and the murder of Bakoua exist as two distinct events in *Makibefo*'s narrative. Secondly, the zebu sacrifice acts as a metaphor for the 'sacrifice' by Makibefo of his once 'trusted friend' (as Bakoua is described by the narrator in the prologue). Thirdly, the sequence echoes elements of *Macbeth*: not only the scene upon which it is based, but also in foreshadowing Makibefo's ultimate fate through evoking the imagery of Macbeth's 'cursed head' being held aloft by Macduff at the end of the play. Fourthly, the zebu sacrifice exists as a real event, carried out in honour of the filmmakers and shot in a way which preserves its documentary authenticity. Finally, the sequence has prominent intertextuality with past films depicting real animal slaughter, binding it to these even as Abela ensures he achieves a degree of separation from them. The film moves between each of these poles throughout the sequence, forcing the

audience to experience *Makibefo* as continually shifting across the modern and postmodern spectrum.

5.4 'In states unborn and accents yet unknown?' (*Julius Caesar*, 3.1.113)

Whilst the Tavianis do not include footage of actual killing in the same way as Abela, the spectre of death hangs over their film through the real crimes committed by the prisoners who make up the cast. Speaking about working with the inmates of Rebibbia on *Caesar Must Die*, the Tavianis have stated that they

> are living in contradiction with our love and hate for these prisoners … Working together to create the art made us feel like brothers. But then we remembered that they were the same people who created orphans and widows. There is an endless conflict in us that remains unresolved. (Pipolo et al., 2012, p. 44)

The 'endless conflict' described by the Tavianis manifests itself within the film, as each prisoner exists as both artist and criminal throughout. This duality is introduced prominently during the audition sequence, in which the prisoners are instructed to give personal details about themselves in two different ways – 'the first time you're crying, the second, you're pissed off',[11] as Cavalli summarises. Whilst the 'crying' and 'pissed off' performances on the surface may be assumed to show each prisoner's artistic and criminal sides respectively, the Tavianis ensure the distinction is never that simple. One prisoner, for example, is shown staring intensely at Cavalli but does not speak, leaving it ambiguous as to whether the performance the audience is seeing is one of sadness or anger. After Cavalli assigns the main parts from the play following the auditions, the Tavianis then offer mugshot-like close ups of each of the six main performers

[11] All English subtitles from *Caesar Must Die* throughout the chapter are taken from the 2013 Region 2 DVD edition released by New Wave Films.

accompanied by captions telling the audience both their respective crimes – including drug trafficking, organised crime and murder – and their lengthy prison sentences. The sequence encapsulates the Tavianis' 'endless conflict', as '[t]he charismatic conviction of [the prisoners'] acting personas is shown to be inextricable from their "real" identities as murderers and thieves' (Pipolo et al., 2012, p. 42). The directors first present the men as artists, then abruptly reframe them through their identities as criminals seconds later, forcing the audience to experience the same contradictory emotions. At this point in the narrative of the film, the prisoners simultaneously inhabit a metamodern position between artists – with depth, feeling and humanity – and criminals – depthlessly reduced to their crimes and sentences – caught between their past real-life acts of violence and murder and the equally violent and murderous Shakespearean roles they are yet to perform.

After the casting of the play has been established, the lines between the prisoners and their characters within the play steadily become more and more indistinct, in a manner similar to the blurring of actor and character in *The King is Alive* (dir. Levring, 2000) (discussed in Chapter 4). However, the Tavianis add an additional sense of blending real life with fiction by having all the prisoners perform in their own dialect, introduced in the narrative by Cavalli near the start of the first rehearsal scene. The fictionalised versions of the prisoners played by themselves within *Caesar Must Die* are therefore brought closer to their real-life personas, allowing the Tavianis and Cavalli together to find within the prisoners 'a source and nucleus of authenticity' (Bassi, 2016, p. 194). Cavalli has stated that 'the words [of *Julius Caesar*] gain an extraordinary new lease of life' through being translated into the various respective dialects of the actors rather than a standard Italian translation, and that 'those words written by [Shakespeare] are stimulated by the experiences and the drama that [the prisoners] have lived through and are magically reborn on stage' ('Interviews', 2013). Cosimo Rega, who plays Cassius, suggests that what the prisoners 'bring to the play comes from our hearts' when they

perform in their own dialect, and that doing so 'bridges the gap that exists between us and professional actors' (ibid.).

The sentiments of Cavalli and Rega suggest that the use of dialects allows the prisoners to shift towards their artist identities. However, by having the prisoners translate *Julius Caesar* into their own dialects, the play inescapably takes on 'the languages and codes of prison culture and, more specifically, the languages/dialects of the *mafia* and *camorra* culture spoken by these convicts-turned-actors' (Calbi, 2014, p. 240). During the first rehearsal scene, for example, in which the prisoners are shown running through act 1 scene 2 of the play, Caesar's line to the soothsayer – 'What sayst thou to me now? Speak once again' (1.2.23) – is translated when spoken by Giovanni Arcuri into a more threatening command: 'The thing you said before, say it to my face, now!'. Caesar's dismissal of the soothsayer – 'He is a dreamer. Let us leave him. Pass' (1.2.25) – is also changed by Arcuri to 'Keep him away from me, but gently, don't hit him', transforming Caesar from Roman general to mob boss in only a few lines. The use of dialect forces the prisoners to swing towards their criminal identities at the same time as augmenting their artist identities, creating a metamodern fluctuation between the two. Once they begin rehearsing and performing *Julius Caesar* within the film, the prisoners therefore exhibit the 'oscillating in-betweenness' identified by van den Akker and Vermeulen as a key feature of the metamodern sensibility (2017, p. 10). The fictionalised versions of themselves the prisoners play within the film are lent additional documentary authenticity through their regional dialects drawn from their real-life personalities; and the overt artifice of their Shakespearean roles is in turn shifted towards sincerity and depth by the perceived authenticity of being translated into regional dialects. The prisoners on screen therefore continually exist somewhere between their Shakespearean roles, their fictionalised characters, and their actual selves, constantly swinging between these distinct but interrelated poles and intertwining all three.

The Tavianis' adaptation of act 1 scene 2 begins as a realistic rehearsal characterised by lines being repeated for practice and regular interruptions by the prisoners. However, the directors soon play with 'the boundaries between theater and cinema, rehearsal and performance, documentary and "fictional" film, life and art' that Calbi argues characterises their film (2014, p. 236). Having achieved a sense of unpolished realism and amateur performance, the Tavianis suddenly move away from this approach when Rega as Cassius and Salvatore Striano as Brutus deliver far more refined performances which contrast with those seen earlier in the scene. Dramatic lighting and music are also introduced at this point, evoking the stylised cinematography of *film noir*, causing the scene to veer away from its earlier documentary realism towards a sense of fictionalised cinema. This sense is enhanced further still when the Tavianis move their adaptation of act 1 scene 2 out of the rehearsal space and into different parts of the prison. The move into Rega/Cassius's cell initially takes the film back towards documentary realism, as the actor is shown sitting on his bed rehearsing the passage he was performing in the rehearsal room in the previous scene. However, the film then shifts back towards the *noir*-esque style seen earlier as the audience sees Striano/Brutus continuing the scene in his own cell, the directors cutting back and forth between the two men rehearsing separately.

As the setting shifts again to a bare prison room, the Tavianis create a sense of the fantastical through a sudden cut to white in a similar manner to the fade to white used by Abela during the opening sequence of *Makibefo*, with a comparable disorienting effect. As the setting fades in, it is revealed that the white screen is being created by sunlight pouring in from a window, moving *Caesar Must Die* towards a dreamlike aesthetic whilst still retaining a sense of documentary authenticity through the filming techniques used by the directors. The Tavianis also break the audience's willing suspension of disbelief to remind them that what they are watching is a 'rehearsal' during this scene: once when Cavalli enters to direct Striano/Brutus,

and again when Rega/Cassius apologises to Cavalli for being stirred by his lines in the play to comment on his home city of Naples ('Excuse me, but it feels like this Shakespeare lived in the streets of my city'). The Tavianis purposefully juxtapose the intrusions of reality with the subtly fantastical nature of the adapted scene by having them occur suddenly and conclude just as quickly, causing the film to shift rapidly between sincere authenticity and postmodern fictionality, creating a metamodern fluctuation between the two.

The Tavianis' adaptation of act 3 scene 1 of *Julius Caesar* marks a further shift away from their previous documentary aesthetic, as the line between what is a 'rehearsal' and what is 'real' becomes significantly more blurred. This is the first 'rehearsal' where Cavalli is not shown, and he remains absent from all further scenes adapted from *Julius Caesar* following this. The wider prison populace also shifts away from its previous inclusion in the film as background extras, and occasional cynical commentators on the main cast's rehearsals, to actively take on the collective role of the Roman people. Several prisoners greet Arcuri/Caesar with 'Hail Caesar!' at the start of the scene and are later seen fleeing in terror after witnessing his 'murder'. This change suggests a general shift throughout Rebibbia's inmates beyond the principal cast towards the 'artist' pole, as the fictional world of the play uncannily extends into the previously established reality of the prison.

However, the Tavianis continue to retain a sense of real-world authenticity through filming choices which undercut the fictionality created through spreading the performance of *Julius Caesar* beyond the main cast. Bassi notes how, despite taking place in a setting 'dominated by a surveillance apparatus, *Caesar Must Die* is a film where the only technology involved is that of the Tavianis' video cameras' (2016, p. 187). The directors' choice not to use security camera footage in their film is not only surprising considering Rebbibia affording them ample opportunity to do so, but also separates *Caesar Must Die* from such postmodern Shakespeare films as *Hamlet* (dir. Almereyda, 2000), which presents Elsinore as being 'riddled

with CCTV cameras, of which the inhabitants are very consciously aware' (Klett, 2013, p. 105). Whilst the Tavianis do not explicitly use security cameras, there are shots during their adaptation of act 3 scene 1 which inexorably evoke CCTV footage. As the prisoners/Romans scatter after witnessing Arcuri/Caesar's 'murder' and during the subsequent shot of the conspirators standing around his dead body, the high-angle shot and claustrophobic framing are strongly reminiscent of security camera images, subtly suggesting the aftermath of an authentic 'mob hit' within the prison. The black-and-white aesthetic enhances the sense of surveillance in these moments, echoing the monochromatic nature of CCTV footage. However, even whilst evoking the real surveillance to which the prisoners are subject in real life, the Tavianis undercut this sense once again. The footage of the prisoners/Romans scattering is interrupted by a notably more cinematic shot of those playing the conspirators pleading with them not to run. The high-angle shot itself is also framed with a similar symmetry to that of the establishing shot of the prison building seen earlier – the central beam above the walkway down which the prisoners/Romans flee vertically bisects the screen almost exactly, and the corrugated rooftops either side create the sense of a mirror image. The prison is simultaneously presented with real-world authenticity and cinematic artifice, oscillating between the two to exist as a metamodern performance space within which the murder of Arcuri/Caesar plays out.

Act 3 scene 1 of *Julius Caesar* features one of Shakespeare's most metatheatrical moments – apart from plays-within-plays – delivered by Brutus and Cassius as they and the other conspirators soak their arms and swords in Caesar's blood:

> CASSIUS: Stoop, then, and wash. How many ages hence
> Shall this our lofty scene be acted over
> In states unborn and accents yet unknown?

BRUTUS: How many times shall Caesar bleed in sport
That now on Pompey's basis lies along,
No worthier than the dust? (3.1.111-116)

Lisa S. Starks-Estes notes how '[b]oth Cassius and Brutus fantasize that their performance will bring them a kind of immortality, as it will be re-enacted over and over again in future generations … [and] remind the audience that Shakespeare's play is just such a re-enactment' (2016, pp. 112-113). The Tavianis use this moment of metatheatricality to create a pivotal moment within *Caesar Must Die* which brings together the metamodern aspects of the film. The theatrical nature of the 'murder' of Arcuri/Caesar is emphasised through the obvious props – Striano/Brutus's plastic sword visibly bends as he delivers the final blow – before the directors move back towards a sense of fictionalised cinema as the witnessing crowd of prisoners/Romans scatters. As the conspirators 'bathe [their] hands in Caesar's blood' (3.1.106), the film shifts back to theatricality once more as the actors simply touch Arcuri/Caesar's body, the blood completely absent. The choice to have Rega/Cassius and Striano/Brutus in close-up looking directly into the camera as they deliver their lines not only demonstrates a shift once more towards a cinematic style, but also creates potent echoes of the earlier mugshot sequence in which the crimes and sentences of the main cast members are displayed on screen. The men simultaneously inhabit both artistic and criminal positions at this point, forcing them to metamodernistically swing back and forth between these poles in a single moment.

Calbi argues that, in adapting both Cassius' and Brutus' speeches, 'the film not only keeps the lines of the "original" but also amplifies and clarifies' them, a decision at odds with the Tavianis' method elsewhere in the film where Shakespeare's lines are either simplified through translation or cut altogether (2014, p. 239). The updated lines translate into English as follows:

REGA/CASSIUS: How many centuries to come will see actors play this great scene of ours in kingdoms that are not yet born and in languages still to be invented[?]

STRIANO/BRUTUS: And how often will Caesar have to bleed on theatre stages, like here today, as well, in this prison of ours, lying on the stone, no more than dust?

Whilst Rega/Cassius's lines retain the sense of being 're-enacted over and over again' suggested by Starks-Estes, the adapted lines spoken by Striano/Brutus further emphasise the duality that exists within the prisoners. The replacement of 'sport' (3.1.114) with 'theatre stages' suggests the idea of the men as artists, only to move almost immediately back towards presenting them as criminals through the replacement of 'Pompey's basis' (3.1.115) with 'this prison of ours'. Looking straight into the camera, Rega/Cassius and Striano/Brutus appear to be talking directly to the audience. This draws particular attention to the fact that the Tavianis' film exists as one version of the play amongst the countless versions that have already existed and will exist in the future, but also that the audience are witnessing a unique performance by real prisoners in a real prison who are simultaneously rehearsing for a stage production (seen in the colour sections at the beginning and end of the film) and creating a fictionalised piece of cinema. At this point, the film oscillates metamodernistically between the metatheatricality inherent to Shakespeare's original scene, the modernism of the Tavianis' neorealist roots, and the postmodernism of *Caesar Must Die* as a self-referential prison-set version of *Julius Caesar*.

Just as the opening shot of the main black-and-white section of the film creates a sense of authentic realism mixed with dreamlike fantasy, so the final scenes before the film transitions back into colour create a sense of 'waking up' from this dream. The Tavianis show Striano/Brutus crying 'Awake! Awake!' at the end of the rehearsed section of act 4 scene 3 –

the equivalent to Brutus's awakening of Lucius, Varrus and Claudio towards the end of the scene – then suddenly and disorientingly cut to a white screen, as if Striano/Brutus's command has begun the process of awakening the audience from the fantastical elements of the film. Much like the opening desert shot of *Makibefo*, and in a similar fashion to the earlier cut to white during the Tavianis' version of act 1 scene 2, the white screen is created by natural light. The effect is achieved authentically through shooting the pale bright sky above Striano/Brutus and Rega/Cassius before they deliver their final words to each other in act 5 scene 1. As the camera pans down, the two men appear as if standing in a featureless void, the last remnants of the dreamlike version of Rebibbia that has now almost entirely faded away. The directors then cut to members of the public entering the prison to watch the play as the film starts to come full circle. A shift back to colour at this point might reasonably be expected; however, the 'real' audience members are presented through the 'unreal' black and white imagery, furthering the sense that reality is increasingly intruding on and replacing the dreamlike aesthetic previously created. The sequence functions as a bridge between the fantastical nature of the 'artistically transformed' Rebibbia created during the black and white section of the film, and the documentary authenticity of the colour sections which bookend it.

When *Caesar Must Die* does finally shift back to colour as it revisits the closing scenes of the stage performance first seen at the start of the film, it should feel like a return to the documentary realism created during the opening colour section. However, whilst the Tavianis use footage of the same performance, the fact that some sections are added and others are shortened or cut altogether creates the sense that the film has in fact shifted to a different position to the one at which it began. After witnessing the prisoners merge their interpretations of Shakespeare's characters with elements of their own lives, blended into a hybrid of reality and fiction played out in increasingly cinematic locations around the prison, the return to the cast's stage performance causes the second colour section to evoke a sense of artificiality not

present in the first. Whilst the Tavianis use the same documentary style as they use at the start of the film, the overt theatricality of the performance now turns the Tavianis' theory that 'black and white is unreal and color is naturalistic' on its head (Pipolo et al., 2012, p. 45). The 'real' theatrical performance shot in colour comes across as artificial and insincere in a way it did not before; whilst the 'unreal' black and white performance belatedly gains a renewed sense of authenticity and sincerity.

⁂

By way of conclusion, I return once again to Buchanan's discussion of archival performances referenced at the opening of this chapter, specifically her potent analogy which draws on Macbeth's reaction to seeing the ghost of Banquo at his banqueting table:

> MACBETH: The times have been,
> That when the brains were out, the man would die,
> And there an end. But now they rise again
> With twenty mortal murders on their crowns,
> And push us from our stools. (3.4.76-80)

Buchanan sees Macbeth's description of the dead 'ris[ing] again' to 'push us from our stools' as the character being 'struck not only by the horror but also by the sheer presumptuous perversity of the dead's obdurate refusal to stay dead', comparable to the anxiety that actors and directors might feel about the 'ghosts' of past performances and productions when approaching a Shakespeare play (2020, p. 325). In contrast to this, however, Buchanan argues that Monkman's *Macbeth* – and indeed other twenty-first-century productions – 'actively enjoy the process of jostling for position at the table, and even of sharing a seat with the resurrected interloper' (ibid., p. 356)

Makibefo and *Caesar Must Die* 'actively enjoy' sharing the table with multiple ghosts from moving image history – silent cinema, *film noir*, neorealism, found footage, and more – as well as the two most domineering spectres of all, the countless productions on stage and screen of the respective plays they adapt. Neither *Makibefo* nor *Caesar Must Die* are pushed from their stools by the ghosts they invite, nor are they overawed by their presence. Most importantly, nor do to they pull the ghosts' stools from beneath them in order to flatten or undermine them. In contrast, they metamodernistically upcycle both Shakespeare and moving image media, resignifying their relationship in the present and reimagining their future together.

CHAPTER 6:

PERFORMING *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM* ON SCREEN(S) DURING LOCKDOWN

As Pascale Aebischer observes, 'Shakespeare, both as a cultural figure and in the shape of his plays, "went viral"' during the lockdown restrictions of 2020 and 2021, implemented around the world in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (2021, p. 3). Developing her point, Aebischer describes how Shakespeare

> began to be associated with extraordinary productivity and creative genius that was linked to the newly widespread scenario of social isolation for fear of contagion. At the same time, he also paradoxically became a figure for community at a time of isolation, and the ability for art in general and theatre more specifically to reach beyond the boundaries set up by lockdown conditions and connect artists with their audiences and audiences with one another. (ibid., p. 4)

Whilst physical performance spaces remained closed, artists and performers from across the globe invented and reinvented modes of online digital performance, both out of necessity to support the performing arts industry in a time of crisis and uncertainty, and fuelled by a personal desire to perform.

The stratospheric rise of video conferencing software Zoom during lockdown was not restricted to communication between family, friends and work colleagues, as the platform was rapidly repurposed by theatre practitioners as a digital performance space. Numerous productions performed live on Zoom by actors isolated in their homes, and streamed to YouTube for similarly isolated audience members to watch, appeared online in the early weeks of lockdown and throughout the subsequent months. As a result, 'Zoom-to-YouTube' emerged

as the most prevalent new form of performance native to lockdown (Allred and Broadribb, 2022a, p. 10). Zoom-to-YouTube performance is a hybrid of existing performance mediums, taking in elements of theatre, film and television; whilst also existing as a new form of performance in its own right, with its own aesthetics, conventions and sensibilities emerging rapidly throughout 2020. Live digital performance during the pandemic has raised similar questions to those prompted by theatre broadcasts as they have become ever more present throughout the twenty-first century. Aebischer and Susanne Greenhalgh have noted the 'hybridity and evolution towards ever more cinematic forms' present in theatre broadcasts, as well as 'the emerging modes of digital spectatorship and participation' that they offer (2018, p. 2). Zoom-to-YouTube productions are fundamentally different to theatre broadcasts in many respects, but they similarly disrupt the boundaries between theatre and screen, live and recorded, ephemerality and permanence.

I have argued elsewhere that 'Zoom offers an inherently metamodern performance space', due to the video conferencing software

> emerg[ing] as a metamodern technosocial marker of the pandemic: simultaneously facilitating affective connection, heightened further by our wider historical and cultural moment; and reducing our friends, our families, ourselves, into depthless low-definition digital duplicates. Whilst creating a sense of togetherness for people worldwide, Zoom's now-familiar Gallery View interface also serves as a persistent reminder of our enforced physical distance. (ibid.)

Consequently, whilst offering a distinct form of screen adaptation which emerged within the cultural moment of 2020, Shakespeare as performed on Zoom, and in other digital performance spaces, during the COVID-19 pandemic presents a continuation and an extension of the

metamodern sensibility discernible in other screen adaptations of Shakespeare explored throughout Section 2 of this thesis.

Whilst many Shakespeare plays received multiple adaptations during lockdown, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* emerged early on as the Shakespearean text of choice to perform online. Following the national lockdown measures declared by many nations around the world during the opening months of 2020, several online adaptations of *Dream* appeared online in quick succession. The play's continuing popularity and perceived ability to appeal to, or be adapted for, audiences young and old arguably makes *Dream* a good choice for creatives hoping to get as many people watching online as possible. The contrasting realms – the court and the woods, the mortal and magical planes – and the different groups of characters that inhabit them also offered directors and actors more opportunities for experimentation than most other plays. I would argue that, in addition to these factors, as one of Shakespeare's most fantastical plays, *Dream* is well suited to reflecting the pandemic world out of joint. Waking up from her magically-induced sleep after spending the night in the Forest of Athens, Hermia declares: 'Methinks I see these things with parted eye, / When everything seems double' (4.1.188-189). For many people, waking up each day in lockdown no doubt felt like wading through a surreal dream – as if viewing the world, to borrow Hermia's phrase, 'with parted eye'. This chapter focuses primarily on four Lockdown Shakespeare adaptations of *Dream*, considering how they offer cultural artefacts of the world during the COVID-19 pandemic and the wider cultural sensibility of the twenty-first century. These productions, whether overtly or tacitly, imitated the nature of the world of COVID-19 through the adaptational choices, aesthetic approaches and cultural sensibilities present.

6.1 'Are we all met?' (3.1.1)

CtrlAltRepeat's Zoom-to-YouTube production *Midsummer Night Stream* was arguably the earliest lockdown production of *Dream*, performed live on 11 April 2020. Speaking about using Zoom as a performance space/medium, director Sid Phoenix (who also played Puck) notes that

> [I]t had to be a version of Shakespeare that embraced what the medium [of Zoom] is and didn't try to apologize or hide it. It had to use the medium as the vehicle for this telling. … It's very hard to think of something that's more of today than Zoom. So many tiny details placed [our production] in the Zoom universe … The more that we can ground it in everyone else's experience, the more resonance we're going to find in [Shakespeare's] words. (quoted in Allred and Broadribb, 2022c, p. 174)

Twelve days later, on 23 April, another production of the play was performed by the Prague Shakespeare Company (PSC), a company founded in 2008 by Guy Roberts with the aim of 'filling a void of professional English-language classical theatre in Central Europe' ('About PSC', n.d.). Directed by Roberts and Amy Huck, PSC's *Dream* was arguably the first lockdown production by an established professional theatre company. Like CtrlAltRepeat's *Stream*, Roberts and Huck opted for a live, one-off Zoom-to-YouTube performance. Rather than embracing the inescapable twenty-first-century nature of Zoom as a medium, however, PSC drew direct parallels between the closure of theatres during the COVID-19 pandemic and in early modern England:

> Several times during Shakespeare's lifetime the London theaters were closed due to the plague. He and his artists retreated into isolation and sometimes toured outside of London to share their work with a wider audience. We are combining both of those possibilities into one – isolating ourselves to contribute to the greater public good and

> at the same time sharing our work with audiences across the world through new online technology. (Prague Shakespeare Company, 2020)

Prior to the *Dream*s of CtrlAltRepeat and PSC, Robert Myles established *The Show Must Go Online* (*TSMGO*) in March, a project which set out to perform during lockdown all the plays in the First Folio in the order in which they are thought to have been written. Beginning with *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* on 19 March, live Zoom-to-YouTube performances took place once a week, concluding almost eight months later with *The Tempest* on 18 November. Myles describes *TSMGO* as 'a global movement and a cultural export, committed to making Shakespeare for everyone, for free, forever … [which] drives the innovation of Zoom as a medium, rising to new creative challenges every week with ingenuity and resourcefulness' ('Our Story', n.d.). *TSMGO* performed *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as part of their First Folio series on 3 June 2020.

Alongside these three Zoom-to-YouTube *Dream*s, the Back Room Shakespeare Project (BRSP) released their own digital adaptation of the play. Founded in 2011, BRSP describes itself as 'most essentially a culture and a set of ideas' which 'seek after the heart of Shakespeare's text: hot blooded, reckless, light hearted and generous', and is focused on creating 'a space where Shakespeare's beautiful, bawdy and bloody plays feel at home' ('The hell is this all about?', n.d.). This is usually achieved through free performances in bars, preceded by one rehearsal with no director; when creating their version of *Dream* in lockdown, the performers followed the same approach. Unlike the other three productions this chapter is focused upon, BRSP's *Dream* is not a Zoom-to-YouTube performance, but a production recorded and edited together in lockdown by socially distanced actors. Whilst not performed live, the production received a premiere on the company's YouTube channel at 7.30pm CT on 20 April, allowing the audience to watch simultaneously and interact live through YouTube's chat function upon its release.

Between them, the *Dream*s of CtrlAltRepeat, PSC, *TSMGO*, and BRSP demonstrate the multifarious ways in which the play was adapted by companies or creatives attempting to put on a production of the entire play (as opposed to individual scenes or works inspired by *Dream*) particularly during the early months of the pandemic. My analysis will be framed through the play's wider history of performance on screen, including cinematic, televisual and recorded theatrical productions. My analysis of the four lockdown productions has two key focuses: the creation of *Dream*'s magical elements, in particular the distinction between the fairy and mortal realms; and the treatment of the metatheatrical performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe* in the play's final act by the six Athenian artisans – commonly referred to using Puck's description of the group as 'rude mechanicals' (3.2.9) – at Theseus and Hippolyta's wedding. My aim in doing so is to explore both the innovations in performances and adaptations of *Dream* made for the digital spaces, both familiar and unfamiliar, that theatre practitioners found themselves moving into during lockdown; and how the adaptational and performance choices of my four chosen productions tied the play to the cultural moment of COVID-19.

6.2 'Such tricks hath strong imagination' (5.1.18)

The third, and most famous, of British science-fiction author Arthur C. Clarke's three laws states that '[a]ny sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic' (1999, p. 2). In relation to the history of the moving image, this is perhaps best demonstrated by the reported events concerning the audience reaction at the premiere of the Lumière brothers' short film *L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (1895). Allegedly, those viewing the fifty-second clip of a train moving towards the camera as it pulls into La Ciotat Station ran in horror away from the 'train' heading towards them. Martin Loiperdinger asserts that '[t]he story of the audience's terror circulates as a generally agreed-upon rumor' (2004, p. 91). Whether

apocryphal or not, the tale's enduring popularity nevertheless encapsulates the ability of moving image media to make audiences accept and believe in the reality of the images it presents. Increasingly advanced visual effects in Hollywood blockbusters may not have the same impact on contemporary viewers as the Lumière brothers' train (supposedly) had upon its nineteenth-century audience, but the need to convince those watching that what they are seeing is *not* purely technology is arguably greater now, considering many audience members' awareness of technological developments. An article on the rebooted *Planet of the Apes* film franchise, which began with *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (dir. Wyatt, 2011), suggests that the series 'hasn't just used CG characters to surprise and awe audiences, but to carry the increasingly complex emotional weight of the films themselves' (Bishop, 2017). In short, and to return to Clarke's third law, it is not important for the viewer to buy into the 'advanced technology' they are witnessing, but the 'magic' it is creating – in the case of the *Apes* films, for example, the idea of super-intelligent apes capable not only of taking control of Earth, but also of experiencing complex, human emotions.

In relation to screen adaptations of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the relationship between magic and technology is perhaps more literal than in many cases, with the technology available to filmmakers regularly being used to bring to life the magical realm of the play. A *Variety* review of Max Reinhardt and William Dieterle's 1935 film, the first feature-length cinematic adaptation of the play, notes that '[t]he familiar story of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, half of which is laid in a make-believe land of elves and fairies, is right up the film alley technically', and that '[t]he fantasy, the ballets of the Oberon and Titania cohorts, and the characters in the eerie sequences are convincing and [the] illusion compelling' (Variety Staff, 1934). Both Peter Hall's 1968 film and Elijah Moshinsky's 1981 *BBC Television Shakespeare* adaptation eschew technology in favour of theatricality and costuming in distinguishing the fairies from the mortals. Michael Hoffman's 1999 film sits somewhere between the theatrical

and technological, at times frustratingly so – as Janet Maslin comments in her *New York Times* review, '[n]ot even the digital butterflies that flutter through the opening credits look as magical as they should' (1999). The 2016 feature-length television adaptation of *Dream* for the BBC – directed by David Kerr from an adapted screenplay by Russell T. Davies, who also served as executive producer – opts for technological flourishes rather than VFX saturation. In her *Den of Geek* review, Louisa Mellor describes it as 'the sort of family-friendly fantasy adventure [Davies] triumphed with in [BBC science-fiction series] *Doctor Who*', noting that '[a] few lines are sacrificed for the sake of visual excitement' but that Davies 'mostly avoids having the spectacle drown out the words' (2016).

Act 2 scene 1 is the first scene of *Dream* to feature supernatural characters, and therefore offers directors the first opportunity to aesthetically distinguish the magical realm of their production from that of the court scenes of act 1. It goes without saying that the technology available to those creating digital adaptations of *Dream* in lockdown was not, to use Clarke's phrase, 'sufficiently advanced' to be 'indistinguishable from magic'. However, exploring the aesthetic choices in the four lockdown productions in adapting act 1 scene 1 and act 2 scene 1 reveals the variety of approaches to using the filmic, theatrical and technological screen language of lockdown in creating the play's magical elements. Of the Zoom-to-YouTube *Dream*s, PSC's production perhaps made clearest use of the video conferencing software's technical functions, but also showcased the limitations of relying on these. When performing act 1 scene 1, the actors performed against 'Virtual Backgrounds', utilising the ability of a user to replace whatever appears behind them with an image, in a manner similar to chroma key compositing used in film and television production (such as 'green screen'). Viewed in 'Gallery View' so that multiple characters were visible in their own frames, each actor performed in front of the same image created by scenic designer Marketa Fantova: a detail from a cathedral's gothic architecture and gargoyles, reminiscent of Prague's St. Vitus Cathedral, blended with a

doorway into a mansion. Whilst this created the abstract suggestion of a location, PSC made no attempt to create a sense of shared space. The resulting aesthetic was repetitive and flat, particularly when seven actors appeared on camera together. Moreover, while some of the actors appeared as intended in front of the image, others partially disappeared into it – a quirk of Zoom's 'green screen' functionality at the time the production was staged – further highlighting the limitations of using a Virtual Background. While the backgrounds changed for act 1 scene 2 to give the impression of a setting change to an urban street, the effect was once again unimaginative and unconvincing, with some actors again disappearing into the images behind them. Whilst technological glitches such as these can be forgiven in the wider context of performing online around a month into lockdown restrictions, they demonstrate the potentially severe limitations of relying on Zoom's technological capabilities in creating the world of the play – something which other companies did to a significantly lesser degree than PSC.

However, the shift from court to forest at the start of act 2 reframed the repetitive aesthetic of act 1 as a deliberate choice by Roberts and Huck. Puck (Vanessa Gendron) spoke to a host of spirits rather than addressing a single fairy, expanding Titania's train from those mentioned in the play. Visible again in Gallery View, each fairy appeared in front of a different ethereal woodland background. Two of the fairies rotated their cameras to create a further supernatural impression, as if appearing on screen from the side or top of the frame. Whilst characters again disappeared into their Virtual Backgrounds, here it was intentional: one fairy's face appeared to be 'made' of the night sky behind her, whilst another seemed to emerge from a glowing white orb. Once the young lovers entered the forest later in the scene, however, each appeared in front of the same woodland background in a manner similar to the court scenes, creating a sense of shared location but not shared space. This distinguished the spirits from the humans, suggesting the supernatural characters were not only able to break free from the

monotony of the mortal world, but also from the restrictions of Zoom itself, blurring the lines between the fictional world and the medium through which it was being created. Whilst never coming close to the point at which technology and magic became indistinguishable from each other, the patchwork of different backgrounds, camera rotations and simple effects when the fairies were on screen worked to distinguish the production's shift from court to forest, and from mortal to magical realms.

TSMGO's production of *Dream* was in many respects typical of the project's weekly shows. In contrast to PSC's use of Virtual Backgrounds throughout their *Dream*, director Rob Myles opted to use this function of Zoom sparingly throughout all *TSMGO* productions, including *Dream*. From the opening of *TSMGO*'s *Dream*, producer Sarah Peachey read act and scene numbers, settings and stage directions throughout – a choice reminiscent of radio drama and a remnant of the project's inception as online play readings.[12] As the First Folio series progressed, however, the stage directions were increasingly phased out, reflecting *TSMGO*'s shift from play readings to fully realised productions with increasingly ambitious visuals and cinema-style instrumental scores. For example, during *The Tempest*, the series' final production, only the act and scene numbers and opening location were included as voiceover, affording the performances and cinematic aesthetic greater opportunities to create the world of the play.

Peachey's voiceover at the start of *Dream* indicated that the action was taking place in 'Athens [in] a room in Theseus's palace'. Rather than attempting to create the play's classical setting through Virtual Backgrounds and traditional costuming, Myles instead chose for the actors' own homes to provide their settings, with simple background, prop and costuming choices incorporated to create a sense of shared location. As a result, by featuring its actors'

[12] The voiceover was provided by Myles for the vast majority of the First Folio series productions. However, as Myles was performing as Bottom, the role was taken on by Peachey in *Dream*.

actual homes, the aesthetic of *TSMGO*'s *Dream* offered a greater sense of authenticity than that of PSC's production. Myles's court of Athens was characterised by contemporary smart casual suits and evening wear, with the 'Amazonian' warpaint and jewellery worn by Hippolyta (Reneltta Arluk) being the sole exception. Theseus (Leonard Cook), Egeus (Amit Khanna), Hermia (MJ Lee) and Lysander (Cameron Varner) were all seen with bookcases behind them in the opening scene, creating a visual motif which suggested continuity in the world of the production. The choice also created a link between the fictional world of *TSMGO*'s *Dream* and the way in which domestic appearances had been constructed online since the start of pandemic in the real world – specifically the trope of bookcases frequently appearing in the background of Zoom calls. Writing in May 2020, Amanda Hess suggested that '[g]rading the video conference backgrounds of public figures has become a pandemic parlor game' (2020). She noted that '[t]he bookcase offers both a visually pleasing surface and a gesture at intellectual depth', and that it 'has become the background of choice for television hosts, executives, politicians and anyone else keen on applying a patina of authority to their amateurish video feeds' (ibid.). Myles's crafting of his version of Athens characterised by bookcases not only gave the court a sense of the intellectual depth suggested by Hess; but also, in the wider context of 2020, lent the nobles a sense of their public personas being artificially crafted. The insincerity inherent in the characterisation of the Athenian nobles contrasted with the authenticity of Myles's aesthetic, causing *TSMGO*'s *Dream* to oscillate between the two.

Peachey's voiceover let the audience know that the action had moved to 'the woods near Athens' at the start of act 2, but the shift in setting was also marked by significant changes in costume and background aesthetics. The costume choices largely reflected the more traditional approach to bringing the supernatural characters to life, echoing the theatricality of the twentieth-century screen *Dream*s of Hall and Moshinsky. The setting too opted for a notably theatrical way of creating the sense of a woodland, as the actors decorated their

domestic acting spaces with both real and artificial plants. This visual motif was further established as the mortals entered the woods, as those playing the mechanicals all brought foliage (mainly pot plants) into view for their rehearsal of *Pyramus and Thisbe* in act 3 scene 1. The key visual distinction between the mortal and magical characters was the presence of light. As well as adorning their backgrounds with plants, several of the fairies also incorporated fairy lights into their settings. Puck (Katrina Allen) also had a string of lights as part of her costume, draped around her neck on top of a scarf. Importantly, it was only the supernatural characters who had lights incorporated into their backgrounds. The Athenians who entered the woods had plants but no lights, allowing the presence of light to distinguish further the magical from the non-magical characters.

The effect was simpler and more subtle than the Virtual Background trickery used by PSC, and ultimately positioned the world of *TSMGO*'s *Dream* as existing somewhere between the reality of 2020 and a theatrical world which depended on the audience's willing suspension of disbelief. Zoom therefore became a comprehensive digital theatre space. Just as in a production on a physical stage, Myles never aimed for genuine realism. However, he was also acutely mindful of the audience's inherent awareness of the circumstances in which they were experiencing the performance – sitting at home, watching a Zoom call streamed to YouTube – and at times allowed this to become part of the constructed world of the play. The fact that Myles chose not to use Virtual Backgrounds for the majority of his production also gave those moments where technical effects were employed a heightened sense of 'magic'. When Oberon (Andrew Mockler) said 'I am invisible' (2.1.186) to spy on the young lovers, 'green screen' trickery similar to that employed by PSC was used to make Mockler partially disappear into his non-virtual background. Myles's deployment of Zoom's technological capabilities for the first time over half an hour into his production increased its 'magical' impact upon the audience through the element of surprise – as one audience member commented through YouTube's

Live Chat feature whilst watching the production live: 'This is an EPIC effect and yet so simple!'.

Director Sid Phoenix also chose to use Virtual Backgrounds rarely during CtrlAltRepeat's *Midsummer Night Stream*. In contrast to PSC and *TSMGO*'s *Dream*s which chose to create a theatrical world which did not acknowledge that the performance was taking place on Zoom, Phoenix recognisably set his production within the world of 2020 to give context to the reason the characters were communicating through video conferencing software. The opening moments of the production took place from the perspective of Peter Quince (Tom Black) looking at his computer screen. Quince logged in, then headed online to 'TheGlobe.com' to read news of Theseus (Adam Blake) and Hippolyta (Anna Sambrook), 'founders of the world's largest entertainment agency, A10' planning to marry 'despite the lockdown measures'. Quince then initiated a Zoom-style call with the other mechanicals, meeting online to rehearse their performance for the upcoming online nuptials. As in Myles's *Dream*, rather than performing in front of Virtual Backgrounds, the actors' homes doubled as those of their characters. In Phoenix's production, however, their homes were not simply theatre spaces to be decorated, but functioned as the domestic spaces of the characters, blurring the lines between the actor and the role they were playing. This not only created an authentic reason for the characters to appear in different places, but also powerfully tied CtrlAltRepeat's production to the cultural moment of 2020 – reflecting back at the audience their own experiences of communicating and connecting with colleagues, friends and family remotely online rather than in person.

Snug (Steven Rodgers) was the sole exception to the lack of Virtual Backgrounds. Arriving late, Snug comically entered the video call upside down. Having finally turned the correct way up, he then appeared with various photographs as his Virtual Background – a beach, a Roman colosseum, a timber shed (the third a nod to his profession alongside his screen

name, 'Snug Fit Joiners Ltd.'). Increasingly perplexed by the images behind him – and even turning round to try to look at the backgrounds – he finally settled on a photo of the inside of a tram car, admitting defeat at trying to remove the Virtual Background with a small shrug. Snug's use of Virtual Backgrounds inversely paralleled their use in PSC's *Dream*, in which the fairies manipulated their cameras and backgrounds to demonstrate their supernatural powers and create a sense of magic. In contrast, Snug's upside-down camera and continually changing Virtual Backgrounds in CtrlAltRepeat's *Stream* highlighted his powerlessness in the face of Zoom technology. Snug's backgrounds existed only as pictures on his computer, and the character's confusion when trying to turn them off lent the world of *Stream* sincerity and realism, reflecting the technological difficulties of those who began using Zoom and other online platforms for the first time in the early lockdown period.

This sense of authenticity extended to CtrlAltRepeat's adaptation of the supernatural characters, who inhabited a magically tinged version of the same authentic world as the mortals, rather than one crafted through Zoom's technological functionality. Much as Myles would do in *TSMGO*'s *Dream* two months later, Phoenix used light to distinguish the magical characters visually. Puck's setting was punctuated with bright electric lights which flared against the lens of his webcam. Oberon (David Alwyn) and Titania (Rachel Waring) were also surrounded by lights: his bright red against a similarly coloured backdrop, hers a pair of orange and pink lamps illuminating the bedroom in which she was isolating. In a production where the characters were overtly communicating through Zoom, Phoenix also allowed his supernatural characters to manipulate technology in ways that the humans could not. The simplest example of this came through Puck passing Oberon a bottle of purple nail varnish – *Stream*'s love-in-idleness – 'through' the Zoom interface. The 'Zoom pass' – creating the illusion of passing items from one Zoom window to another – quickly became a staple of online digital performance during Lockdown: one actor moves a prop offscreen, and another brings an

equivalent prop onscreen, suggesting continuity of an item being passed between two characters.

In productions performed via Zoom, but which are not overtly framed as taking place over video conference calls, Zoom passes are often carried out by any characters who need to do so – for example, Quince (Gabrielle Sheppard) hands out the different roles to her fellow mechanicals in this manner during act 1 scene 2 of *TSMGO*'s *Dream*. However, as the narrative of *Stream* explicitly took place over Zoom-style calls, giving the mortal characters the ability to do this would break the rules of the world of Phoenix's production. Allowing only the supernatural characters to traverse the barriers of telecommunication by briefly breaking the 'Zoom wall' is a simple but effective way of conjuring a sense of magic within the production. This was at times facilitated further by some of the actors being isolated in the same place as each other. Puck was able to transform Bottom (Joanna Brown) by briefly sneaking out of his Zoom window and into hers to quickly attach a pair of donkey's ears to her head – in reality, Phoenix and Brown were performing from different rooms in the same house, with Phoenix briefly moving into shot on Brown's webcam feed. Gemma Kate Allred highlights Bottom's quick and subtle transformation as 'a moment so brief as to appear magical' (2020, p. 424). Allred also describes a later sequence in which Oberon

> at first seemed to be reflected in [Titania's] mirror as if through magical apparition, the reality being the much more plausible explanation that he was in fact physically present in the same acting space. The fact that the audience, however briefly, could suspect magic is a credit to the staging of the couple's opening argument which saw the pair argue not in person, but by video conference with no hint of the shared space. (ibid., p. 424-425)

By using his ability to do this sparingly – choosing only to place characters within the same Zoom window when it enhanced the story being told – Phoenix authentically created a sense of magic within the production, without undermining the sense that it was taking place in a version of the same world in which the audience were watching the production.

Like CtrlAltRepeat, BRSP set their *Dream* overtly in the world of 2020. Creating a pre-recorded and edited film rather than performing live over Zoom afforded the company different opportunities to achieve this sense of authenticity and resonance. The film opens with a phone call between Theseus (Samuel Taylor) and Hippolyta (Courtney Abbott). In a parallel to Phoenix's production, the couple are recognisably real-world figures rather than the play's mythological duke and queen. Separated from his love, Theseus wearily marks the days in lockdown on the wall beside him before calling; Hippolyta jogs alone through an isolated park, stopping to answer by an out-of-use picnic bench (a stark sign reads: 'COVID NOTICE: THIS AREA CLOSED'). An acoustic ukulele version of The Beatles' 'All My Loving' plays over these opening moments, the lyrics and instrumentation suggesting not an enforced marriage by a conquering man over a defeated woman, but an authentic love between two people kept apart by extraordinary circumstances. Theseus tells Hippolyta, 'I won thy love in this time of injury' rather than the play's 'I won thy love doing thee injuries' (1.1.17), reframing their love as a pandemic romance – marrying in spite of a time of crisis, rather than her being the spoils of one. This choice further parallels Theseus and Hippolyta's relationship in CtrlAltRepeat's production: marrying despite the lockdown measures, appearing throughout the production in the same Zoom window (another casting choice facilitated by actors isolating together), and often seen with a baby and dog – the stereotypical happy family unit.

The opening scene of BRSP's *Dream* continues over a Zoom call: Theseus initiates a meeting with Egeus (Lawrence Grimm), who instructs the young lovers to turn their cameras on one by one. The real-world aesthetic is furthered as the film alternates between the Zoom

interface taking up the entire screen – each character appearing in their own window, with Theseus in mid-shot conducting the meeting from a throne-like chair in his home – and it being visible as a window on Egeus's computer desktop. When all but Lysander (Diana Coates) and Hermia (Andrea Abello) exit, the interface switches from Zoom to FaceTime as we see Hermia initiate a new call on her own desktop. This switching between technologies is used throughout BRSP's production, with the different characters using whichever platform most suits their characterisation and situation. The conversations between the four lovers mostly happen over FaceTime to suggest a more intimate connection between the younger Athenians, and Helena's (Erin O'Shea) soliloquy at the end of act 1 scene 1 is recorded as a 'selfie' Instagram story, as if wearing her heart on her sleeve for her followers. The mechanicals' meeting in act 1 scene 2 switches back to a Zoom-style interface, but without the sense of business-like formality of Theseus's meeting with Egeus in act 1 scene 1, comically paralleling with sincerity the mildly chaotic energy of both social Zoom calls and isolated actors rehearsing online within the pandemic.

In a parallel to CtrlAltRepeat's *Stream*, the mortal characters in BRSP's *Dream* are never shown breaking the restrictions of the technology they are using, giving the filmed production a further sense of happening in a recognisable version of our world. Moreover, the mortals are seen unfiltered through their lenses throughout act 1, lending the images of the actors in their own domestic locations as in *TSMGO* and CtrlAltRepeat's productions a sense of documentary authenticity – a snapshot of isolated actors performing at home during the pandemic. In a choice which echoes PSC's *Dream*, only the magical characters in BRSP's *Dream* are able to use the visual effects of the digital platforms through which the production takes place. The sudden appearance of three fairies seen through a variety of digital camera filters during the opening moments of act 2 therefore gains additional visual power, linking their use of technological flourishes with magic. The fairies are shown through a series of jump

cuts back and forth with Puck (Nick Harazin), who is initially depicted in the same authentically domestic manner as the mortals: unfiltered against a plain white wall, a pot plant behind him, slurping a cup of tea. As he looks up from his drink, seemingly noticing the fairies for the first time, Puck's 'How now, spirit, whither wander you?' (2.1.1) is updated to a casual 'Oh hey! Hey fairies, where you goin'?'. This is contrasted with the three fairies' grave delivery of the 'Over hill, over dale' speech (2.1.2-17) between them. A heartbeat sound-effect continuously plays in the background to add tension, and the three fairies' faces are distorted by ever-changing filters. Puck's weary extratextual response – 'So we're like gonna do the whole fairy bit, then? Okay… okay' – bathetically deflates the tension and sobriety of the fairies' speech and postmodernistically deconstructs the film's premise, drawing attention to the technological effects and cynically dismissing the sequence as 'the whole fairy bit'. Puck then delivers his next speech (2.1.18-31) using a variety of Snapchat-style camera filters, his appearance changing from one line to the next – he becomes a bearded king, an underwater scuba diver, and a snake-haired gorgon, amongst others – adopting a different voice for each appearance. The same heartbeat is heard in the background, suggesting he is using the same technological magic as the fairies, but his use of cartoonish filters and comedic voices contrasts with the fairies' sincerity. His rapid shifting from one filter to the next detaches depth and meaning from the speech, transforming it into a series of disconnected lines and drawing attention to the surface-level visuals instead. The deconstructive nature of Puck's speech arguably reaches its most postmodern at its conclusion. 'Here comes Oberon' (2.1.58) is performed by Harazin as a knowing parody of Jack Nicholson's delivery of the phrase 'Here's Johnny!' from *The Shining* (dir. Kubrick, 1980) – itself a pop culture reference to Ed McMahon's famous catchphrase when introducing US talk show host Johnny Carson, making Harazin's performance of the line a copy of a copy and intensifying its postmodern referentiality and depthlessness.

The entrance of Oberon (Elizabeth Laidlaw) and Titania (Sigrid Sutter) contrasts significantly with the opening of act 2 scene 1, however. The screen shifts to a shot of Titania from the perspective of her iPhone as she receives a FaceTime call from Oberon. Presumably filmed on the actors' smartphones, the conversation is authentically presented in a portrait aspect ratio, with black panels at either side of the screen, offering a sudden and stark visual shift from the previous sequence. In contrast to the abstract visuals of the fairies and the postmodern cartoonishness of Puck, Oberon and Titania are seen unfiltered and speak to each other with sincerity, their lovers' quarrel whilst isolated from one another paralleling the emotional depth of Theseus and Hippolyta's quarantine romance at the start of the film. Oberon and Titania's magical abilities are also demonstrated with more subtlety: in a parallel to CtrlAltRepeat's *Stream*, Puck passes Oberon the love-in-idleness flower 'through' the screen of a FaceTime call. Through its contrasting representations of magic through technology, BRSP's *Dream* offers a metamodern oscillation between irony and sincerity, simultaneously presenting its magical characters through pop culture referentiality and affective authenticity.

6.3 'Your play needs no excuse' (5.1.352-353)

Louise Geddes notes that *Pyramus and Thisbe*, as performed by the mechanicals in act 5 of *Dream* at the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta, has 'developed a transmedial identity, its metacritical content facilitating use in a wide variety of aesthetics by its ability to engage with the forms representing it' and suggests that '[i]n spite of the playlet's terrible verse, the structure of the piece demands detailed and careful performance' (2017, pp. 1, 2). This assertion is true of the adaptation of *Pyramus and Thisbe* in the four lockdown productions examined in this chapter, which show varied inventiveness in translating the play-within-a-

play in ways which embrace the digital spaces in which the productions are performed. Geddes further argues that

> the simple joy of Shakespeare's *Pyramus and Thisbe* is located in the fact that the players are, quite simply, no good. This failure is well documented by Theseus and the lovers, and this device of the surrogate audience keeps the actual audience at a critical distance … *Pyramus and Thisbe* is further politicized because it requires our alignment with Theseus's drawing us into his class critique, and our resistance to the aristocrats' scorn must be mediated for the comedy to succeed. (ibid., p. 4)

There have been productions of *Dream* in recent years, however, which have veered too far in either direction, resulting in problematic adaptations of the play-within-the-play. Emma Rice's 2016 production for Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, directed for the screen by Ian Russell for a live television broadcast by the BBC, made the mechanicals' performance a ridiculous farce which was mercilessly mocked by the wedding party. The young lovers were seated in the yard amongst the 'groundlings', closely aligning the 'actual audience' with the 'surrogate audience' and framing the laughter of those in attendance as part of the wedding party's vindictive mockery. The directorial choice felt especially cruel considering Rice's decision to transform the mechanicals into volunteer stewards, wearing the same recognisable branded aprons as real stewards positioned around the theatre. Kerr's 2016 television adaptation swung too far in the opposite direction, setting the audience up in opposition to John Hannah's despotic Theseus, reframed by Kerr and Davies as the villain of the story, from the outset. The performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe* is adapted as an exercise purely for the Athenian duke to exert power over his subjects. Theseus delivers every derisory comment with contempt as the rest of the wedding party sit silently in fear, and callously marks members of the mechanicals for execution as the performance goes on.

The productions of Rice and Kerr come across as unnecessarily harsh and cynical in their approach to staging *Pyramus and Thisbe*, especially considering the wider shift since the end of the twentieth century to craft the mechanicals into much more rounded and idiosyncratic figures to whom the audience can genuinely warm. In Hoffman's 1999 film, for example, each of the mechanicals is given depth and individuality – Bottom (Kevin Kline) in particular has a tragic backstory in which he is stuck in a loveless marriage and barely able to speak to his wife. Nicholas Jones suggests that 'Hoffman surely gives us Bottom's shrewish wife to help us see Bottom's fantasies as understandable and likeable. The film constructs Bottom as a warm and fuzzy man, a dreamer for whom we can root', and that because of this 'it is hard for us to laugh with him or even at him … Theater is for Bottom a deeply engrained fantasy of freedom and transformation, thwarted by his unnoticed marginality' (2004, p. 128). This turn towards depth and sincerity is powerfully demonstrated through the performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe* towards the end of the film. Flute's (Sam Rockwell) performance of Thisbe's dying soliloquy aptly demonstrates this, as described by Terri Bourus:

> [T]he campy, tongue-in-cheek delivery suddenly changed in mid-line to an unexpected and powerful seriousness. The young actor playing Thisbe removed his wig, lowered his voice to his natural pitch, and continued in his grief for the death of his lover and for his own suicide. The resultant silence in the onstage audience contributed to the heightened emotion of this scene. (in Shakespeare, 2016, p. 1131)

As Jones notes, Flute 'somehow, suddenly, understands how to give meaning to his stilted lines … To play another, to escape himself, he needs to be in his own body, not in some fantasy of another's' (2004, p. 129). Kerr's film attempts a similar emotional impact, but unsuccessfully so. After Bottom (Matt Lucas) as Pyramus wins over the crowd, Flute (Fisayo Akinade) delivers Thisbe's dying soliloquy with sincerity to a standing ovation. However, the impact is significantly undercut both by the previous cruelty of Theseus and by Kerr and Davies's

decision to parallel Thisbe's theatrical death with Theseus's harrowing assassination by Oberon (Nonzo Anozie) and Titania (Maxine Peake). As a result, any warmth and emotional connection Akinade's performance is able to achieve is diminished by the tense and unpleasant events and atmosphere surrounding it.

This shift towards the mechanicals performing *Pyramus and Thisbe* in a genuinely affecting way, and the wedding party responding with empathy rather than derision, was far more successfully reflected in Nicholas Hytner's 2019 production of *Dream* at the Bridge Theatre in London. Directed for the screen by Ross MacGibbon for NTLive cinema screenings, the production was also streamed for free via YouTube during the first UK lockdown in June and July 2020 as part of the National Theatre's 'NT At Home' series. Whilst maintaining their comedic status, Hytner never allowed the mechanicals to be reduced to figures of ridicule. The group were costumed for much of the production in plain overalls, the varying colours of which paralleled the initially disconnected and disharmonious players. Quince (Felicity Montagu) was positioned as a figure of authority: notably attired differently, she attempted to inspire the group, who were initially uninvested in performing, in the manner of a drama teacher leading a group of unwilling students. By act 5, however, all of the mechanicals were costumed in matching purple sweatshirts adorned with 'Rude Mechanicals', suggesting a levelling of the previous hierarchy and a sense of unity and shared identity amongst them. Their selection to perform at Theseus (Oliver Chris) and Hippolyta's (Gwendoline Christie) wedding was presented in the style of a reality TV talent show, which the mechanicals were genuinely elated to win.

Moments of physical comedy, such as Bottom's (Hammed Animashaun) ludicrous overplaying of Pyramus's death came across as genuine exuberance and investment in their performance. Like Kline's version of the character, Animashaun's Bottom ultimately experienced a 'deeply engrained fantasy of freedom and transformation' through his

performance. Contrasting Bottom in terms of subtlety but matching his sincerity, Flute (Jermaine Freeman) delivered an affecting version of Thisbe's dying speech just as powerful as that of Rockwell's Flute in Hoffman's film. Speaking Thisbe's 'O Sisters Three, / Come, come to me / With hands as pale as milk' (5.1.333-335), Flute invited Hermia (Isis Hainsworth), Helena (Tessa Bonham Jones) and Hippolyta to join hands with him over the lifeless Pyramus. The performance choice not only imbued the speech with greater poignancy, but also blurred the lines further between *Pyramus and Thisbe* and *Dream*, the affective nature of Freeman's performance of Flute as Thisbe lending Hytner's entire production a keen sense of depth and sincerity. This was underscored perfectly by Theseus in particular, who was genuinely won over by the mechanicals' performance and became protective of the group when any other members of the wedding party dared to criticise them. As Peter Kirwan notes of Chris's performance at this point, 'a transformed Theseus had learned how to experience wonder, and his generosity of spirit was humbling' (2019). 'No epilogue, I pray you; for your play needs no excuse' (5.1.352-353) was delivered by Theseus with sincerity – a heartfelt compliment following the performance, rather than an attempt to dismiss the mechanicals as quickly as possible.

6.4 'Follow? Nay, I'll go with thee, cheek by jowl' (3.2.338)

The shift towards presenting the mechanicals with affective and narrative depth begs the question: why bestow these qualities on supporting characters written as superficial comic relief, particularly in a play which is primarily set up as being focused on a love quadrangle between two pairs of young lovers? I would suggest that not only are the young lovers at least as superficial in their characterisation as the mechanicals, but their superficiality is in fact fundamental to the play. Whilst ostensibly being about love, *Dream* can more accurately be

considered to demonstrate love at its shallowest. Sukanta Chaudhuri argues that the play 'present[s] love as a matter of encounters and interactions rather than affect or sensibility' and that 'there is little amorous sentiment, let alone insight into the psychology of love' (2017, p. 78). Similarly, Emma Smith notes how, in the play, 'boys ricochet between girls at random, revealing the shallowness of their impulses' (2019, p. 88). She further argues that '[t]he stress throughout the play is not on the lovers' ultimate distinctiveness but on their interchangeability', and that '[i]t's hard to remember, still less to care, who gets off with whom at the end' as Shakespeare 'suggests that any combination is as good as any other' (ibid., pp. 87, 88). Lending the play's romantic couples – and the young lovers in particular – affective sincerity and depth in relation to their feelings towards one another would potentially undermine a central theme of the play: that of love as fundamentally fickle, artificial and depthless.

This superficiality was demonstrated in the scenes focused upon the young lovers in the four lockdown productions focused upon in this chapter. It was particularly true of act 3 scene 2, in which the four characters fight with – and over – each other, and which regularly proved to be one of the most unsatisfying scenes across the various lockdown *Dream*s. Allred notes in her review of CtrlAltRepeat's *Stream* that '[o]ne of the joys of that scene in [stage] performance is the over-the-top demonstrative fighting between the love-drugged Lysander and Demetrius, coupled with the usually exaggerated reactions of Helena and Hermia as they experience a gamut of emotions' (2020, p. 426). However, Allred continues, as '[t]he four lovers were, understandably, not in the same place … not lost in a forest, but rather in the actors' own separate homes, some of the impact was lost – the text alone can't carry this scene', a consequence that highlighted 'the limitations of the medium' of Zoom as a performance space (ibid.). Phoenix attempted to counteract these limitations through the on-screen details of his production, which also helped to remedy the interchangeability Smith highlights as inherent to

the young lovers' characterisation. The opening moments of *Stream* on 'TheGlobe.com' positioned Hermia (Rebeckah Finch) as an 'influencer', a characterisation continually alluded to through her stylised screen name all in lower case with additional spacing: 'h e r m i a'. In contrast, Helena's (Will Thompson-Brant) screen name was 'H xx', which, whilst more unassuming, nonetheless suggested a character who spent time crafting their online identity to reflect their personality. Details such as this made the characters' argument over Zoom in act 3 scene 2 feel more natural. Whilst this did not ultimately resolve the issue of the scene lacking the physicality that brings it to life during in-person performances, it further demonstrated the close attention to detail being paid by CtrlAltRepeat in crafting the world of their production over Zoom.

As described earlier, BRSP's filmed production of *Dream* shifts between multiple technologies, with the young lovers switching between Zoom, FaceTime and Instagram throughout. Much as in CtrlAltRepeat's *Stream*, establishing the lovers as living their lives through multiple digital platforms ensures the logic of the characters playing out their act 3 scene 2 argument over a FaceTime call holds up within the world of the film. FaceTime's interface also allows BRSP to break from Zoom's uniform rectangular windows, as the call participants are visible in floating windows which continually resize and overlap throughout depending on who is talking. The young lovers regularly embellish their speeches with modern vernacular throughout BRSP's *Dream*, and act 3 scene 2 is no different, adding vibrancy which strict textual fidelity may not have achieved in a production inherently and overtly tied to the modern day. Despite these touches, however, the scene remains one of the least visually striking of the film, especially as the characters are visible against plain and, for the most part, dark backgrounds. As a result, whilst the lack of physicality in the scene is understandable from an audience perspective, BRSP's version of act 3 scene 2 proves that the challenges of socially distanced digital performance are not restricted to the medium of Zoom alone.

Using Zoom purely as a theatre space rather than making it part of their production's world meant that PSC did not need to contend with the issue of their audience buying into the young lovers arguing online. However, by using Zoom in this way, the company highlighted further the limitations of the medium as a performance space. In keeping with the visual grammar of the production, Demetrius (Taylor Napier), Lysander (Mike Zaharczuk), Hermia (Fedorah Philippeaux) and Helena (Laura Baranik) all appeared in front of the same woodland Virtual Background, but this gave the scene the same sense of flatness and monotony which characterised the wider production. Whilst the actors occasionally played with the space between them and their webcams (moving closer to the camera to suggest aggression or intimate conversation, for example) this was undercut by the artificial backgrounds behind them, which robbed their performance spaces – and consequently their performances – of any depth. As all four characters were costumed in plain dark clothing, Roberts and Huck failed to achieve any clear visual distinction between the four young lovers either. As a result, PSC's version of act 3 scene 2 was amongst the least successful scenes of the whole production – ultimately existing as a model example of how *not* to adapt Shakespearean performance on Zoom.

In comparison, *TSMGO*'s adaptation of the scene was notably more successful. As in PSC's *Dream*, Zoom was a theatre space rather than existing within the world of the production, but Myles's choices helped counteract the lack of physical presence and superficiality of the young lovers. Again, the actors played with a range of shots through varied distance from their webcams, but as *TSMGO* did not use Virtual Backgrounds, the real-world spaces visible behind the actors offered a sense of depth that PSC's production lacked. Moreover, Myles played with camera angles as well as shots, which helped bring some digital physicality to the production. At one point, Lysander pushed Hermia to the ground, achieved through Varner moving his camera upwards to film himself in low angle, whilst Lee

simultaneously lifted her camera up to film her face from above in a handheld shot. Together, these two simple filming choices effectively added the suggestion of physical contact between the characters, as well as demonstrating the hybridity of lockdown performance between cinematic and theatrical modes.

6.5 'Very tragical mirth' (5.1.57)

Just as in the pre-lockdown stage and screen productions of *Dream* discussed earlier, the mechanicals – and their performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe* in particular – offered the four lockdown productions greater opportunities for innovation both in performance and adaptation. This in turn lent affective depth and sincerity to the characters and, consequently, the productions as a whole. Roberts and Huck characterised the mechanicals in PSC's *Dream* as somewhat exaggerated versions of contemporary working-class figures. In one of the few decisions within the production to acknowledge the pandemic, five of the six mechanicals entered in act 1 scene 2 wearing facemasks – a choice seemingly made to allow the audience to identify with the group from their first appearance, encouraging those watching to see in the masked everyday figures a reflection of themselves. PSC's version of *Pyramus and Thisbe* was in keeping with Roberts and Huck's approach throughout their *Dream*, as each actor performed against a Virtual Background (the same cathedral-mansion blended image seen in act 1 to indicate their presence at Theseus's palace). Each of the mechanicals performed their role in turn, only having their camera turned on when they were 'on stage'. This meant that, when only one character was required – such as during Snout's (Sarah Bentley) opening monologue as Wall – the performance was visible to the audience in the equivalent of Zoom's full-screen Speaker View, with Bentley and others performing into their cameras alone against their Virtual Backgrounds. Roberts and Huck cut the wedding party's commentary in its entirety,

allowing the mechanicals to present *Pyramus and Thisbe* uninterrupted. However, in doing so, the mechanicals regularly appeared on screen alone throughout the performance, which significantly limited the comedic impact of the sequence. With the reactions of neither the surrogate audience in the production nor those of the actual audience at home visible or discernable during *Pyramus and Thisbe*, the exaggerated performances of the actors were flattened by their isolation on screen.

At other moments, however, PSC's *Pyramus and Thisbe* was more successful, usually when more than one performer was visible. The exchange between Bottom (Jeff Smith) as Pyramus and Flute (Sean Renwick) as Thisbe through the hole offered by Snout as Wall simply but effectively demonstrated the acting techniques developed by actors for Zoom performance from very early in lockdown, which regularly combined elements of stage and screen performance. As Pyramus looked for Thisbe, Smith brought his eye close to his camera, whilst Bentley held her thumbs and forefingers together close to her camera to form Wall's hole. As Pyramus and Thisbe kissed through the wall, Smith and Renwick each moved their mouths into close-up. Smith exaggeratedly waggled his tongue, and Renwick reacted by gagging, which he played off as Thisbe's 'I kiss the wall's hole not your lips at all' (5.1.201). Bentley silently wore a look of disgust, wiping her hands as if Bottom and Flute had physically rather than virtually kissed Snout's fingers. It was a cartoonish moment which brought the performance to life and demonstrated how Zoom performance, whilst by its very nature mediated through screens, requires a physical and emotional connection between the performers in order to be impactful. Roberts and Huck's decision to excise the wedding party's interruptions had the potential to alleviate the mean-spiritedness of Shakespeare's play at this point, and did so during the mechanicals' performance itself. However, this effect was undercut as *Pyramus and Thisbe* concluded and the nobles and young lovers turned their cameras back on, most of whom clapped unenthusiastically with expressions of confusion and

condescension. As the mechanicals enthusiastically took their bows, Theseus (Scott Sophos) motioned for them to exit the stage. Roberts and Huck then moved straight to Theseus's declaration that 'The iron tongue of midnight hath told twelve' (5.1.353), delivered as a thinly veiled indication for the performers to leave. As a result, whilst the cutting of the wedding party's interruptions allowed *Pyramus and Thisbe* to take place without being undermined, Roberts and Huck ultimately retained the cynical snobbery of the nobles and young lovers towards the mechanicals.

Myles's adaptation of the mechanicals in *TSMGO*'s *Dream* took the cartoonish approach further, offering a playful interpretation of Shakespeare's broad comedic roles by evoking classic cartoon characters. Snout (Mark McMinn), for example, became a Scottish caricature. Glaswegian actor McMinn exaggerated his natural accent and wore a tam-o'-shanter, giving the character the feeling of having been taken from the pages of a comic such as the *Beano*. Myles as Bottom was a blend of vintage and contemporary animation: his exaggerated movements, rubber-faced expressions and seemingly endless energy was strongly influenced by classic twentieth-century animation – notably the cartoons of Tex Avery – and his decision to use a Snapchat-style filter for Bottom's transformation to give himself the head of Donkey from DreamWorks Animation's *Shrek* franchise created a postmodern link to twenty-first-century pop culture. Myles's cartoon aesthetic also lent the characters' Zoom windows an additional suitability, evoking the comic strips and small screen shorts which influenced their characterisation.

As part of their cartoonish appearance and characterisation, the mechanicals continually displayed a childlike enthusiasm throughout *TSMGO*'s *Dream*. As a result, Myles's production offered a similar sense of childlike playfulness and sincerity to that found in another lockdown digital production of *Dream*, directed by Matt Pfeiffer for Arden Theatre Company (ATC) in June 2020. ATC's production featured a sequence in which Puck (Anna Faye Lieberman)

constructed her night-sky performance space out of fairy lights and a paper plate moon. I have argued elsewhere that 'Lieberman's performance throughout was characterised by childlike sincerity and enthusiasm … Puck sincerely believed in the abstract, fanciful setting she had created, like a child playing make-believe constructing an imaginary world', a choice which 'imbu[ed] Pfeiffer's *Dream* with a distinctly metamodern sensibility' (Broadribb, 2022, p. 55). Myles's production was aesthetically distinct from that of Pfeiffer, but *TSMGO*'s version of *Pyramus and Thisbe* demonstrated a comparable childlike *naïveté* and enthusiasm through its costuming, performance and extratextual choices. *TSMGO* Master of Props Emily Ingram describes the series as having a 'homespun aesthetic' created through actors crafting their own props and costumes for each show, which was initially driven both by the closure of shops during lockdown and by the desire not to have actors spending money in a time when they were unable to earn a living (quoted in Allred and Broadribb, 2022b, p. 156). This resulted in Ingram drawing on her background in object theatre, telling the *TSMGO* actors: 'if you believe it's not cardboard and tinfoil, then the audience will believe as well' (ibid.).

The mechanicals' appearances during their performance were a combination of homemade efforts, such as Snout's cardboard box decorated to look like a brick wall; fancy dress costumes, such as Snug's (Corinna Brown) childlike facemask and furry hat as Lion; and raiding the wardrobe for whatever could be found, such as Flute (Harry Boyd) loosely disguising his previous attire by wearing a shawl and headscarf. The exaggerated speech and movement throughout *Pyramus and Thisbe* combined the conventions of Zoom performance – as in PSC's production, Myles as Bottom playing Pyramus brought his eye close to the camera to look through Wall's hole, represented by McMinn as Snout holding his fingers close to his camera – and a sense of 'child[ren] playing make-believe' similar to that of Lieberman's Puck in ATC's *Dream*. In contrast to PSC's production, *TSMGO* ensured there was always more than one of the mechanicals on screen throughout *Pyramus and Thisbe* thanks to Sheppard as

Quince not turning her camera off. Instead, with a headset on and script in hand, she sat and performed the role of a stage manager, watching the production and offering prompts to the cast during their performances. This meant there was continual physical and emotional connection between the performers, avoiding the flatness to which PSC's *Pyramus and Thisbe* fell victim at several points, as well as increasing the sense of equality and solidarity between the mechanicals in a similar manner to their unity in Hytner's 2019 production. For example, Brown initially played Snug's opening speech as Lion in the manner of a child with stage fright. Quince gave her gentle prompts and encouragement throughout, with Bottom also peering round the curtain (Myles turned on his camera with a towel held at one side 'playing' the curtain) to offer encouragement. Snug steadily grew in confidence as a result, with both Bottom and Quince visibly overjoyed at her increasingly self-assured performance, creating an affectively rich moment within the primarily comedic performance.

Whilst the childlike sincerity and enthusiasm of the mechanicals coupled with the homespun aesthetic of the production lent *TSMGO*'s *Dream* a metamodern sensibility during the performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, this was significantly counteracted by Myles's choices for the wedding party's metatheatrical commentary. The courtiers turned their cameras off prior to the prologue as if exiting, and Quince appeared alone on screen. As in the play, Theseus, Lysander and Hippolyta interrupted the prologue after the first ten lines, but unmuted their microphones without turning their cameras back on to offer their commentary as voiceover. Their remarks were delivered in the traditional condescending manner, a choice which felt particularly unkind considering the *naïveté* and nervousness of Quince's performance. As the courtiers haughtily criticised the prologue, Quince remained alone on screen, clearly uncomfortable and hurt by their heckling. Starveling (Andrew Yabroff) reacted less calmly to the interruption of his performance as Moonshine, delivering his response to

their commentary with overt annoyance – the cynicism of the wedding party diminishing his previous enthusiasm.

Pyramus's death scene surpassed the ridiculousness of Animashaun's performance in Hytner's 2019 production, offering the zenith of *TSMGO*'s cartoonish mechanicals and their production. Myles combined his Tex-Avery-style performance with the suggestion of an overexcited child at play: Pyramus came back to life again and again as Bottom staged multiple death scenes – including metatheatrical references to the severing of Titus's hand in *Titus Andronicus* and Clarence's drowning in the malmsey butt in *Richard III* – before finally lying down as if sleeping under a blanket with a soft toy. Quince's silent reactions to Bottom's overacting became increasingly extreme: first mild trepidation, then tearing her script up in exasperation, and finally rocking back and forth in tears as if comically traumatised by Bottom's hijacking of the show. Boyd then delivered Flute's performance of Thisbe's dying soliloquy with histrionic overstatement in contrast to the more subtle and sincere Thisbes seen in both Hoffman's film and Hytner's 2019 production. Nonetheless, both Quince and Bottom (who remained on camera under his blanket after Pyramus's death) were clearly moved by Flute's performance, with Quince enthusiastically applauding once Flute had fallen out of shot to demonstrate Thisbe's death. However, the combination of derision and bewilderment from the wedding party to *Pyramus and Thisbe* paralleled that seen in Roberts and Huck's production. Cook's delivery of Theseus's 'No epilogue, I pray you' (5.1.351) was a desperate attempt to prevent any further performance by the mechanicals; 'for your play needs no excuse' (5.1.351-352) followed with condescension, as Theseus vainly attempted to dial back his desperation. Whilst the mechanicals in Myles's *Dream* were set up as larger-than-life characters for whom the audience could genuinely root, echoing Hytner's version of the group in his 2019 production, the conclusion of *Pyramus and Thisbe* ultimately sounded a confused and unsatisfying note. Considering the mechanicals' childlike nature and sincere enthusiasm

for their performance, the courtiers' derision of the group felt particularly heartless and cynical in a manner reminiscent of the mean-spirited mockery in Rice's 2016 production at Shakespeare's Globe.

Pyramus and Thisbe in CtrlAltRepeat's *Stream* offered a combination of the choices made in the *Dream* productions of PSC and *TSMGO*. Like Roberts and Huck, Phoenix chose to cut all of the wedding party's commentary, allowing the mechanicals to perform without interruption; and, like Myles, Phoenix ensured that more than one member of the mechanicals was visible on screen for the majority of their performance, allowing comedic and affective connection to be created between the actors throughout. A 'homespun aesthetic' paralleling *TSMGO*'s production was also apparent in *Stream*'s *Pyramus and Thisbe*. When performing Wall, Starveling (James Dillon) held up a marker pen drawing of a wall, the 'hole' represented by a flap cut in the paper. As Joanna Brown and Olivia Caley performed as Bottom playing Pyramus and Flute playing Thisbe respectively in their separate Zoom windows, Dillon held up stickman drawings to represent the characters, with which he performed *Pyramus and Thisbe* in his window as a rudimentary puppet show. As a result, the play-within-the-play was presented both as a theatrical performance, and as voiceovers to Starveling's stickman performance – which itself became a play within the play-within-a-play. Snug gained a simple character arc by demonstrating an aptitude for Virtual Backgrounds developed since the beginning of the production when performing his first speech as Lion. As he turned his camera on, a photo of a ginger cat appeared as his background, with Rogers remaining out of shot for Snug's first four lines. Rogers then came into shot for his next four lines, appearing in front of the photo to show he was '[n]o lion fell, nor else no lion's dam' (5.1.223), then moving back out of shot to create the 'illusion' once more. The performances of Starveling and Snug in particular paralleled the childlike performances of *TSMGO*'s mechanicals and Puck in ATC's *Dream*; however, just as in those productions, the earnestness and enthusiasm of all the

mechanicals counteracted the inherent artifice in what they were doing to create a metamodern tone throughout Phoenix's adaptation.

The key to CtrlAltRepeat's version of *Pyramus and Thisbe* and its metamodern sensibility was Phoenix blurring the lines between the mechanicals as characters within the production and the actors playing them. *Pyramus and Thisbe* existed as a play overtly performed on Zoom within the lockdown world of the production, exemplifying Geddes's idea of the play-within-the-play's 'transmedial identity' and 'ability to engage with the forms representing it' (2017, p. 1). As Dillon notes: 'I think acknowledging Zoom worked with the humour of the mechanicals … we were just trying to find as many ways for things to go wrong [during a Zoom performance]. It ended up becoming massively endearing' (quoted in Allred and Broadribb, 2022c, p. 174). The audience warms to the mechanicals in stage and cinematic *Dream*s through their comically terrible theatrical performances, sending up the medium of theatre itself through self-aware parody. Similarly, the mechanicals in Phoenix's Zoom-to-YouTube adaptation became 'massively endearing' both through their exaggerated lockdown performances and their constant struggles to utilise the software itself – something to which many in the audience could no doubt relate only weeks into the first UK lockdown. Flute initially delivered her opening speech as Thisbe on mute, causing Starveling to break character and Quince to turn his camera back on, both motioning to Flute that she could not be heard until she unmuted herself and began the speech again. In a parallel to *TSMGO*'s later production, Quince also appeared on camera at points throughout *Pyramus and Thisbe* to react to the performances of the other mechanicals: he silently mouthed 'Ninus!' when Bottom referred to 'Ninny's tomb' (5.1.202); grew increasingly perturbed by Snug's ginger cat background representing Lion; and watched in horror as Bottom donned a baseball cap and rapped Pyramus's dying soliloquy, then Flute operatically sang Thisbe's final speech. As in Myles's production, this choice by Phoenix ensured *Stream*'s *Pyramus and Thisbe* was

continually characterised by human connection and emotion between the mechanicals, as well as avoiding the adaptational missteps of PSC's version.

Dillon as Starveling offered the clearest reminders of the reality of the circumstances of the actors performing *Stream*. When taking on the role of Moonshine, Starveling's 'lanthorn' (5.1.236) was a ring light, likely used by Dillon in real life pre-lockdown for self-taped acting auditions. Repurposed as a prop, Phoenix blurred the lines between Starveling the mechanical, performing as Moonshine in the Zoom-performance-within-the-Zoom-performance, and Dillon the actor, performing on Zoom out of necessity at the start of the first UK lockdown. Whilst the ring light served to postmodernistically deconstruct *Stream* by drawing attention to the real-world circumstances surrounding its creation, Starveling's thornbush and dog were both represented by marker pen drawings similar to his earlier puppet show, continuing the childlike *naïveté* of his previous role as Wall. Like Quince, Starveling appeared on camera when not performing at points throughout *Pyramus and Thisbe*; in contrast to Quince, however, his reactions were more joyous. As Bottom began to rap, Starveling struggled to hold back his laughter at her performance; he at first stared in disbelief at Flute as she sang, then enthusiastically conducted and cheered her on, joining in with the playful silliness of the whole performance. Dillon as Starveling simultaneously inhabited the position of real-world actor forced to adapt to performing on Zoom, and earnest mechanical throwing himself into acting with the enthusiasm of a child at play. As a result, Starveling epitomised the metamodern sensibility of Phoenix's mechanicals and his production more widely. The removal of the wedding party's interruptions therefore felt particularly in tune with the world of the pandemic: heartlessly criticising actors adapting to a new medium of performance during a time of global catastrophe would undoubtedly feel acutely cynical – an observation which further highlights the problematic nature of Myles choosing to include the interruptions during his production. The reaction of Blake as Theseus in Phoenix's production most closely resembled that of

Chris's version of the character in Hytner's 2019 Bridge Theatre *Dream*, earnestly praising the mechanicals in his response to Bottom's offer of an epilogue rather than ridiculing their performance or attempting to cut it short.

BRSP's *Dream* paralleled CtrlAltRepeat's *Stream* in overtly presenting the mechanicals as performing online during the pandemic. However, BRSP at times blurred the lines further than Phoenix's production through the extratextual additions to their script. During her act 4 scene 1 soliloquy, Bottom (Bethany Thomas) embellishes the speech to place it explicitly within the lockdown moment: 'It's April tenth, two-… two-thousand-twenty, day twenty-six of isolation, and I have had a most rare vision'. The sequence is self-recorded by Thomas: seated on her sofa, sipping a cup of coffee in a dressing gown and wearing no makeup in contrast to her earlier appearances, the audience in this moment arguably sees the actress more than the character she is playing. Thomas places the scene on 'April tenth' – presumably the actual date that she recorded the scene – rather than the date of *Dream*'s YouTube premiere ten days later, a choice which lends the moment a sense of documentary realism. The scene becomes a window into the recent past, blurring the lines between Bottom's awakening from her 'dream' and a video diary by the real actress of her lockdown experience. Seeing Thomas isolated at home on a specific date invites the audience to reflect on their own experiences and feelings on the same day. The scene deconstructs the world of BRSP's *Dream*, lending the production a postmodern quality of fourth-wall-breaking self-consciousness. However, whilst Thomas inherently draws attention to the artifice of the film, the moment is ultimately one of metamodern sincerity rather than postmodern cynicism. By blurring the lines between actress and character, Thomas offers an additional sense of affective melancholy to Bottom's comedically bombastic speech as she wistfully reflects on the monotony of nearly a month in lockdown. Thomas briefly stumbles over saying the year ('two-… two-thousand-twenty') as if apprehensive about giving voice to the period she is living through. The choice by BRSP to

keep this hesitation in the film offers an additional sense of realness, further transforming this scene – and the production more widely – into a time capsule of the cultural moment of early lockdown.

Like in CtrlAltRepeat's *Stream*, BRSP's *Pyramus and Thisbe* is positioned as a Zoom performance occurring within the production. As with the film's opening Zoom call visible on Theseus's computer desktop, BRSP present the mechanicals' Zoom performance on the duke's screen from his perspective. In a further metacinematic touch, the audience sees Theseus navigate to YouTube to watch the mechanicals' Zoom performance live-streamed to the site, presented as a 'YouTube premiere' – an event with which many viewers will have been familiar thanks to the time-limited free streams made available by theatres and companies around the world during lockdown. Indeed, the premiere of BRSP's own *Dream* began in exactly the same way, adding an additional sense of self-referentiality to place the production overtly within the same lockdown world as that of the audience. As Elizabeth E. Tavares notes in her review: 'The countdown font, sound, and graphics [preceding *Pyramus and Thisbe*] looked exactly like those with which we had been greeted earlier, and so we watched Theseus and Hippolyta relive our own experience … of digital viewing' (2021, p. 514). The wedding party experiences *Pyramus and Thisbe* as a 'watch party', a remote form of social gathering which gained popularity during lockdown in which people in separate locations congregate online to view a production simultaneously, creating a shared experience. In the nobles and young lovers, physically separated yet watch-partying together, BRSP offers the audience a mirror of their own experience of remotely connecting with others whilst in isolation.

The mechanicals' performance in BRSP's *Dream* is characterised by a homespun aesthetic and childlike *naïveté* reminiscent of other lockdown productions. *Pyramus and Thisbe* begins with Snug (Katherine Bourne Taylor) holding up title cards handwritten in marker pen, paralleling the simple stickman drawings of Starveling in CtrlAltRepeat's *Stream*. The

prologue is initially performed by Quince (Delia Baseman) using a sock-puppet snake through a children's play theatre, with a young child – presumably Baseman's actual daughter – also visible peeking through the curtains. Quince then opens the curtains to complete the prologue with the child standing in front of her. In a further parallel to *Stream*, Snout (Sam Pearson) as Wall begins his performance on mute, only unmuting when another performer turns their microphone on to interrupt him. Snout's costume – a red plaid shirt, white vest and reversed baseball cap – is exactly the same clothing he has worn throughout the film, embellished only by a Post-it Note with 'WALL' handwritten in ballpoint pen stuck to his chest. When performing as Lion, Snug shifts towards a more technological method of performance: she holds a smartphone in front of her face, the screen towards her webcam, with a Snapchat-style camera filter activated to give her the appearance of a cat.

The differing approaches and aesthetics of BRSP's mechanicals are reminiscent of *Sofa Shakespeare*, another lockdown Shakespeare project. Created by Julia Giolzetti in March 2020, the project involved dividing a whole play into minute-long segments, which were separately filmed by individuals across the globe isolated in their homes, then edited together by Giolzetti into a complete production. According to Douglas Lanier, '[t]he result is a kaleidoscopic, crowd-sourced Shakespeare production that changes from minute to minute, all barely held together by Shakespeare's text and plotline' (2021, p. 21). However, as Lanier further notes

> Though many segments are deliberately comic, the whole doesn't read as Shakespearean parody. Rather, what emerges from this assemblage is an exuberant, unexpectedly earnest engagement with Shakespeare, using the domestic objects and spaces so central to our lives throughout the pandemic. (ibid.)

As a result, *Sofa Shakespeare* achieves a metamodern oscillation between its inherently postmodern deconstruction of the plays and the authenticity and commitment of its performers.

As I have previously noted, each *Sofa Shakespeare* production is 'affectively linked by the sincerity of the performers in committing to their low-tech aesthetic and real-world surroundings … earnestly creat[ing] their minute of the play in their homes' (Broadribb, 2022, p. 50). From the juvenile aesthetic of Quince's sock-puppet show, to Snout's basic performance as Wall undeterred by his lack of Zoom skills, to Snug's digitally conjured Lion, *Pyramus and Thisbe* as performed by the mechanicals in BRSP's *Dream* is the most aesthetically disconnected of the four lockdown *Dream*s explored in this chapter. But, as in *Sofa Shakespeare*'s productions, even whilst the artifice of the performance is made overtly apparent through postmodern deconstruction, the childlike sincerity and commitment of the mechanicals to their homespun Zoom-based production within lockdown generates a sense of affective connectivity throughout the performance, lending BRSP's version of *Pyramus and Thisbe* a distinctly metamodern sensibility.

This was paralleled through the reactions of the wedding party to the mechanicals' low-tech performance. Rather than having the courtiers interrupt the performance as they do in the play (and as Myles did in *TSMGO*'s *Dream*) or removing their commentary entirely (as Phoenix chose to do in CtrlAltRepeat's *Stream*), BRSP uses YouTube's Live Chat function to allow the characters to react to the mechanicals. Throughout *Pyramus and Thisbe*, the wedding party type messages to react to the play and chat with each other as part of their watch party without disrupting the performance. Whilst the Live Chat occasionally parallels the interruptions of the play, it is primarily made up of extratextual modern English commentary from the characters which emulates the style of reactions seen alongside real-world YouTube streams, further placing BRSP's film within a recognisable version of early lockdown in 2020. This was at times paralleled in the real-world reactions of *Dream*'s premiere audience. When the young child appeared on screen during Quince's prologue, comments from real audience members included 'OMGGGGG BABYYYYYYYYY' and '10/10 WOULD WATCH

AGAIN JUST FOR THIS BABY'.[13] Moments later, in the film, Demetrius types 'AAAAWWWW' and Theseus comments 'v cute bb' – the use of all capitals, repeated letters, and over-the-top reactions to seeing a child (rather than comments on the performance itself) all anticipating the style and content of the Live Chat commentary from the premiere audience.

Whilst the wedding party initially offer throwaway commentary such as this, their comments indicate a shift towards the affective sincerity seen in Hoffman's 1999 film and Hytner's 2019 production as *Pyramus and Thisbe* reaches its conclusion. As in Hytner's *Dream*, Theseus is positioned as the character most emotionally invested in the production and protective of the mechanicals. When Hippolyta comments 'I'm bored' during Starveling's (Elizabeth Quilter) speech as Moonshine, Theseus first replies 'i know honey but we gotta watch', then 'they worked real hard on this'. The film then cuts to show the mechanicals' performance in full screen for the beginning of Bottom's dying soliloquy as Pyramus; when it cuts back to Theseus's computer screen, Hippolyta has commented 'I'm feeling this y'all', to which Theseus replies 'god, me too' and 'this is so goddamn sad'. When Hermia offers a cynical rhetorical question in response to Theseus's emotional response – 'pls tell me you're joking' – she is quickly shut down by Hippolyta, who first tells Hermia to 'Shut up' then explains that 'The man [Pyramus] is dying for love', further demonstrating her affective connection to the mechanicals' performance. By the conclusion of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, the wedding party have become emotionally invested further still: Helena asks 'Is anyone else crying?', to which Hippolyta responds 'I might be crying' (adding 'a little' in her next message in an attempt to downplay her emotional response). Theseus's response is less equivocal,

[13] The non-standard spelling, grammar and capitalisation of both the in-film YouTube Live Chat comments featured in BRSP's *Dream* and those of the real-world premiere audience have been maintained in all citations from the production and its premiere.

messaging ‘i just can’t fucking stand to see them kept apart’, then asking ‘where is the clap emoji?’ (in a comic touch, he is then seen on his screen trying and failing to find this emoji).

Once the performance has ended and the YouTube player cuts to black, the Live Chat continues. Hermia asks ‘should we throw them some [money]?’, to which Hippolyta responds ‘definitely’, then comments to Theseus ‘We should go to the theater more often, dear’. Theseus then shatters the fourth wall by writing a message directly to the ‘[actual] audience’ in the Live Chat, asking them to donate ‘actual money’ as ‘those actual actors had their actual industry get destroyed’. The sequence is comparable to Starveling’s use of a ring light in CtrlAltRepeat’s *Stream*, blurring the lines between the mechanicals as actors performing on Zoom within the production, and the BRSP actors playing the mechanicals who chose to make the film following the shutdown of in-person performance spaces. Theseus’s messages in particular imbue the film with a distinctly metamodern quality. By speaking directly to the audience, Taylor as Theseus postmodernistically deconstructs the world of BRSP’s *Dream*, consciously drawing attention to the artifice of the film. However, Taylor’s plea to the audience is one of affective sincerity, emotionally highlighting the plight of the actors the audience is watching, and those working in the theatre industry around the world.

Between them, CtrlAltRepeat and BRSP’s lockdown adaptations of *Dream* demonstrate why lending the mechanicals affective depth and sincerity, and having the wedding party shift away from the cynical mockery of the play to earnest engagement, is the most successful adaptive choice when performing the play during the pandemic. The mechanicals are intrinsically metatheatrical – actors being played by actors, performing a play within the play. In lockdown *Dream*s, the mechanicals inherently came to represent the real actors who were playing them, struggling just as often as succeeding in using the digital technology with which they were faced, and the virtual performance spaces into which they had been thrust. CtrlAltRepeat and BRSP’s mechanicals in particular were not ‘[h]ard-handed

men … Which never laboured in their minds till now' (5.1.72-73), but modern-day actors adapting to new forms of creative expression and coming to terms with the paralysis of their industry. Just as isolated viewers in lockdown accepted and celebrated the low-tech roughness of lockdown Shakespeare throughout the pandemic, it is far more satisfying to experience the courtiers – existing in a recognisable version of 2020 and watching Zoom performances of *Pyramus and Thisbe* – do the same.

⁂

To conclude, I return once more to BRSP's *Dream*, specifically the film's YouTube premiere, during which members of the cast held their own real-world watch party and joined the Live Chat. In a further metatheatrical touch, the cast messaged in character alongside the real audience to offer postmodern commentary reflecting on the production and their own performances, as well as further blurring the distinction between the characters and the actors playing them. However, one hour and forty-three minutes into the film, near the conclusion of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, Taylor's live commentary as Theseus sincerely embellished his character's emotional in-film reaction. Three comments in particular subtly broke character to allow Taylor to put across his own feelings about living and performing in lockdown:

> i do actually love this
>
> i know it's a little silly
>
> […]
>
> but god damn it a little ridiculous sincerity is what i want right now.

Taylor's paradoxical 'ridiculous sincerity' echoes the mechanicals' own description of *Pyramus and Thisbe* as 'very tragical mirth' (5.1.57), as read out by Theseus in the play. Both Shakespeare's phrase and Taylor's effectively sum up the metamodern sensibility of adaptations of *Dream* created in lockdown, and of the structure of feeling inherent to lockdown

digital performance more widely. Performed from domestic spaces around the world by actors physically separated from their fellow cast members (and who may never have met in person) using homemade props and costumes, online performances in lockdown cannot help but be, to use Taylor's phrase, 'a little ridiculous'. And yet, the authentic commitment and belief of the actors, and the devastating real-world circumstances which surround these productions, ensure that they come across with sincerity and depth at the same time as being 'ridiculous'. Lockdown productions of *Dream* allowed audiences to escape from their experiences of the pandemic through fantastical silliness, whilst also earnestly reflecting life within the cultural moment of 2020. This metamodern oscillation between ridiculousness and sincerity is the key to the success of these productions, lending them a profound richness despite their surface-level appearance of poverty.

CONCLUSION

On Friday 9 September 2022, just under twenty-four hours after the official announcement of the death of Queen Elizabeth II, her son King Charles III made his first address to the nation as sovereign through a televised speech. The king concluded his speech by expressing deep gratitude to the late queen for her seventy-year reign with a fittingly sentimental Shakespearean quote: 'Thank you for your love and devotion to our family, and to the family of nations you have served so diligently all these years. May "flights of angels sing thee to thy rest"' (The Royal Family, 2022). Three days later, King Charles cited Shakespeare again to describe his mother in his first address to parliament at Westminster Hall: 'As Shakespeare says of the earlier Queen Elizabeth, she was "a pattern to all Princes living"' (BBC News, 2022). Whilst not screen adaptations in the same sense as a fully realised production or filmed performance, by drawing first from *Hamlet* (5.2.316) and then from *Henry VIII* (5.4.22) in his speeches, Charles created two of the first Shakespearean moving image artefacts of his reign.

It was not just the new king who cited Shakespeare to mark the end of the second Elizabethan age. Within an hour of the announcement of the queen's death, the Royal Shakespeare Company released a statement from Executive Director Catherine Mallyon and Acting Artistic Director Erica Whyman, which naturally featured a Shakespearean quote. Drawing from the same scene as King Charles would days later, Mallyon and Whyman concluded with lines from *Henry VIII* originally written about Elizabeth I – 'She shall be to the happiness of England / An aged princess. Many days shall see her, / And yet no day without a deed to crown it' (5.4.56-58) – which they connected to the late monarch: 'Translated to our times, Elizabeth II sought the happiness of England with her steadfast service, certainly lived many days, and did a great deed on every one' ('Her Majesty The Queen', 2022). On Twitter, Ed Davey, the leader of the Liberal Democrat Party, described the queen as 'an ever-fixed mark

in our lives', drawing from Sonnet 116; and journalist Petronella Wyatt offered a mawkish rewrite of the final couplet of Sonnet 18: 'I don't have to believe it if I don't want to. Your Majesty, so long lives this country, so long it gives life to thee' (Davey, 2022; Wyatt, 2022). In the week (at the time of writing) since the death of the queen, as people around the world have reacted to the news, Shakespeare has surfaced again and again – not to the extent of going 'viral' as he did during the COVID-19 lockdowns, but enough to assert himself once again as 'part of the cultural air that we breathe' (Aebischer, 2021, p. 3; Cottrell Boyce, quoted in Prescott and Sullivan, 2015, pp. 45-46).

Regarding the televised coronation of Elizabeth II in 1953, Laura Clancy argues that '[i]n contemporary British history, the coronation is typically imagined and narrated as the moment where television was anchored as a national cultural form', and 'perceived as the day the Queen became Queen, and television became television' (2019, p. 427, 428). The perception of the queen as inseparably linked to the televisual medium from her coronation onwards marked her at the start of her reign as a monarch who embraced both new technologies and a changing society. The media accessibility of the ceremony surrounding her death in 2022 therefore feels apt. The BBC is providing (again, at the time of writing) a livestream of the queen's lying-in-state in Westminster Hall until the morning of her funeral on 19 September 'for people who want to pay their respects virtually' ('BBC streaming', 2022). The stream is continually accessible through the BBC News website, the BBC iPlayer streaming platform, the BBC Parliament television channel, the BBC Red Button digital interactive service, and the broadcaster's YouTube channel – all of which can be viewed on televisions, computers, tablet and smartphone devices by people around the world with broadband internet access (ibid.). As well as signifying the sheer breadth of screen technology widely available in the present day, the high-definition footage streamed round the clock draws attention to the now

antiquated nature of the fuzzy black-and-white images of Elizabeth II's coronation broadcast to the relatively few British homes that had access to a television set nearly seventy years ago.

This brief excursion into the current events that are forming the backdrop to the writing of this conclusion highlights both the certainties and the uncertainties of looking towards the future of the cultural significance of both Shakespeare and the moving image, both separately and together, in the twenty-first century. Those who have quoted Shakespeare in the week since Elizabeth II's death have done so in order 'to generate meaning', to return to Terence Hawkes's phrase – turning to Shakespeare's words to give their emotions form and coherence, perhaps through a sense of their own sentiments not doing the historic moment justice (1992, p. 3). The citation of Shakespeare in this moment also draws on his position as a figure of cultural heritage, marking the queen's passing as a distinctly British event.

However, these invocations of Shakespeare exemplify the kind of oversimplified and outdated perspective on national identity perpetuated by films such as Carlo Carlei's *Romeo & Juliet* (2013) which, as demonstrated in chapter 3, is both harmful and increasingly unpopular. In contrast to the displays of patriotism and gratitude for the queen's reign, the accession of Charles to the throne has already triggered discussions about the monarchy's function and relevance in contemporary Britain. Just as Shakespeare on screen has reflected the anxieties and fractures in British national identity in the years following Brexit, it seems likely that the plays will be adapted to reflect this newly reopened rift in the nation, just as they have been for centuries. Indeed, there is arguably precedent for this in Mike Bartlett's 2014 play *King Charles III*, adapted into a film directed by Rupert Goold in 2017, which presents a disastrous and short-lived reign for Charles. 'By means of five-act structure, iambic pentameter verse, and title and subtitle', argues L. Monique Pittman, 'Bartlett deliberately positions his *King Charles III* in the tradition of Shakespearean history', which he uses 'as a vehicle to reflect on the state of the British nation in the twenty-first century' (2022, p. 183, 184). Whilst the future is never certain,

Shakespeare's position as a figure used to reflect shifts in cultural identities and sensibilities as the twenty-first century progresses seems unlikely to be toppled.

With Shakespeare as present as ever, screen technology is becoming ever *more* pervasive in twenty-first century life. The suggestion that viewers can 'pay their respects virtually' by accessing the BBC's lying-in-state livestream is indicative of the screen's recently accentuated status as a mediating presence which works in both directions, and the ways in which digital technology is increasingly able to facilitate authentic emotional connection. The Shakespeare productions performed and streamed online during the COVID-19 lockdowns discussed in chapter 6 demonstrate this powerfully. The webcam feeds into isolated actors' homes, presented by the performers without pretence and accepted by the audience without prejudice, became the conduit through which people connected in a time of enforced physical distance just as much as Shakespeare's words. At the turn of the twenty-first century, the technology which kept people connected during the pandemic did not exist or, if it did, was not widely available to the public. What technological advancements may have been made when the century approaches its halfway point is uncertain, but humanity's relationships both with each other and with digital technology mediated through screens now seem like a permanent fixture.

The final question, therefore, is what relationship the continuing presence of Shakespeare will have with ever-developing screen technology. It seems inevitable for both Shakespeare and moving image media to persist as two of humanity's most powerful 'empathy machines', to return to Roger Ebert's phrase (2005). To offer a concluding analogy, I turn once more to Shakespeare. Reunited on the heath in act 4 scene 6 of *King Lear*, the mad Lear tells the blind Gloucester: 'Your eyes are in a heavy case, your purse in a light, yet you see how this world goes' (4.6.143-144). In response, Gloucester simply says: 'I see it feelingly' (4.6.145). His reply offers a double meaning, suggesting both physically feeling his way through the

world, and his heightened emotional sensitivity following the events he has experienced in the play. It is this second sense which powerfully encapsulates the sensibility of Shakespeare on screen in the twenty-first century. Those who create screen adaptations of Shakespeare offer representations of 'how this world goes', which allow their audience to step outside their everyday perspectives and affords them an opportunity to 'see … feelingly'. It is my sincere hope and belief that, as the twenty-first century progresses, Shakespeare on screen will continue to do this – the empathy machines, both independently and in tandem, continually upgrading and adapting to an ever-changing world.

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