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**‘The Other RSC’:
The History and Legacy of the
Reduced Shakespeare Company**

by

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requirements for the degree of

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Declaration

I certify that this thesis is my own work and that it has neither been submitted as part of a degree at a different university nor has it appeared in any published form.

Abstract

This thesis investigates the history and legacy of the Reduced Shakespeare Company (RSC), a Californian three-man comedy troupe who have created ten stage shows to date, which encompass abridged, fast-paced versions of substantial, serious topics. My focus is on the company's inaugural source of adaptation and the subject to which they have regularly returned throughout their 37-year existence: William Shakespeare's plays, life and influence. The 'other' RSC have reached a global audience and represent a fascinating American tale of how a small-scale, open-air troupe gradually expanded into a highly successful theatre brand.

I will argue that, through their blend of vaudevillian humour, pop culture references, audience involvement, metatheatrical narratives and intertextual use of Shakespeare, the RSC are central to the development of Shakespearean parody of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. I further contend that the RSC occupy a significant locus in the contemporary performance of Shakespearean adaptation, as demonstrated by the longevity of their work and their influence on other companies. As my thesis will demonstrate, their work oscillates between sincerity and irony and is structured around a series of collisions between characters who differ both in ideology and purpose.

This research encompasses an account of the company's history from 1981 to the present day, interviews conducted with the founders and managing partners as well as close-readings of their Shakespearean texts. I explore the company's origins at Renaissance Faires during the 1980s and examine their development through three case studies: their first play, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)* (1987), their 1994 six-part BBC radio series and their most recent work, *William Shakespeare's Long Lost First Play (abridged)* (2016). My project represents the first full-length study of this internationally renowned company, whose plays have been translated worldwide and who hold the record for the longest-running comedy play in London's West End.

Abbreviations and Conventions

Shakespeare Plays

<i>A&C</i>	<i>Antony and Cleopatra</i>
<i>Caesar</i>	<i>Julius Caesar</i>
<i>Dream</i>	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>
<i>R&J</i>	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>
<i>Lear</i>	<i>King Lear</i>
<i>Much Ado</i>	<i>Much Ado About Nothing</i>
<i>Shrew</i>	<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>
<i>Tempest</i>	<i>The Tempest</i>
<i>Titus</i>	<i>Titus Andronicus</i>

Other Plays

<i>America</i>	<i>The Complete History of America (abridged)</i>
<i>Complete Deaths</i>	<i>The Complete Deaths</i>
<i>Complete Works</i>	<i>The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)</i>
<i>Long Lost</i>	<i>William Shakespeare's Long Lost First Play (abridged)</i>
<i>Remix</i>	<i>Othello: The Remix</i>
<i>Shitfaced</i>	<i>Shitfaced Shakespeare</i>

Recordings

<i>Radio Show</i>	<i>The Reduced Shakespeare Company Radio Show</i>
<i>RSC Podcast</i>	<i>Reduced Shakespeare Company Podcast</i>

Company Names, Institutions and Events

ASC	American Shakespeare Center
BRSP	The Back Room Shakespeare Project
Firesigns	The Firesign Theatre
FKB	Flying Karamazov Brothers
Folger	Folger Theatre
FSL	Folger Shakespeare Library
MBP	Magnificent Bastard Productions
PBS	Public Broadcasting Service
RPFN	Northern Renaissance Pleasure Faire
RPFS	Renaissance Pleasure Faire of Southern California
RSC	Reduced Shakespeare Company
SSE	Shenandoah Shakespeare Express

The full names of plays, recordings, companies and institutions are used whenever they are first mentioned in an individual chapter and referred to by their abbreviations thereafter. To avoid confusion, the Royal Shakespeare Company are referred to throughout by their full name. All in-text citations from Shakespeare are taken from *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd edn, eds. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008).

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Introduction

'The One with The Shipwreck'

REED: [...] my favourite comedy is the one with the shipwreck.

AUSTIN: Er, that's *Twelfth Night*?

REED: No, no, *Twelfth Night* is the one with the twins.

ADAM: No, Reed. *Comedy of Errors* has the twins.

AUSTIN: Well, it has two sets actually.¹

GREEN: [...] I can never tell the comedies apart. What's that one [...] that starts with a shipwreck, and has identical twins, mistaken identities, cross dressing, and ends with a wedding?²

SHAKESPEARE / AUSTIN:

[...] this tempest's too good to use just once.

Likewise cross-dressing and similar stunts

Like potions and shipwrecks and a lost twin:

That will be how half of my plays begin.³

This trio of quotations is a clear indicator of the fact that, while artistic directors, writers and performers may have changed during the thirty-seven year existence of the Reduced Shakespeare Company (RSC), the ridicule of repeated tropes across Shakespeare's plays (here, the shipwreck, among others) has remained a constant. Furthermore, the comedic imbroglio generated by the expression 'the one with...' evokes not only Abbott and Costello's 'Who's On First' vaudeville routine – which is parodied by the RSC in

¹ Adam Long, Reed Martin and Austin Tichenor, 'The Comedies' in *The Reduced Shakespeare Company Radio Show* (Laughing Stock Productions Ltd., 1994).

² Daniel Singer and Jess Winfield, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged) [revised]* (Reduced Shakespeare Company, 2007), p. 27.

³ Reed Martin and Austin Tichenor, *William Shakespeare's Long Lost First Play (abridged)* (New York: Broadway Play Publishing Inc., 2018), p. 101.

the first of the three above passages – but also entered the popular consciousness during the 1990s thanks to the idiosyncratic name of all but two episodes of the NBC sitcom *Friends* (1994 – 2004).⁴

By means of their feigned confusion, the RSC relocate Shakespeare's plays into modern popular culture and parodically acknowledge the formula writing of this most celebrated of playwrights, rendering him more accessible to audiences. This process of re-popularisation, which has been a common goal of the company's members, is one of the principal reasons why an examination of their work can enhance the understanding of the ways in which Shakespearean adaptation in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has intersected with popular culture practices, such as fan-fiction, mash-ups and, notably, the tendency to express reverence for the playwright by irreverent means.⁵ The company members, past and present, have carved successful careers out of reducing weighty subjects such as Shakespeare, The Bible and literary classics, matters about which many people hold strong opinions, and are more commonly associated with places of learning, worship and quiet study.⁶ In performance, they invite their audience into a communal club of revelry, piercing the bubble between highbrow and lowbrow culture with their bold, physical approach.

My experience in researching the RSC's history, work and legacy has been, metaphorically, akin to unstitching a vast, intertextual quilt, not dissimilar to the experience of watching an RSC performance, during which audiences are showered with a series of references to Shakespeare's plays and pop culture, the latter both related and unrelated to the playwright's work. Playgoers are also required to distinguish between the various levels of performance within which the actors operate, moving freely between fictional versions of themselves, characters within Shakespeare's plays, and, most

⁴ The title of *Friends* episodes began with the words 'The One Where', 'The One With' or 'The One After', with the exception of the pilot and finale. This feature was parodied in subsequent US sitcoms such as *30 Rock* (2006 – 13) and *Arrested Development* (2003 – present).

⁵ This last method calls to mind the analogy of the pub landlord who shows his acceptance of a much-favoured customer by being rude to him.

⁶ For example, after leaving the RSC in 2003, Adam Long wrote and performed *Star Wars Shortened* (2006) for Sky Television and *The Condensed History of Tony Blair* (2006) for BBC Radio 4. He also wrote and directed *Dickens Unplugged* (2007) performed at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe and, subsequently, the Harold Pinter Theatre.

recently, a representation of the playwright himself. The aforesaid comparability between my role as academic researcher and audience participant has made necessary a brief personal account of my initial exposure to the company, as well as to others with a comparable performance methodology.

I first saw the RSC perform at the age of ten, my chief recollection of which was the thrill of seeing three actors race from entrance to exit wearing an array of different costumes, making hilarious (and seemingly unintentional) mistakes and directly engaging with the audience, thus recalling the pantomime traditions with which I, like most British theatregoers, was familiar. Later, aged eighteen, I watched Patrick Barlow's adaptation of *The 39 Steps* at London's Criterion Theatre, which involved four actors playing a multitude of characters, breaking the fourth wall and acknowledging the simultaneous artistry and flaws of their source material.⁷ The following year, I saw *Potted Potter* at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, a production where two actors perform all seven of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels which, according to its co-creator and performer, Daniel Clarkson, was directly influenced by his own childhood experiences of the RSC.⁸ As formative theatrical experiences, I derived satisfaction and enjoyment in identifying the textual and visual references throughout these fleet-footed, comedic reductions of Shakespeare and popular culture respectively.

In this introduction, I review existing critical literature on the RSC, and explore various theories of Shakespearean adaptation, explaining the ways in which these have shaped my research methodology. I submit the theory that

⁷ The Criterion Theatre was also the venue in which *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)* was performed from March 1996 to April 2005, when it became the longest running comedy play in London's West End. It was succeeded by *The 39 Steps* (September 2006 – September 2015), and followed by Mischief Theatre's *The Comedy About A Bank Robbery* (March 2016 – present).

⁸ Clarkson recalls seeing *Complete Works* in his youth and later realising that this had directly inspired his own work on the play, which condenses the books into a seventy-minute parody reminiscent of the RSC's reductive approach and performance style. In an interview conducted with Clarkson in August 2017 for the *Reduced Shakespeare Company Podcast*, Austin Tichenor commented that *Potted Potter* is often incorrectly attributed to the RSC. Furthermore, Tichenor and Reed Martin hired two actors, James Percy and Joseph Maudsley, to perform *William Shakespeare's Long Lost First Play (abridged)* for its 2017 UK tour, both of whom had previously toured *Potted Potter* internationally, suggesting a correlation between the performance style required for both shows.

the RSC can be considered a modern extension of the nineteenth-century vaudeville tradition, discussing the influence of twentieth-century vaudevillians on the company members. I conclude by defining reduction in the context of this thesis. In Chapter 1, I explore the company's origins at Renaissance faires during the 1980s, and, in Chapter 2, present a close-reading analysis of their first play, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)* (1987). These chapters also include analysis of the RSC's influences, processes of adaptation and interaction with specific Shakespeare texts. Chapter 3 examines the RSC's six-part radio series, *The Reduced Shakespeare Company Radio Show* (1993) and the ongoing *Reduced Shakespeare Company Podcast*. Chapter 4 focuses on their most recent play, *William Shakespeare's Long Lost First Play (abridged)* (2016), delivering a scene-by-scene analysis and insight into the development of this new work, and a reflection on its status as an act of Shakespearean commemoration. In Chapter 5, I consider the company's wider influence and legacy, using research from first-hand interviews with the writers and directors of other contemporary Shakespearean interpretations and reductions. Finally, I consider how the company, through their blend of irony and sincerity, can be considered as an example of metamodernism. Given the subjective nature of such interviews, I have attempted, where supporting evidence is available, to ratify statements made with additional sources, critical insight, comparative analysis with other companies and personal observations of productions in order to evaluate the results of these theatre-makers' intentions.

Reduced Shakespeare Criticism

To date, the RSC have received critical attention that, rather than exploring the company in their own right, has used them to illustrate a broader argument within the fields of Shakespearean adaptation and performance studies. Each of the following critics explores a different aspect of the company's work and identity, all of which will be addressed in my thesis. Felicia Hardison Londré charts their origins and formation in *Shakespeare Companies and Festivals: An*

International Guide,⁹ while both Margaret Jane Kidnie and Peter Holland, assessing *Complete Works*, consider how best to define the company's practice of adaptation, variously describing their work as 'premised on citation and operations of memory'¹⁰ and 'abbreviated stage Shakespeare'.¹¹ In *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture*, Douglas Lanier addresses the RSC's various performance styles, describing them as 'Shakespearian vaudeville, combining physical comedy, bad punning and doggerel, deliberately crude props and sound effects, performance "mistakes", audience participation, a wealth of pop culture references, an anarchic improvisation structure, and, of course, "disrespectful" reduction of the text'.¹² The company are also referenced in *Shakespeare and Youth Culture*, where their work is examined via 'celebrations of stupidity',¹³ exemplified by American pop culture examples such as the films *Dumb and Dumber* and *Dude, Where's My Car?*, acknowledging that 'the Shakespeare that is given to this generation, or the one created by and for it, perhaps, is a reduced one'.¹⁴ In his discussion of 'Shakespeare and the Theatre' in *Shakespeare's Creative Legacies*, Paul Prescott cites the RSC as an example of Shakespearean burlesque, reflecting that 'the postmodern period [...] has also proved congenial to pastiche and parody'.¹⁵ Stephen Purcell prefaces his analysis of the company in *Popular Shakespeare: Simulation and Subversion on the Modern Stage*, with the suggestion that 'the range of Shakespearean parodies' attitudes towards their sources might broadly be said to lie somewhere on a spectrum between respectful homage [...] and

⁹ Felicia Hardison Londré, 'California' in *Shakespeare Companies and Festivals: An International Guide*, eds. Ron Engle, Felicia Hardison Londré and Daniel J. Watermeier (London: Greenwood Press, 1995), pp. 53-9.

¹⁰ Margaret Jane Kidnie, 'Citing Shakespeare' in *Shakespeare, Memory and Performance*, ed. Peter Holland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 129.

¹¹ Peter Holland, 'Shakespeare abbreviated' in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Popular Culture*, ed. Robert Shaughnessy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 41.

¹² Douglas Lanier, *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 102-3.

¹³ Jennifer Hulbert, Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr. and Robert L. York, "'Dude, Where's My Bard?'" Reducing, Translating, and Referencing Shakespeare for Youth: An Introduction' in *Shakespeare and Youth Culture*, eds. Jennifer Hulbert, Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr. and Robert L. York (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 25.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 26.

¹⁵ Paul Prescott, 'Shakespeare and the Theatre' in *Shakespeare's Creative Legacies: Artists, Writers, Performers, Readers*, eds. Paul Edmondson and Peter Holbrook (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 13-4.

deliberate sacrilege',¹⁶ proposing that they occupy a significant niche within the continuum of Shakespearean adaptation through parody, located between the highbrow and lowbrow.

Methodology and Influences

My thesis acknowledges the value of all the aforementioned work, which has supported this research at every turn, in my attempt to provide the first comprehensive analysis of the RSC. This encompasses the company's history from 1981 to the present day, close-readings of their Shakespearean texts, and a consideration of their importance as inspiration for other theatrical companies and parodists. As an internationally renowned company whose work has been translated worldwide and who hold the record for the longest-running West End comedy play, there exists relatively little scholarship to reflect this popularity, a critical gap which, employing practical methodologies, my research seeks to fill. These combine primary methods of first-hand research to present evidence from three main sources: interviews with the RSC founders, Daniel Singer, Jess Winfield (né Borgeson) and Adam Long, as well as the current managing partners, Reed Martin and Austin Tichenor, attendance at play rehearsals and access to previously unavailable archival material, provided by the company. I have chosen to make minimal use of theatre reviews as this thesis is not intended as a study of the company's reception, but, rather, as the first critical appraisal of their history, development and legacy.

My research has taken as its model the notion of Shakespearean scholarship that places the academic in direct conversation with the subject, without sacrificing critical objectivity. Thus, the integration of interview material into my thesis and process of corroborating personal observations with secondary sources owes much to Emma Poltrack's unpublished thesis on the all-male Shakespeare company Propeller, as well as the Arden

¹⁶ Stephen Purcell, *Popular Shakespeare: Simulation and Subversion on the Modern Stage* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 98.

Shakespeare's *Shakespeare in the Theatre* series, notably, *Mark Rylance at the Globe* by Purcell, and *The American Shakespeare Center* by Paul Menzer. My research takes its lead from Menzer's mission statement in his preface: 'to honour the institution by taking its claims and its project seriously, recognizing its contributions, noting its inconsistencies, but above all attempting to locate and position it within the twenty-first century landscape of Shakespeare and performance'.¹⁷

Among those critics whose work has contributed to the theoretical principles, terminology and methodology of my research, Lanier's has provided the template for my own exploration of the cultural divide between highbrow and lowbrow Shakespeare. In his abbreviation of 'Shakespeare' and 'popular' to create the portmanteau word 'Shakespop',¹⁸ Lanier reflects contemporary society's increasing tendency to express itself in as few words as possible, a consequence of its reliance on the digital shorthand that is so prevalent in social media. For the purposes of this thesis, 'Shakespop' will be a term of reference to describe what is created after the RSC have deconstructed and reassembled Shakespeare, combining it with one or more popular culture references. This was defined by Elizabeth Abele as 'shreds and patches'¹⁹ and was most recently visible in the 'intertextual splicing'²⁰ that the company used in creating the script of *Long Lost*.

Prescott's definitions of Shakespearean adaptation by methods of artistic engagement, such '[c]ollage'²¹ and '[m]ashing up',²² directly inform how I present the RSC's various 'adaptive tactics'²³ and have been a vital influence on my approach to the semantics of adaptation. A further essential part of my methodology has been based on Linda Hutcheon's 'doubled definition of adaptation as product (as extensive, particular transcoding) and

¹⁷ Paul Menzer, *Shakespeare in the Theatre: The American Shakespeare Center* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2017), p. xvi.

¹⁸ Lanier, p. 5.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Abele, 'Introduction: Whither Shakespop? Taking Stock of Shakespeare in Popular Culture' in *College Literature*, 31.4 (John Hopkins University Press: Fall 2004) <<http://muse.jhu.edu/article/174162>> [Accessed 30 May 2019], p. 10

²⁰ Jeffrey Kahan, *Reforging Shakespeare: A Theatrical Scandal* (London: Associated University Presses, 1998), p. 217.

²¹ Prescott, p. 16.

²² *Ibid*, p. 23.

²³ *Ibid*, p. 13.

as process (as creative reinterpretation and palimpsestic intertextuality)',²⁴ interpreted through a critique of the RSC and their Shakespeare-focused work. My interviews reveal creative decisions made by the company during these texts' development and allow for the dual analysis of how they adapted their material for different media (product) and responded to their Shakespearean source texts (process).

Adaptation Studies: The State of Play

A major issue within adaptation studies lies in the definition itself: the pool of synonyms and interpretations that scholars variously attach to their own specific theories. For example, in her introduction to *Adaptation and Appropriation*, Julie Sanders presents a list of no fewer than thirty-eight terms that encompass 'the vocabulary of adaptation', from 'borrowing' to 're-evaluation'.²⁵ Prescott reflects that '[m]uch ink has been spilled in assessing the finer taxonomical distinctions between what counts as an adaptation, an offshoot, a spin-off'.²⁶ Mark Fortier and David Fischlin suggest that even 'adaptation is not the right name [...] because there is no right name'.²⁷ Hutcheon rejects the attempt to define its terms through a single term for adaptation, in favour of focusing on 'modes of engagement - telling, showing, and interacting [which] can allow for certain precision and distinctions that a focus on medium alone cannot'.²⁸

Sanders also provides a clear definition between the two areas from which her study derives its title: 'adaptation signals a relationship with an informing sourcetext or original [...] appropriation frequently affects a more decisive journey away from an informing source into a wholly new cultural

²⁴ Linda Hutcheon with Siobhan O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 22.

²⁵ Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 3.

²⁶ Prescott, p. 13.

²⁷ Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier, 'General Introduction' in *Adaptations of Shakespeare: A critical anthology of plays from the seventeenth century to the present*, eds. Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 2.

²⁸ Hutcheon, p. 27.

product and domain'.²⁹ Elsewhere, Sanders addresses how a hypertext behaves in relation to its foundational hypotext, especially when the latter is canonical and carries with it a strongly defined set of creative and critical principles, in keeping with Lanier's discussion of highbrow/lowbrow binaries in Shakespop. He suggests that 'Shakespeare's relationship with specific media or arenas of culture tends to be invested with energy at certain moments and social contexts, and that energy shifts from medium to medium'.³⁰ This has resulted in an upheaval within traditional perceptions of media, such as comic book adaptations, as a debasement of Shakespeare's heritage, when 'in an age where visual culture is the new cultural dominant, graphic versions of Shakespeare have lost their former stigma and are becoming texts in their own right'.³¹ This subject is the focus of Sverren-Arve Myklebost's 2013 University of Bergen thesis on *Shakespeare in Configuration: Models, Comics and Manga*, in which he challenges the established defining terms of adaptation theory and powerfully admits in his preface to the stark reality of such a course of study:

[...] what I am studying is really *nothing*; it is a gap in-between texts, a spot which is only visible in peripheral vision but which disappears when looked at directly. [...] This space, spot, (no)thing nevertheless remains possible to detect, because it has an outline. A black hole somewhere in the universe is not directly observable, but its existence is surmised because of what its gravitational force does to the surrounding space.³²

This, then, is the current state of play within adaptation studies: a recognition of the field's indefinable scope and the plethora of terms with which we label and distinguish cultural products. However, in the search for an appropriate terminology, critics may often fail to take into account the experience of

²⁹ Ibid, p. 26.

³⁰ Douglas Lanier, 'Recent Shakespeare Adaptation and the Mutations of Cultural Capital' in *Shakespeare Studies, Vol. 38* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2010), p. 105.

³¹ Lanier, *Popular Culture*, p. 111.

³² Sverren-Arve Myklebost, *Shakespeare in Configuration: Models, Comics and Manga* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Bergen, 2013), p. 11.

adaptation, both in its production and reception. In a thesis such as mine, which has developed in direct interface with its subjects, it is clear that that the adaptive decisions taken by artists are often unconscious or coincidental. Equally, the types of audiences who attend RSC performances are rarely concerned with whether or not their source of entertainment constitutes a Shakespearean adaptation, appropriation, offshoot or any of the other myriad terms ascribed to a hypertext. Scholars such as Hutcheon and Purcell have helped move the field of adaptation towards a greater prioritisation of how the creators and receivers of adaptation make and unmake its definitions and this thesis is situated in their theoretical footprint.³³

‘Intellectual Vaudeville’

The RSC can be considered as part of a continuum of parodic adaptation, whose work is clearly identifiable with that of contemporaries such as the National Theatre of Brent, and with influences that include the Flying Karamazov Brothers (FKB) and Monty Python. Simultaneously, their performance techniques follow on from that of nineteenth-century literary burlesque, the purpose of which was to lampoon so-called ‘serious’ literary work, genres or authors through comic inversion. It is essential, therefore, to trace the roots of the RSC’s brand of ‘intellectual vaudeville’³⁴ in order to contextualise the company’s work in the tradition of the American stage. This expression was coined by Stephen Holden in his 1993 review of the company’s second play *The Complete History of America (abridged)*, where he asserted that, ‘an apt description of what the three-man group does is intellectual vaudeville [...] smart, cheeky clowns who present themselves as a collective

³³ Linda Hutcheon with Siobhan O’Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 113-39; Stephen Purcell, *Popular Shakespeare: Simulation and Subversion on the Modern Stage* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 142-71; Stephen Purcell, *Shakespeare and Audience in Practice* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Stephen Purcell, *Shakespeare in the Theatre: Mark Rylance at the Globe* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2017), pp. 109-53.

³⁴ Stephen Holden, ‘Review/Theater; America, As Loony As It Is Beautiful’ (New York: New York Times, 1993) <<http://www.nytimes.com/1993/07/24/theater/review-theater-america-as-loony-as-it-is-beautiful.html>> [Accessed 10 January 2017].

repository for most of American mass culture'.³⁵ The RSC have since used the caption extensively in their marketing campaigns, as well as on their website and the front cover of their parodic reference book *Reduced Shakespeare: The Complete Guide for the Attention-Impaired* (2006). Vaudeville was America's most prominent form of popular entertainment from the 1880s to the 1930s: indeed, most medium-to-large American cities had their own vaudeville theatre and acts toured regionally, performing for a national audience, making it one of the most highly influential and widely received forms of entertainment in the early twentieth century. Many comedians who influenced the RSC, such as the Marx Brothers and The Three Stooges, began as vaudeville performers, using a number of techniques which, as I will demonstrate throughout this thesis, have become staples for the RSC's onstage blueprint: audience interaction, pratfalls, wordplay, clownish costumes, subversion and short, sketch-length scenes.³⁶

The critical vocabulary of Shakespearean parody has proved to be difficult to navigate, particularly when its terms of reference have evolved. In his work on British and American Shakespeare burlesques performed during the nineteenth-century, Stanley Wells admits that 'problems of defining genre are notoriously difficult [...] and various terms, such as burlesque, travesty, burletta, and extravaganza might equally be applied to the same work'.³⁷ It is questionable whether the average RSC audience member would describe the company's work as fitting into any of the aforementioned categories, particularly that of burlesque, in view of that particular genre's recognised mutation into erotic performances and striptease, which began in the nineteenth-century. Thus, it is necessary to clarify the terminology separating 'burlesque' from 'vaudeville'. Frances Teague suggests that 'one motive for that process of change and the drive towards respectability was [...] distaste for the rowdiness of the galleries, filled with working-class patrons who expressed

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ The Marx Brothers and The Three Stooges were alluded to by their first names in performance (whether or not these were their given names). The RSC have continued in this tradition.

³⁷ Stanley Wells, *Nineteenth-Century Shakespeare Burlesques, Volume 1: John Poole and his Imitators* (London: Diploma Press Limited, 1977), pp. xiii-xiv

their feelings towards the performance vocally and on occasion with missiles'.³⁸ Theatre managers thus sought 'audiences of men and women who were well-to-do or at least middle-class',³⁹ precipitating the gradual disintegration of American burlesque and leaving 'shattered for good the phenomenon of the theatre as a social microcosm of the entire society'.⁴⁰ To avoid potential danger, many opted either to 'attend legitimate plays, but these tickets were expensive, several times the cost of a seat in a vaudeville house' or 'to bypass burlesque shows or concert saloons for the cleaned-up shows of vaudeville'.⁴¹ Teague begins here to delineate the developing contrast between burlesque and vaudeville; while the former divorced itself from satire in favour of female nudity, the latter constituted a more varied, family-friendly form of performance.

The theatrical impresario Tony Pastor (1837-1908), sometimes referred to as the 'Father of Vaudeville', was largely responsible for vaudeville's increased respectability, presenting 'a vaudeville bill aimed specifically at women and children'.⁴² Despite its resulting in the evolution of vaudeville performances into something new and altogether removed from their rowdier variety show counterparts, Pastor was determined to maintain the connection across class boundaries, continuing 'to call his entertainment "variety" in his desire not to alienate those audience members who had given him his start and who were accustomed to a more liberal style of the genre'.⁴³ An examination of this divergence, which occurred over a century ago, facilitates the understanding as to why contemporary practitioners of Shakespearean parody, such as the RSC, define themselves as vaudevillians rather than burlesque performers. Levine's following comparison is informative in clarifying the RSC's nineteenth-century lineage:

³⁸ Francis Teague, *Shakespeare and the American Popular Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 81.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Levine, p. 50.

⁴¹ Teague, p. 82.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Susan Kattwinkel, *Tony Pastor Presents: Afterpieces from the Vaudeville Stage* (London: Greenwood Press, 1998), p. 2.

To envision nineteenth-century American Theatre audiences correctly, one might do well to visit a contemporary sporting event in which the spectators not only are [...] heterogeneous but are also [...] more than an audience; they are participants who can enter into the field of action, who feel a sense of immediacy and at times even of control, who articulate their opinions and feelings vocally and unmistakably.⁴⁴

This fits well with the notion of audience participation, which is an integral component of the RSC's performances, such as the enlisting of audience members to create a storm by spraying the cast with water pistols during the climactic tempest of *Long Lost's* first act. While the theatrical spaces where they perform nowadays are more sanitised - and the audiences less unruly - than those described by Levine, the company are, nonetheless, drawing on the American Vaudeville tradition to which Pastor contributed.

Levine also considers that 'the nineteenth-century had harbored two Shakespeares: the humble, everyday poet who sprang from the people and found his strength and inspiration among them, and the towering genius [...] The happy symbiosis between the two began to wear thin by the end of the century when sacred Shakespeare emerged triumphant',⁴⁵ illustrating the cultural hierarchy that the RSC frequently seek to undermine in their work. In *Not Shakespeare: Bardolatry and Burlesque in the Nineteenth Century*, Richard W. Schoch's critical study on Shakespeare burlesques within that specific historical period, he refers to the RSC in several footnotes, the company being among his few contemporary examples. This is significant in the degree to which they can be regarded as descendants of the burlesque tradition, as I will examine throughout this thesis. Schoch references the RSC in his argument that 'Shakespeare burlesques are *not* Shakespeare because they do not iterate - but rather interpret - their precursory texts',⁴⁶ claiming that the RSC 'does

⁴⁴ Levine, p. 26.

⁴⁵ Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 68-9.

⁴⁶ Richard W. Schoch, *Not Shakespeare: Bardolatry and Burlesque* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 21.

not imply – in its name – that its performances will burlesque Shakespeare, even though many aspects of their performances do'.⁴⁷ His study begins with a critical re-evaluation of these burlesques, both within their original nineteenth-century context and their legacy in contemporary criticism. He contends that

[...] nineteenth-century remarks on the perceived demerits of burlesque turned on reductive oppositions between 'high' and 'low' culture in which the burlesque could only be a debauched version of a classic original. Twentieth-century critics generally followed a similar line of reason. Most recently, Jonathan Bate maintained that, for all their 'comic and ironic sharpness', plays like *Hamlet Travestie* are 'mean and limited' when 'set beside the magnanimity and breadth of vision' of Shakespeare's original works.⁴⁸

Schoch attempts to disassociate the critical reading of Shakespearean burlesques from their source texts, exploring them as intertextual mosaics and performance artefacts to be understood and appreciated independently from Shakespeare's original. His analysis of the continuation of 'reductive oppositions between "high" and "low" culture'⁴⁹ connects to Levine's chapter on Shakespeare's cultural reputation and development in America, in which he concludes that there exist 'significant similarities between the audiences of Shakespeare's own day and those he drew in America',⁵⁰ in relation to Shakespeare's cultural stratification during both early seventeenth-century England and nineteenth-century America. Levine interprets the role of Shakespearean adaptation as a tool employed to make the playwright more accessible or comprehensible to American audiences and suggests that 'the adaptations did work this way – not primarily, as has widely been claimed, by

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 20.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Levine, p. 24.

vulgarizing or simplifying him to the point of utter distortion but rather by heightening those qualities in Shakespeare that American audiences were particularly drawn to'.⁵¹ This bears comparison with the RSC's recasting of Shakespeare into modern contexts to promote audience perception and approval.

Lanier warns against an exclusively positive portrayal of Shakespearean burlesques, suggesting that they 'segregated popular Shakespeare from Shakespeare "proper", confining what had been a traditional element of performance to afterpieces and separate works'⁵² and that 'in the long run they had the effect of enabling "proper" Shakespeare to be proper, in effect dividing the kingdom of Shakespearian performance in two'.⁵³ These critical views are clearly relevant to the RSC's reductive methodology and their awareness of the limitations and negative aspects of parody, as revealed by the instances of serious drama which they include in both *Complete Works* and *Long Lost*. However, their interpretations of Shakespeare's plots, characters and legacy in a condensed format are, in fact, amplifications of the playwright's cultural reception in theatre, film, music and other popular media, setting aside the length of the original narrative to make room for an analysis of the role of Shakespeare in American cultural life. Levine's contention that, for these American artists and audiences alike, 'Shakespeare was frequently seen as common property to be treated as the user saw fit',⁵⁴ connects his viewpoint still further with the RSC's own process of adaptation. His discussion of 'the profound and longstanding nineteenth-century American experience with Shakespeare'⁵⁵ and why this makes it 'more difficult to understand why he lost so much of his audience so quickly'⁵⁶ serves as a useful critical model for understanding the RSC's artistic origins, as well as the reasons why their work has survived and evolved in its quest to refashion a hyperbolised American version of Shakespeare for their audiences.

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 42.

⁵² Lanier, *Popular Culture*, p. 39.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 45.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

The Science of Reduction

It is important to distinguish ‘reduction’ from synonyms such as ‘abridgement’, ‘compression’ and ‘condensation’, given that it is the dominant term throughout this thesis, reflecting, as their name suggests, the RSC’s primary tool of adaptation. ‘Reduction’, by definition, is the process whereby something is made smaller or less in amount. It also describes the process of intensifying flavour, a sub-definition which can be, figuratively, applied to the ways in which the RSC encapsulate the basic essence of Shakespeare’s plays through a series of scenes, quotations and images.

‘Abridgement’ is, perhaps, the second most important term for any discussion of the RSC, given that the word ‘abridged’ appears as a parenthetical insertion in the title of each of their plays. In a general literary context, the word is largely used to describe the shortening of a text and can equally be applied to comedies which set out to abridge with parodic or satirical intent, such as Richard Curtis’s *Skinhead Hamlet* (1981), and to cut-down versions of full-length texts, a practice usually carried out by a director or dramaturg in the professional and amateur theatre. Therefore, for the purpose of my thesis, the distinction between these two terms is representative of the RSC’s process of adaptation (reduction) and the product which they present in the form of live productions and written scripts (abridgement).

The term ‘compression’ describes the process of taking something large and figuratively squeezing it together in order to produce a new entity. I contend that this more accurately describes experimental texts and productions such as Heiner Müller’s *Hamletmachine* (1977) or Robert Lepage’s *Elsinore* (1996), where a canonical text such as *Hamlet* undergoes a process of change in its focus, form and aesthetic through its creator’s decision to isolate a single element of the original text, and extrapolate this in order to produce something entirely new. Conversely, although the RSC’s productions parodically interpret specific plays and genres in ways that radically reconfigure them for the audience, their work delivers a series of extended

riffs on Shakespeare's originals, rather than a full-length deviation or re-telling of their own.

Aside from its scientific usage to describe the collection of water droplets on a warm surface, the term 'condensation' means a concise version of something, often a text. This might describe a simplified adaptation where the creator's intention is to make Shakespeare's plays easier to understand such as Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807), or to literary guides such as Spark Notes or No Fear Shakespeare, which break the texts down into scene-by-scene summaries or modern translations, chiefly for educational purposes. Although the RSC's plays have been performed by school groups and, arguably, condense plays like *Romeo and Juliet* or *Hamlet* into a 'greatest hits' version of Shakespeare's narrative, the term 'condensation' describes the company's appropriation of the playwright less well than 'reduction', which implies the intensification of certain Shakespearean tropes at the expense of a complete re-telling of the original plot. The difference between these definitions, all of which might, in effect, be used interchangeably, is encapsulated in the RSC's self-description as practitioners of reduction who deliver abridgements of large topics, hence these two terms will feature most often throughout my thesis.

The task of comprehensively defining reduction is itself a difficult one, with myriad interpretations available, especially when considering the various possible intentions within an act of reduction. For instance, staging a play usually performed by a large ensemble with a small cast delivers a different type of reduction to one in which the original text has been truncated. Moreover, this thesis exclusively analyses companies and practitioners whose reduced Shakespearean performances seek largely to produce a comic effect, even in instances, such as physical theatre company Spymonkey's *The Complete Deaths* (2016), where this is balanced with moments of pathos and dramatic sincerity. Such forms of reduction differ greatly from productions such as Tim Carroll's 2005 three-man deconstruction of *The Tempest* at Shakespeare's Globe, where the purpose of a reduced cast was geared towards experimentation with the form and interpretation of Shakespeare's text. In *I, Shakespeare* (2004-11), Tim Crouch's series of one-man Shakespeare plays,

the wider narrative of a play is stripped away to focus on a marginalised character. Although they incorporate comedy, these were written with a younger audience in mind and are more intentionally pedagogic than the RSC's work. They also differ in being more tightly structured around a sole idea, rather than attempting to fit Shakespeare's complete works into a single production. The concerns of theatre companies such as the RSC and Spymonkey are centred on the position of Shakespeare's work within a cultural hierarchy and, furthermore, as a vehicle to explore meta-theatrically those structures within the dynamics of their own troupe.

I will comprehensively consider the RSC's name and initials in my opening chapter; however, by subverting the title of the Royal Shakespeare Company, whose productions are accorded a level of prestige and expectation due to their cultural and historical reputation, not to mention their geographical location in the playwright's birthplace, the 'other' RSC simultaneously acknowledge and distort the pejorative connotations that surround reduction. Their appropriation of the Royal Shakespeare Company's initials also evokes a strong transatlantic binary alongside some bewilderment about how this American company were able to exploit the intellectual property of this most revered of English theatrical institutions.

1

‘Give us your cash, if we be friends’: The Formation and Early History of the RSC

Introduction: Shakespeare on Sneakers

The seeds for *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)* were sown by the Reduced Shakespeare Company (RSC)’s founding member, Daniel Singer, even before the name or the ‘formal partnership’¹ had been established: the idea for the play came first, the company, second. This chapter begins by analysing the RSC’s name, costume and logo, and draws comparisons between these key aspects of the company’s identity and those of the Shenandoah Shakespeare Express (SSE), another American theatrical institution that began life as a regional theatre company. It will then explore the RSC’s formation and early years, tracing the development of *Complete Works* from 1981 to 1994.

The issue of names in the RSC needs to be addressed at the outset: in performance, the three actors are addressed by their real forenames. However, regarding their methods in relation to Shakespeare’s plays and legacy in performance and culture, the RSC’s work can be considered as a series of ongoing structured debates between three contrasting stereotypical responses, each of which is represented by one of a trio of characters: Black, the erudite pseudo-intellectual (originated by Jess Winfield), Green, the unsophisticated enthusiast (originated by Adam Long) and Red, the exasperated pragmatist (originated by Singer), who strives to provide balance and keep the peace between his two antithetical colleagues. Named in honour of the colour of their conspicuously contemporary Converse footwear and

¹ Felicia Hardison Londré, ‘California’ in *Shakespeare Companies and Festivals: An International Guide*, eds. Ron Engle, Felicia Hardison Londré and Daniel J. Watermeier (London: Greenwood Press, 1995), p. 54.

matching knee-length sweatpants/breeches, the three performers make their entrance, each sporting the hybrid costume that combines trendy trainers with a derivative of the Elizabethan-style white frilled shirt, breeches and hose. This provides an immediate visual shorthand for audiences, being both traditional and contemporary, and presents a visual parody of the concept of highbrow and lowbrow culture that is entirely in keeping with their purpose, as stated by Austin Tichenor at the end of each *Reduced Shakespeare Company Podcast* episode, of ‘reducing expectations since 1981’.²

This compares with the costumes worn by the SSE, the theatre company founded by Ralph Alan Cohen and Jim Warren in 1988, which would later become the American Shakespeare Center (ASC) and is notable for its theatre, the Blackfriars Playhouse in Staunton, Virginia, the world’s only re-creation of London’s Blackfriars, the indoor playhouse used by the King’s Men for their winter performances until the theatre’s closure in 1642. Paul Menzer notes that

in the early years, the [SSE] members wore Converse Chuck Taylor sneakers. Indeed, the company’s commitment to swift-footed play was branded by a graphic that showed a crown encircling a pair of ubiquitous Chucks (the converse star replaced by a sketch of Shakespeare’s head).³

The RSC wore sneakers in their performances as early as the initial 1987 performances of *Complete Works*, and the SSE formed just a year later. This suggests a possible RSC influence, or, at least, a correlation between the two companies due to this shared costume anachronism, based upon a particular

² Reference to the three RSC characters is complicated by the different versions of *Complete Works* in existence. In the first published version of *Complete Works* (1994), they are named Daniel, Jess and Adam, reflecting the names of the three founders. In the published revision (2007), the script refers to them as Red, Black and Green, with instructions given to other companies who wish to perform the play that, in place of these, they use their own forenames. To differentiate between the fictional RSC roles in performance and my reference to their real-life counterparts in personal interviews, I will refer to the characters by their forenames (Daniel, Jess and Adam) and the interviewees by their surnames (Singer, Winfield and Long).

³ Paul Menzer, *Shakespeare in the Theatre: The American Shakespeare Center* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2017), pp. 96-7.

cultural image at a specific time. Contemporary theatre-makers such as the UK open-air touring company, The Pantaloons, have also adopted this footwear motif, which indicates that the Converse image continues to possess cultural cachet, along with the power to deliver a visual shorthand of high/low subversion for audiences.

The SSE did not use early modern costumes, but instead wore a base of black jeans and black turtlenecks, accessorized with vests, crowns and sashes. This shows their early determination to root their Shakespearean productions in the present, reflected through the combination of simple costumes and iconic sneakers, which also represent a practical choice for the physical, breakneck performance style, which the SSE and RSC have in common. The parallels do not, however, end at their footwear choices; firstly, like the RSC, '[t]he SSE had no permanent playing space and the sneakers neatly conveyed both the pace and practice of their actors' express delivery.'⁴ Secondly, as Menzer further explains, '[o]ne early rejected name for the SSE – a name chosen to suggest, according to Cohen, “wholesome American straightforwardness” – was the ‘Un-Royal Shakespeare Company’.⁵

The RSC's founders, Singer, Winfield and Long, also experimented with alternative titles for their troupe, including 'Condensed Cream of Shakespeare Soup',⁶ before requisitioning the letters synonymous with Stratford-upon-Avon's Royal Shakespeare Company. Exploring this blatant act of appropriation, Douglas Lanier deduces that, '[a]s the acronym RSC suggests, the Reduced Shakespeare Company is a carnivalesque inversion of the Royal Shakespeare Company, unabashedly pop American'.⁷ Singer has described the initialism as 'a compliment, as it seemed at the time, of sharing the same initials',⁸ given that he was a fan of the Royal Shakespeare Company from his time as a drama student in London. Taken literally, his use of the word 'sharing' is not so much a pastiche as a well-meaning acknowledgement of how the RSC

⁴ Menzer, p. 97.

⁵ Ibid, pp. 99-100.

⁶ Daniel Singer qtd. in Jess Winfield, 'Reduced Shakespeare Company 30th Anniversary Retrospective', 30 August 2011 <<https://vimeo.com/28343530>> [Accessed 10 April 2018].

⁷ Douglas Lanier, *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 104.

⁸ Singer, 30 August 2011.

sought to honour the Shakespeare establishment. However, it seems clear that their choice of name simultaneously represented their satirising of its concomitant institutions and conventions.

The RSC continued to use these initials after Reed Martin and Austin Tichenor became the new Managing Partners in 1990 and 1992 respectively. Tichenor explains that they have meaning beyond the ironic evocation of the *other* RSC: the name's purpose is not to describe what the RSC are parodying or opposing, but instead what the company themselves represent, namely, three actors attempting to perform plays with many characters, which audiences thus expect to require large ensemble casts. Tichenor suggests that 'on first blush, you either get it or you don't'⁹ and that, when the RSC appear onstage, audiences who have not inferred the reason for the name, suddenly realise the joke behind it: 'there's only three of them, so they're reduced'.¹⁰ His explanation suggests that the 'Reduced' part of their name applies primarily to the 'Company', reduced as they are in performer numbers, rather than to 'Shakespeare' and his work. The retention of the 'Shakespeare' component throughout their history not only reinforces the recognition of their brand for audiences but also indicates their commitment to the abridgement of large, highbrow topics, of which Shakespeare was simply the first.

⁹ Austin Tichenor, Personal interview, Skype, 30 March 2018..

¹⁰ Ibid.

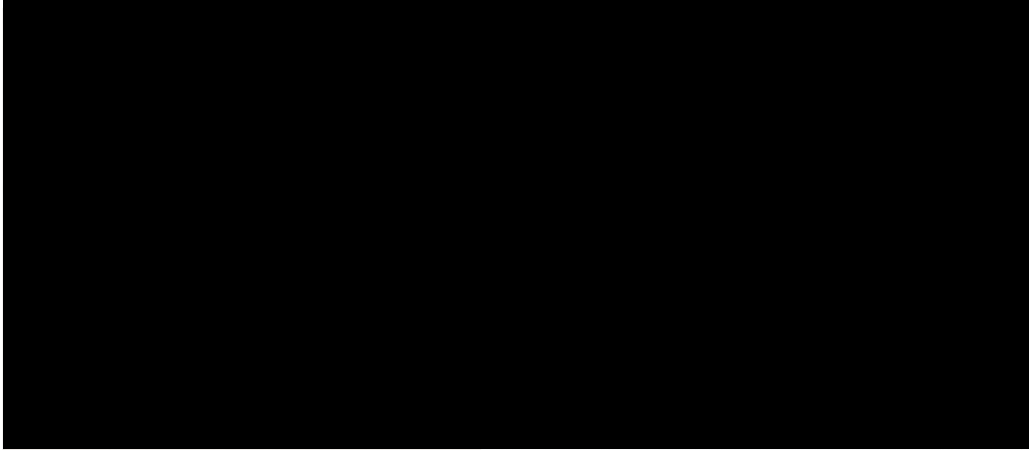


Figure 1.1 The alternative company title and original Converse logo [left] and the Shenandoah Shakespeare Express 1993 Season Program [right].

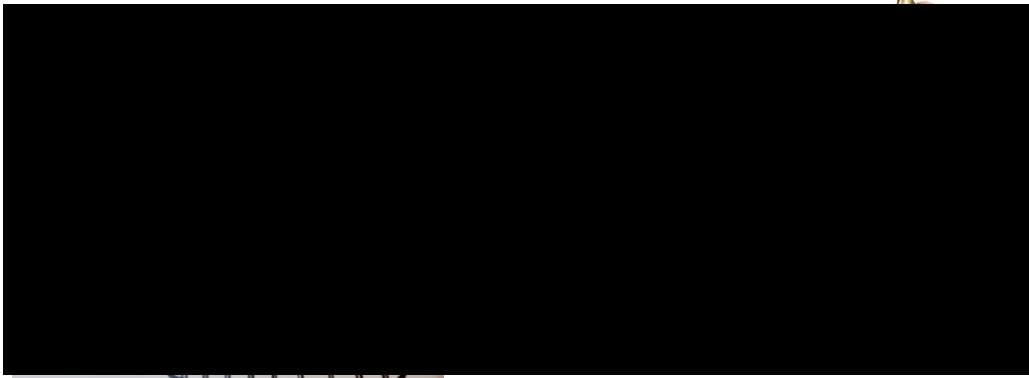


Figure 1.2 1992 poster for the RSC's eleven-month run at the Arts Theatre in London [left]. Publicity image for the 2015 revival of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged) (revised)* featuring the UK cast wearing their Converse trainers [right].

These images suggest a correlation between the RSC and SSE (later, the ASC)'s incorporation of modern references and techniques into Shakespearean performance. Describing productions at the ASC's Blackfriars Theatre, Menzer argues that these 'take place [...] in the cross-hatched history of England and America – and between the now and then'.¹¹ Indeed, in constructing a visual synthesis that merges Shakespeare's image with examples of contemporary fashion and popular culture, the RSC and SSE's emblems and costumes might also be interpreted as postmodern hybrids, which blend the England of the past with contemporary America. Clearly, the RSC and SSE's choice of footwear made the disjunction between the contemporary and early modern immediately obvious to audiences, although Menzer suggests that '[w]hile the sneakers helped to convey the company's scrappy approach to Shakespeare,

¹¹ Menzer, p. 6.

they also help to convey its ideological commitments'.¹² For example, he describes how a "storm-the-barricades' rhetoric showed up in the company's programmes and brochures that spoke of 'blowing the cobwebs' off Shakespeare or – borrowing a then-current MTV locution – offering Shakespeare 'Unplugged'.¹³ The RSC have made similar noises in their programme notes, describing themselves as 'The Bad Boys of Abridgement', clarifying that, in fact, *they* are '[t]he RSC (that's the Reduced Shakespeare Company), not that other RSC that stole our initials', and promising to 'take you on a roller-coaster ride through all thirty-seven of Shakespeare's plays in under two hours'.¹⁴ This choice of words reflects the rapid-fire delivery and physical speed with which the SSE and RSC reimagined and performed Shakespeare's plays for contemporary audiences raised on a diet of Looney Tunes and Disney animations.

Despite the SSE's early commitment to costuming that was indicative of their anti-establishment ideology and performance style, Menzer concludes that '[o]ver the decades, the Chuck Taylors [...] came to look less like choices born of necessity than faux naïf calculation. Less DIY and more like an aging hipster in a pre-distressed Pixies t-shirt'.¹⁵ One key difference between the companies is that the SSE chose 'to transform their look and approach'¹⁶ and reject a name with a direct connection to the Royal Shakespeare Company. The *other* RSC, meanwhile, retained the incongruous footwear along with the name, signalling commitment to their particular hybrid form of Shakespearean parody and homage. A further distinction between the two companies is in their choice of performance location. Although they continue to tour productions, the ASC ultimately chose to centralise their work at the Blackfriars. Menzer suggests that, '[b]y adopting the procedures, protocols, and rhetoric of regional theatre operations, the ASC now smuggles its "revolutionary" impulse within the banalities of institutionalized American

¹² Ibid, p. 97.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Reed Martin and Austin Tichenor, Programme notes for *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged) [revised]* (Newbury Productions, 2015), p. 2.

¹⁵ Menzer, p. 100.

¹⁶ Ibid.

theatre'.¹⁷ The RSC, by contrast, have never had a theatrical base, despite having established themselves as a prominent theatre brand that regularly returns to specific venues and locations, such as the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. This is in part explained by the varied whereabouts of their members, scattered as they are across America and Britain, but is also because they have continued to operate solely as a touring company, using multiple troupes to perform different plays in repertory.¹⁸

As well as their original name and costumes, the SSE changed their logo when they became the ASC. Menzer explains that, '[t]oday, the ASC uses a quite different graphic than the crudely drawn, crown-encircled Chucks. In its promotional materials, the Center uses a silhouetted chandelier to represent those that illuminate their reconstruction of the Blackfriars Playhouse'.¹⁹ The RSC, by contrast, have not only continued to use their characteristic logo, but have adapted it over time to suit the different requirements of each production. However, the synergy between the RSC's onstage appearance and offstage publicity was originally based on their Converse trainers, which were included on the poster and programme for their 1992 run at the Arts Centre in London. For this iteration of *Complete Works*, their second series of performances in the UK, Tichenor recalls that 'the programme was in the shape of the [Converse] boot',²⁰ meaning that each audience member received a personal souvenir featuring the most distinctive part of the company's costume.

This image was subsequently replaced by their 'Groucho Shakes'²¹ pastiche of the Droeshout portrait, as Tichenor explains: 'the first time we discovered it was when [journalist] Bernard Levin wrote an op-ed in *The Times* about us in 1992. The artwork that they created for that article was the Droeshout portrait with Groucho glasses drawn on. We looked at that and

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 102.

¹⁸ In 1995, for instance, Long led a UK company to tour *Complete Works* and *America*, while Martin, Tichenor and new member, Matt Croke, performed a six-week run of *America* and their most recent play, *The Bible: The Complete Word of God (abridged)* in repertory at the Pittsburgh Public Theatre.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 100.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Tichenor, 30 March 2018.

thought it was a great logo'.²² As with their use of Holden's review in their subsequent publicity, this demonstrates the company's enterprising ability to appropriate critical responses to their work and utilise them to enhance their brand. The RSC subsequently purchased the rights to the adapted Droeshout image, as depicted in *The Times*, and trademarked it as part of their identity. It accurately summarised their 'Marx Brothers approach to Shakespeare: there's three of us and we're taking a sacred Margaret Dumont-like text and having our way with it'.²³ Referring to Dumont, the comic foil to the Marx Brothers in many of their films, Tichenor's comments emphasise the important function of their publicity materials in reflecting their onstage aesthetic. For audiences, this gave a further clue to the company's vaudevillian approach to Shakespeare. These principles have changed very little since the RSC's formation and, despite their work being performed and translated internationally, the company continue to tour plays involving three-person ensembles, following the onstage company structure established by the hierarchy of Daniel, Jess and Adam from the first performance of *Complete Works* in 1987.

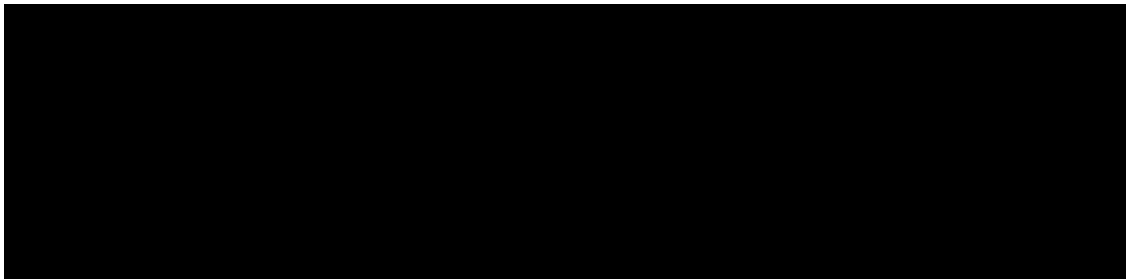


Figure 1.3 The evolution of Groucho Shakes (left to right): The original 1993 image; the Groucho Marx/George Washington mash-up used for the book cover of *The Complete History of America (abridged)* (1993); Marx combined with the MGM Lion for the front cover of *Completely Hollywood (abridged)* (2010); the most recent version used for the 2017 UK tour of *William Shakespeare's Long Lost First Play (abridged)* (2016).

In keeping with this enduring aesthetic, the RSC have used modified versions of the 'Groucho Shakes' logo throughout their history, reflecting their consistent approach to reduction, irrespective of the subject matter. Having first used it for their 1993 run at the Edinburgh Fringe, they later substituted Shakespeare's face for George Washington's in *America* and the MGM Lion's in

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

Completely Hollywood (abridged). This not only shows the continuing influence of the Marx Brothers but, crucially, also strengthens the recognisability of their 'intellectual vaudeville' brand. The poster for their 2017 UK tour of *Long Lost* featured an updated version of the 1993 image. This, according to Tichenor, 'felt more pasted on. It looked almost as though Droeshout drew it'.²⁴ The fact that this most recent logo appears as less of a caricature than its predecessor reflects *Long Lost's* shift away from the more satirical stance presented by *Complete Works*.

Tichenor's language also suggests a form of textual intercourse between the source text and adapter, conveyed in his description of the RSC 'having their way'²⁵ with Shakespeare through the process of adaptation.²⁶ This form of connection is theoretically conceptualised by Adam Hansen and Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr. through 'the idea of Shakespeare as a vampire, feeding on texts and also being fed upon and breeding a new generation of vampires. Shakespeare's textual life is prolonged by those he feeds and feeds upon though the process of adaptation'.²⁷ Viewed thus, the RSC are decidedly vampiric in the way they swoop upon Shakespeare for his resources and are sustained by his work, which, in turn, allows Shakespeare further life through their parodic engagement with him.

The Early Years: From Hat-Passing to Publication

▪ 1981-1984: Renaissance Faires and Half-Hour *Hamlets*

Complete Works began life as a four-person, half-hour *Hamlet*, adapted by Singer in 1981 for performance at the Northern Renaissance Pleasure Faire (RPFN) in Novato, California, the first of which was held during Autumn 1967.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ During the seven Marx Brothers films in which she appeared, Dumont portrayed wealthy widows or dowagers whom Groucho wooed for their money. The analogy which Tichenor draws between the RSC 'having their way' with Shakespeare and Groucho romancing Dumont therefore implies that they take a 'Marx Brothers' attitude towards the playwright: his work is old, profitable and ripe for exploitation.

²⁷ Adam Hansen and Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr, 'Introduction' in *Shakespearean Echoes*, eds. Adam Hansen and Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr., (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 15.

This was among the first such events, which re-enact the setting, customs and entertainment of a documented period, most commonly from sixteenth and seventeenth-century England. Although initially confined to America, the *faires* have since spread internationally across Europe, Canada and Australia.²⁸ Each is set in a specific historical location and requires those who attend and perform to remain ‘in character’²⁹ for the duration of the *faire*. For instance, the Renaissance Pleasure Faire of Southern California (RPFS) recreates the London market of ‘Port Deptford’ during the late sixteenth-century. First held in Spring 1963 and the earliest of its kind, the RPFS was held at the Paramount Ranch in Agoura Hills, California, which would later be the site for the RSC’s 1987 premiere of *Complete Works*.

The ‘personal, political, and cultural uses’ to which Americans have put an English past which, ‘for the most part, is *not* their own’ has, according to Rachel Lee Rubin, ‘changed over the course of the *faire*’s four-decade run’.³⁰ She explains that, ‘in the early 1960s, as the *faire* began to establish itself, it functioned as a resounding slap in the face of 1950s conventions of Cold War bellicosity, compulsory female domesticity, stifling anticommunism, and narrow ideals of a nuclear family’.³¹ However, this changed over time and she argues that, ‘[i]n many ways, the Renaissance *faire* is a mainstream, family affair in the twenty-first century, a largely corporate institution whose “brand” extends far beyond California, where the *faires* originated’.³² The RSC’s development mirrors this international expansion away from countercultural beginnings in their native California into a family-orientated brand.

Meanwhile, a parallel cultural shift was taking place in the UK during the 1960s, which included the work of playwright Tom Stoppard. His first major success, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (1966), is an existentialist exploration of Hamlet’s two friends, which creates offstage moments for these

²⁸ Throughout this thesis, I will refer to the ‘fares’ in the lower-case and with an ‘e’ inserted, with the exception of section titles, named Renaissance fares and references to other types of ‘fair’. This follows Rachel Lee Rubin’s usage of the word in *Well Met: Renaissance Faires & The American Counterculture* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2012).

²⁹ Adam Long, Personal interview, Skype, 29 September 2017.

³⁰ Rachel Lee Rubin, *Well Met: Renaissance Faires and the American Counterculture* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2012), p. 3.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 4.

³² *Ibid*, p. 3.

two minor characters that intersect with Shakespeare's play.³³ Marjorie Garber asserts that Stoppard's text 'both interprets and upends *Hamlet*. It is *Hamlet* inside out, so to speak, seen from the green room or the wrong end of a telescope'.³⁴ Paul Prescott also cites it as an example of 'decentring'³⁵ Shakespeare's work in theatrical adaptation, meaning 'the act of refocusing the play away from its customary centre; not necessarily *Hamlet* without the Prince, but certainly *Hamlet* in which the Prince is not the main object of attention'.³⁶ In the second act of *Complete Works*, the RSC focus exclusively on *Hamlet* and employ a number of theatrical devices to satirise the play's cultural and scholarly reputation, both reaffirming and decentring its position as '[p]erhaps the greatest play ever written in the English language'.³⁷

Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr. argues that *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* constitutes a 'deconstructive adaptation of *Hamlet*',³⁸ that is, its narrative inhabits that of Shakespeare and, owing to its intertextuality, implicitly questions perceptions of originality. This is an equally apt description of the RSC's approach to the play, which dismantles *Hamlet* through a wide range of references to its citation and use in popular culture and academic analyses, including a brief reference to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's extratextual history beyond Shakespeare's play:

JESS: [...] Right. We start off with the guard scene, so we need Bernardo and Horatio.

DANIEL: We'll need Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

³³ *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* was first staged at the 1966 Edinburgh Fringe Festival and forms part of a continuum of *Hamlet* adaptations which shift the focus away from the Prince onto Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, either for comic purposes, or to offer an alternative perspective on Shakespeare's narrative. Stoppard's adaptation follows W.S. Gilbert's satirical play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* (1891) and influenced *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Undead* (2009), an intertextual vampire film.

³⁴ Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare and Modern Culture* (New York: Anchor Books, 2008), p. 227.

³⁵ Paul Prescott, 'Shakespeare and the Theatre' in *Shakespeare's Creative Legacies: Artists, Writers, Performers, Readers*, eds. Paul Edmondson and Peter Holbrook (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 17.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Jess Borgeson, Adam Long and Daniel Singer, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)* (New York: Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, 1994), p. 67

³⁸ Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr., 'The Immortal Vampire of Stratford-upon-Avon' in *Shakespeare Echoes*, eds. Adam Hansen and Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 72.

JESS: Nah, they've got their own play, we can skip them.³⁹

It is important to acknowledge here the influence of *Hamlet* on the company and its significance in their formation. Tom Stoppard followed *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* with two further Hamlet-focused adaptations, *Fifteen-Minute Hamlet* (1976) and *Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth* (1979). The former, which condenses Shakespeare's play into thirteen minutes, offered Singer and Winfield an initial shared experience; it had given Winfield his first role at the University of California, Berkeley, and, during his time as a UK drama student at Guildford School of Acting, Singer had seen and been inspired by Stoppard's play. He recalls that he first saw it

in London around 1979. The actors played their heavily-edited version of *Hamlet* with a detached sincerity – not trying to be funny, but just delivering their lines in a matter-of-fact way – and the audience roared with laughter. I thought, 'why is this so funny? We're watching a gut-wrenching, tragic drama, but when reduced to minimal plot and essential – and largely familiar – dialogue, it's hilarious'. The effect surprised me.⁴⁰

The vaudevillian tone of serious and playful in which the RSC's material is rooted has echoes of Singer's fascination with the incongruity between deadpan delivery and audience amusement. Indeed, in their acknowledgments written for the 1994 published version of *Complete Works*, the founders credit 'Tom Stoppard for bringing Bardian abridgment into the modern idiom'⁴¹ and his work unquestionably played as significant a role in shaping their adaptation methodology and performance style as did the experience of performing at Renaissance faires. Singer surmises that the initial reaction to his own reduced *Hamlet*

³⁹ Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 61.

⁴⁰ Daniel Singer, Personal interview, E-mail, 5 April 2016.

⁴¹ Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. vii.

was that the show succeeded on a variety of levels. People who knew *Hamlet* saw that it was a clever reduction; people who didn't were amused by our highbrow clowning done in the guise of a melodramatic 'tragedy'. Kids liked us because we were like a cartoon. Educators liked us because we actually acted out a Cliff-Notes version of a great play.⁴²

Singer held auditions for his half-hour *Hamlet* in August 1981 and cast Winfield in the title role, Michael Fleming as Claudius, and Barbara Reinertson as Ophelia and Gertrude. It is worth noting that the trio dynamic was not an original component within the company's foundation, despite becoming an intrinsic part of the RSC's onstage setup in the later performances of *Complete Works* and, indeed, every subsequent show to date. Furthermore, Long – who had unsuccessfully auditioned for Singer – joined only after Reinertson broke her ankle on the second weekend of the faire, stepping in to perform her roles. For the duration of the production's run at the RPFN, they shared the roles, with Reinertson performing on crutches. This culminated 'with a double-cast "Dueling Ophelias" extravaganza for the final performance'⁴³ of *Hamlet*, after which Long permanently replaced Reinertson and became a full-time company member.⁴⁴ How different might the company have been if Long had not joined or if they had continued as a mixed-gender, four-person ensemble? Undoubtedly, their performances would feature a decrease in male cross-

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 117.

⁴⁴ Although having consistently been all-male troupe, the RSC have nevertheless used female performers during their career. For instance, their fourth founding member, Sa Winfield (née Thompson), was the long-running costume and props designer, thus enabling a key aspect of the company's success: rapid-fire costume changes. She became a full partner in 1988 and has also appeared as a performer, including the title role of *Lucinda, Wood Nymph of the Glade*. This was performed during the RSC's short-lived incarnation as the Abbreviated Ballet Theatre. More recently, she took Long's roles, alongside Singer and Winfield, in a May 2012 performance of the original RSC *Hamlet* in Irwindale, California. This marked both the Original Renaissance Pleasure Faire's 50th Anniversary and thirty years since the company had first performed *Hamlet*. The performance featured a fourth RSC member: American Sign Language (ASL) Interpreter, Christine Bartley Williams. This enterprising theatrical device encourages 'open access' and assists in the translation of the RSC's material. Moreover, rather than being separate, Williams was embedded within the performance by wearing the same Renaissance faire costume as the three RSC performers.

dressing and three-way squabbles, at the very least. Singer reflects that

if Adam had never joined the show, I have no doubt that our *Hamlet* would have come and gone like other faire shows. *Complete Works* certainly would never have happened. It was obvious that the Daniel/Jess/Adam combo had the right pixie-dust to create a hit.⁴⁵

In 1982, the company went their separate ways: Singer, to the University of Washington; Winfield, to complete his degree at Berkeley and Long, to the Portland Center for Performing Arts. However, Singer and Long kept in touch and co-authored a two-man production for the following summer. Following a contest to determine whether they would perform Singer's *Macbeth* or Long's *Romeo and Juliet*, the latter won, with Singer serving as both Romeo and narrator, thus creating what would later become the opening section of *Complete Works*. They toured this production extensively at a number of venues which, according to the company, included 'fairs, festivals, weddings, bar mitzvahs [and] bake sales',⁴⁶ illustrating the fact that the duo honed their material by presenting it within a number of different contexts and to an eclectic range of audience types.

The performers with whom the RSC shared their stage also played an important role in developing their work as a non-traditional theatre company. Lanier draws a comparison between the performance styles prevalent amongst Renaissance faire participants, and the traditions that inspire them. He suggests that this had a significant and lasting impact on the RSC, explaining how '[t]he fast-paced, participatory mode of performance demanded by this venue, not unlike the innyard performances of Elizabethan England, has remained a hallmark of the company's style'.⁴⁷ Long explains that their 'influences in those early days were more like stand-up comics and jugglers and street performers rather than actors'.⁴⁸ The correlation between stand-up

⁴⁵ Daniel Singer, Personal interview, E-mail, 18 April 2018.

⁴⁶ Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 117.

⁴⁷ Lanier, p. 102.

⁴⁸ Long, 29 September 2017.

comedy and Shakespeare performance is especially apparent when applying parallels between techniques such as comedians' and performers' use of direct address and interaction with audiences, and recalls the historical precedent of the comic actors, Will Kempe and Robert Armin, who played the fools in *The Lord Chamberlain's and King's Men*.

Stephen Purcell has discussed how Shakespeare's Globe has hosted comedy events and employed a number of actors with a background in stand-up, as well as the recent history of celebrity comedians appearing in other productions, from Ken Dodd to Dawn French.⁴⁹ Purcell explains that, '[i]n the Elizabethan theatre, there was no divide between popular comedians and classically trained actors; Will Kempe worked alongside the equally well-loved Richard Burbage, and actors played both comic and tragic roles. The clowns were part of an ensemble of actors, and as such, plays were written as ensemble pieces'.⁵⁰ The Renaissance faires in which the RSC operated were not unlike this environment, the barriers between highbrow actors and lowbrow comedians being less prevalent than in the more traditional performance spaces of the twentieth century.

These influences, along with early experiences with different types of entertainers at Renaissance faires, shaped the way in which the RSC interacted with audiences. For instance, Long recalls a conversation with a comedian, which helped to define the difference between acting in traditional and non-traditional theatre spaces:

The thing about a performance, as an actor, is that there's a fourth wall and you're standing in front of an audience and presenting something; but, as a stand-up comic, there's much more a vibe of sitting around the campfire together. When somebody gets up to tell a story or sing a song, it's their turn to do their bit and then they sit back down again. So, you're actually one of the audience. There

⁴⁹ Stephen Purcell, *Popular Shakespeare: Simulation and Subversion on the Modern Stage* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 81-3, 107-9, 113-15.

⁵⁰ Stephen Purcell, *Shakespeare as Popular Comedy*, (unpublished master's dissertation, University of Kent, 2004), p. 15.

wasn't any real delineation or difference between us and the audience, which, later, when we were working in theatres, is why we started sitting out in the audience and spending a lot of time going out into the audience.⁵¹

This suggests that, in terms of audience interaction, the mutable performance area did not matter to the RSC: the principles of direct engagement and an emphasis on participation remained the same. Long describes a Renaissance faire audience as 'transient',⁵² and getting them to the theatre space involved a form of hustle, explaining that

the only way you could get an audience to come in was if you actually went out, talked to people as they went past, and dragged them to the stage, so your performance would start ten minutes before you took to the actual stage. By that time, you'd already spoken to most of the people who were going to be in your audience because you'd accosted them in the street.⁵³

Long's recollection of the company cajoling audience members by all available means evokes the language of force, almost bordering on coercion, and creates an interesting terminology and, indeed, a paradigm for audience participation: the shifting, inconsistent nature of the 'transient' Renaissance faire's audience makes them the centre of the performance's universe, rather than the performers themselves. Purcell argues that '[i]t is a defining characteristic of the illegitimate tradition that the audience will be addressed directly by the performer, and one which sets it apart from a more Stanislavskian approach to Shakespearean performance, in which actors are forbidden to acknowledge the presence of the audience'.⁵⁴ Long's account correlates with this tradition described by Purcell, suggesting that the lambs (audience) were brought,

⁵¹ Long, 29 September 2017.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Purcell, *Shakespeare as Popular Comedy*, p. 7.

sometimes unwillingly, to the slaughter (performance), rather than flocking in admiration or expectation of cultural enrichment. His description of the RSC's early experiences with outdoor audience members also evokes Peter Brook's description of spectatorship and 'the absence of [...] style'⁵⁵ within what he terms as 'Rough Theatre',⁵⁶ of which a Renaissance faire is clearly an example, owing to its creation of links between audience and performers in an informal, natural setting:

The Rough Theatre doesn't pick and choose: if the audience is restive, then it is obviously more important to holler at the trouble makers – or improvise a gag – than try to preserve the unity of style of the scene.⁵⁷

Long further explains that building a consistent character, who could be used to attract audience members and then perform in the production itself, was an integral part of the company's initial success. He describes his personal experience of developing the Fool figure who would eventually become Adam in *Complete Works*:

Renaissance faires are meant to be a recreation of an Elizabethan country village so, even when you're on the street, you're supposed to be playing authentic Elizabethan characters. In the first year, I called myself Peter Quince but, after that, I didn't want to take the name completely from Shakespeare. Everybody said it looked like I was using semaphore when I was onstage because I was always using my hands to point at things, so I changed my name to Ajax Semaphore. We developed these characters that we could use when we were talking to people on the streets and then, of course, once we got on the stage people expected us still to be those characters.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Peter Brook, *The Empty Stage* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2008), p. 74.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 74-5.

⁵⁸ Long, 29 September 2017.

Long's chosen alter-ego suggests a connection between the RSC's physical approach and Adam's affinity with a particular Shakespearean character type, which aligns him most closely with the Fool. This heightened theatricality is achieved by using the name of Shakespeare's Ajax, the imposing, yet dim-witted Greek warrior of *Troilus and Cressida*, alongside the surname 'Semaphore' to conjure an image of waving flags as communicators. Thus, Long created a title for himself to designate a character based on a parodic combination of Elizabethan actor and enthusiastic attention seeker.

In *Complete Works*, although Adam fulfils the role of a chaotic and somewhat disruptive force, encouraging his colleagues to engage physically, rather than textually, with Shakespeare's work, he tries nonetheless to promote the company's mission: to make it more accessible for their audience. Moreover, the structure and narrative progression of the Rude Mechanicals in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, who unite to attempt the performance of a section from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, might itself serve as a useful parallel in representing how the RSC developed as an unconventional troupe of rough players trying to stage the work of an exalted but long-dead writer, and help to explain why this structure has served the company effectively since their formation. Brook, for instance, argues that '[t]he strongest comedy is rooted in archetypes, in mythology, in basic recurrent situations; and inevitably it is deeply embedded in social tradition'.⁵⁹ Long's account helps to demonstrate how important the performance environment of the Renaissance faire was towards the development of the RSC's three different comic archetypes in *Complete Works*. In the company's case, these social traditions were also those of the faire: rough, transient and, most significantly, cradled within modern American culture's fictional, mythologised recreation of an English cultural past.

Throughout their history the RSC have retained the use of American accents in performance, even when the actors themselves are not American.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Brook, p. 78.

⁶⁰ For instance, during the 2017 UK tour of *Long Lost*, British actors Matthew Pearson, James Maudsley and James Percy, performed with American accents. The conceit was underlined by

A central proposition within each of their productions is that of three Americans presenting a crass reduction of an impossibly large topic, whilst relying for success on their knowledge of popular culture, rather than on thorough research into their subject matter. They also sought to capitalise on how audiences outside America might enjoy seeing American culture, as well as Shakespeare, ridiculed or parodied. Singer notes, for instance, that ‘as American satirists, we found it vital, when performing outside the USA, to make jokes critical of life in America, because audiences love to see America taken down a peg’.⁶¹ This is particularly apparent in the RSC’s success in the UK, where audience members – some of whom may view Shakespeare as exclusively English cultural and intellectual property – might enjoy witnessing the self-aware disparagement of US-influenced Shakespeare by three American-accented actors. Shakespeare’s plays and twentieth-century American popular entertainment, such as Disney, are undoubtedly cultural superpowers, and one of the RSC’s main resources is the comic energy produced by tearing down these idols. Consequently, the company satirise modern American cultural dominance and, in *Complete Works* specifically, imagine how British audiences might digest a fast-food reduction of Shakespeare’s work.

▪ **1985 – 1988: Passing the Hat and Finding the Fringe**

The RSC developed their performance techniques and archetypes among a milieu of non-traditional theatre performers, with whom they competed for the attention (and money) of audience members. As Singer and Long discovered when ‘sharing a performance venue with the world-renowned juggling team *Sean and Robert* [...] these master manipulators made a seemingly lucrative living by passing the hat and soliciting donations after

‘Episode 528: LongLost UK Cast’ of the *RSC Podcast*, in an interview between Tichenor, who directed the tour, and the three actors. They each spoke in an American accent throughout and described their fictional American life and backgrounds as though these were factual. This parodies, to some extent, method actors who remain ‘in character’ during the development and promotion of a film or television series, such as British actor Christian Bale’s decision to retain his American accent during press tours of *The Dark Knight Trilogy* (2005-12), in which he plays American superhero Batman.

⁶¹ Daniel Singer, Personal interview, E-mail, 25 August 2015.

their performances'.⁶² These experiences and interactions led to the company introducing a more literal form of hustle into their performances. In the appendix to *Complete Works*, they describe this in terms of an invented equation: 'j/sec x mph = \$ → H'.⁶³ This stands for 'jokes per second times breakneck pace equals dollar bills in hand', a formula produced by the duo's realisation that audiences would be more likely to appreciate their work and pay larger sums if they compressed more material into as short a show as possible.

This development not only helped transform the RSC's act from, as they describe it, 'a non-profit weekend hobby into an elaborate scheme to purloin spare change from feeble-minded yahoos'⁶⁴ but also proved instrumental in shaping the opening and closing sections of *Complete Works*. The first scene of the play introduces Jess as a 'caricature academic [who] lamenting falling cultural standards, rapidly descends into fire-and-brimstone evangelism'⁶⁵ and finally into an open plea for donations:

JESS: We descend among you on a mission from God and the literary muse, to spread the holy word of the Bard to the masses. [...] A future where this book (*indicating the 'Complete Works'*) will be found in every hotel room in the world! This is my dream, ladies and gentlemen, and it begins here, tonight. Join us! Join us in taking those first steps down the path toward the brave new world of intellectual redemption by opening your hearts.

(DANIEL picks up a plate and begins to pass it among the audience, soliciting donations.)

⁶² Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 117.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Purcell, p. 118.

Yes, please open your hearts – and your pocketbooks!⁶⁶

In this speech, the RSC satirise bardolatry – extreme admiration for Shakespeare’s life and work – by likening it to a form of religious worship through Jess’s fervent declaration that (through *Complete Works*) Shakespeare’s work will soon ‘be found in every hotel room in the world’,⁶⁷ a parodic reference to Gideons International, the evangelical Wisconsin Christian association primarily involved in the free, international distribution of Bibles, an endeavour which began at the Superior Hotel in Superior, Montana during 1908. The passing of a collection plate amongst the audience imitates and parodies this practice during church services, further suggesting that their celebration of Shakespeare’s ‘holy word’⁶⁸ is tantamount to a religious experience. The RSC’s congregation will already have paid for their tickets and, therefore, Jess’s ironic suggestion that they pay extra to show their appreciation for Shakespeare’s work further satirises the monetisation of the playwright by institutions such as the Royal Shakespeare Company where, after attending a performance, the audience exit pursued by a gift shop.

Furthermore, the RSC parody their own outdoor act of passing-the-hat by bringing this practice to the increasingly large indoor theatre venues in which they performed after their success in Edinburgh. The final three sentences of the speech establish the company’s satirical intentions right from the start of the play:

JESS: Give us your cash, if we be friends, and deduct it when the tax year ends! On with the show and may the Bard be with you! Thank you, and Hallelujah!⁶⁹

Here, they succeed in lampooning three key groups with an investment in the influence and significance of Shakespeare across popular culture. Jess frames

⁶⁶ Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 5.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

the celebration of Shakespeare's genius as a religious sermon, first asking for donations, paraphrasing Puck's epilogue from *Dream*, and calling to mind those who primarily view Shakespeare as a financial commodity to be plundered. Next, he appropriates the well-known *Star Wars* motto 'may the Force be with you', which, in performance, the actor playing Black delivers while making the equally famous Vulcan salute from *Star Trek*. This insider-joke confusion between the two science-fiction franchises is emblematic of the troupe's alleged incompetence, suggesting that they are just as uninformed about popular culture as they are about Shakespeare. Also, the reference offers a gentle mockery of those who are intent on proving Shakespeare's continuing, all-pervasive influence on popular culture. Finally, the celebratory and evangelistic overtones of 'Hallelujah' further call to mind the practice of bardolatry and the zealous fervour with which some revere the playwright and his work, to the exclusion of other artists.

After completing his degree at Berkeley, Winfield returned to the company in 1985 to perform *Hamlet* and *R&J* in repertory at the RPFs. This is when the show formally became a 'pass-the-hat' act which, according to Singer, 'dramatically changed our style'.⁷⁰ Having previously been paid only \$40 a day for their performances, they decided not only to adopt this financial practice, but also, influenced by jugglers, stand-up comedians and circus acts, to integrate all the appropriate comic techniques to stimulate increasing excitement as their show progressed towards its climax, and thus, they hoped, make their audiences more willing to part with money. The company's final promise in *Complete Works* to perform *Hamlet* fast, faster and backwards is clearly rooted in their desire for the show to culminate in a spectacular feat of theatricality. Singer admits that, although it was financially motivated, it made the performance funnier and forced them to hone their skills.

At the time of Winfield's return, *R&J* was still being performed by Singer and Long only, and in *Hamlet*, a fourth actor, David Springhorn, was brought in to play both Claudius and the Ghost. Singer recalls that 'the *Hamlet* encore had always been part of the show – going shorter and then even shorter – but

⁷⁰ Singer, 30 August 2011.

the backwards encore wasn't born until we became a trio'.⁷¹ The three-man company began when they were told, on a Sunday morning at 7.30 a.m., that Springhorn's wife had gone into labour: they were due onstage at 10 a.m. In the intervening two and a half hours, they blocked the show for three actors, with Long taking Springhorn's roles. Singer and Winfield reflect that the visual joke in *Hamlet* where Long has not enough time to change costumes, sprang directly from 'our experience in our very first show as a trio'.⁷²

In 1987, it was suggested to Singer, Winfield and Long that their physical comedy style and fast-paced reductions, honed for Renaissance faire audiences, might equally be suited to the environment of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, which features a similar carnival atmosphere, involving performers in rounding up audiences and persuading them to watch a fuller version of their performances.⁷³ *R&J* and *Hamlet* gave the RSC a forty-minute show, so they needed to add twenty minutes, which, they decided, would encompass the rest of Shakespeare's canon and enable them to take the resulting hour-long production to Edinburgh. They divided up responsibility for reducing the other thirty-five plays: Singer (Histories), Winfield (Tragedies) and Long (Comedies) and wrote a two-minute sketch of every play. On reading these through, they found them to be unsatisfactory, especially the comedies, whereupon they decided to try reducing these to a single play, an idea deemed strong enough to become part of their developing script.

Having been accepted to perform at Edinburgh even before the script's

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Fringe performers who were particularly influential on the RSC included the British duo, the National Theatre of Brent, whose first production, in 1980, was a reduced version of *The Charge of the Light Brigade*. The company's name is a riff on another British theatrical institution. The company's principal member is its writer and artistic director, Desmond Olivier Dingle (played by Patrick Barlow), whose name further parodies Laurence Olivier, the first artistic director of the National Theatre. He is joined by an assistant – referred to by Dingle as 'my entire company' – who has been played during the company's existence by Jim Broadbent (as Wallace), Robert Austin (as Bernard), and John Ramm (as Raymond Box). *The Charge of the Light Brigade* parodied Alfred, Lord Tennyson's 1854 narrative poem of the same title by enacting the poem's refrain 'Into the valley of Death / Rode the six hundred' with two actors. Barlow later adapted *The 39 Steps* as a comic farce for a four-person company. The production also played at the Criterion Theatre and became the second longest-running West End comedy, after *Complete Works*.

completion, the RSC also decided to include a metatheatrical focus on the enterprise that they were undertaking, namely the process of three performers who are striving to condense Shakespeare's thirty-seven plays into a one-hour production. The company's initial play scripts indicate that they were predominantly focused on condensing these into short scenes which could be performed by three people and would involve some degree of audience participation. Moreover, these early drafts deviate from Shakespeare's original text much less than the later, published version of *Complete Works*. For instance, in a *Timon of Athens* skit, a member of the public was enlisted to play the title role and, in the ensuing confusion, is forced to relinquish his possessions and remove items of clothing:

DANIEL: So Timon flees Athens forever, leaving behind his false friends as well as renouncing his home and all his worldly possessions.

JESS: Do you have any possessions on you that you'd like to renounce?

(Adam holds out his hat, indicating that he'd like Timon's wallet, watch, rings, etc.)

DANIEL: The bitter Timon finds a refuge in a remote cave, wearing nothing but a loincloth.

(Adam holds out a loincloth and indicates that Timon should wear it. When Timon puts it on, he objects.)

ADAM: I think Daniel said "NOTHING but a loincloth," isn't that right, Daniel?

DANIEL: Um, yes.

JESS: Well, come on, we're all waiting.⁷⁴

Other reductions included a version of *King Lear* in which Goneril and Regan are conflated into the hybrid 'Goneregan' and Lear's Fool sings 'Singin' in the

⁷⁴ Daniel Singer, Jess Winfield and Adam Long, Unpublished drafts for *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)* (Reduced Shakespeare Company, 1987).

Rain' during the storm. Their *Comedy of Errors* is a line-for-line version of the chaotic sequence from the play's final scene, during which Antipholus of Ephesus regales the returned Duke with the play's events, and features the intriguing stage direction '(enter Ant. S.) (mirror routine?)'.⁷⁵ This refers to the moment at which Antipholus of Syracuse walks onstage and sees his twin, much to the confusion of every other character. There is here a suggestion that the RSC originally considered performing the reunion between the Antipholi as a 'mirror routine', the most famous and imitated example of which is the mirror scene between Groucho and Harpo Marx in *Duck Soup* (1933).

This reveals a correlation between the company's primary influences and the style in which they intended to match particular Shakespearean moments – such as twins being confused at their identical appearance – with vaudeville routines. The RSC's *Much Ado About Nothing*, for instance, was written specifically with the Fringe audience in mind, by means of the incorporation of the Edinburgh restaurant chain, Spudulike, into Hero's final couplet: 'Then dost thou love me, all now is set right. / Let's get a bite to eat at spud-u-like'.⁷⁶ Other early draft sketches are either short prototypes of later full-length ones (*Othello* and *Julius Caesar/Antony and Cleopatra*) or monologues removed from the context of a wider text (Posthumus's 'Is there no way for men to be' soliloquy and Jaques's 'All the world's a stage' speech).

The majority of these routines were either discarded or significantly edited, perhaps because that the writers realised that mainstream audiences were less likely to be familiar with the references to Shakespeare plays such as *Timon of Athens* and *Cymbeline*. However, although these scenes were cut in favour of a narrative built around the company's original *R&J* and *Hamlet* reductions, the central features remained, in the tropes that have remained consistent in RSC performances: audience participation, pop culture allusions, vaudeville performance techniques and references designed to localise the play for individual audiences.

The trio premiered their show at the Paramount Ranch in June 1987. Singer explains that 'it was hard to tell if it was a success or not because it was

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

completely attended by fans who screamed with approval at every stupid thing we did'.⁷⁷ The original version of the comedies, which involved working through each play, rather than condensing them into one, was modified in Edinburgh and therefore, despite the show's success at home in America, they remained unsure of what did and did not work. What they did learn from the process was that 'grouping all the comedies together in one lump and grouping all the histories together in one lump really allowed us time to play with the tragedies, which was where all the comic material comes from'.⁷⁸ Not unsurprisingly, therefore, the RSC's pre-*Complete Works* productions centred on two of Shakespeare's most performed tragedies.

This focus also assists in the categorisation of the RSC as a parodic troupe rather than as a comedy theatre company, given that, in *Complete Works*, they primarily concentrate on inverting audience expectations about plays with serious, tragic consequences, locating the comedy within the ways in which these function onstage, and exploring what happens when one attempts to perform them with only three actors. Linda Hutcheon states that parody can be 'a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text'⁷⁹ or, 'in another formulation, repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity'.⁸⁰ I suggest that the RSC's form of parody should be defined by Hutcheon's first category, rooted as it is in the comedic inversion of Shakespearean tropes and interpretations. Through the dual influence of the Renaissance faires and *Fifteen-Minute Hamlet*, the RSC learned that their audiences would be drawn towards laughing at the serious, rather than by the replication of an already comic scene or character. In *Complete Works* and their subsequent work, they follow Hutcheon's route of 'imitation characterized by ironic inversion', transforming the tragedies into slapstick burlesques and condensing the comedies to make accurate observations about how the tropes and character archetypes reoccur across particular plays.

⁷⁷ Singer, 25 August 2015.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Hutcheon, Linda, *A Theory of Parody: The Teaching of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 6.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

The performances in Edinburgh in August 1987 were viewed by the trio as the culmination of their artistic efforts, after which they intended to hang up their doublets and disband. However, *Complete Works* proved to be a hit at the Fringe, despite its unfavourable 10 a.m. performance slot, 'earning rave reviews and widespread interest in the Company not only in the UK, but back home in California'.⁸¹ Multiple bookings began to materialise, transforming their hobby into a viable business, which resulted in the establishment of a formal partnership in 1988.

▪ **1989-1994: Changing Members and Breaking Records**

The RSC further expanded the show for their first US tour by incorporating audience participation into the second act. The next significant change that the company experienced was in 1989, when Singer left to pursue a career as an 'Imagineer' for the Walt Disney Company. Given that the RSC's three archetypes had been constructed and developed around Singer, Winfield and Long's specific personalities, as well as the synergy between the actors and audiences at the faires and Fringe performances, the loss of their founder member could have significantly damaged the company and future performances of *Complete Works*. However, his replacement was Berkeley graduate Martin, who also had significant performance experience from his time as a clown for the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus.⁸² Martin reflects that his hiring was due to a combination of his 'classical Shakespeare training in graduate school and then having joined the circus',⁸³ which he recalls Winfield, who had known him at Berkeley, describing to him as 'a perfect combination of skills'.⁸⁴

The company's success continued, and in March 1992, they began an unlimited engagement at the Arts Theatre in London's West End. However, three months into their season, the RSC lost another founder member when Winfield also departed to work for Disney, being replaced by Tichenor,

⁸¹ Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 121.

⁸² Prior to his circus experience, Martin had also performed in Shakespeare productions at Berkeley Shakespeare Festival, The Old Globe and La Jolla Playhouse.

⁸³ Reed Martin, Personal interview, Skype, 24 April 2018.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

another Berkeley alumnus and classmate of both Winfield and Martin, whose writing and directing background was seen as advantageous in the creation of their next show, *The Complete History of America (abridged)*. Although the company's formation did not take place at Berkeley, it is no less important to note that Winfield, Martin and Tichenor's attendance there during the early 1980s would have, at the very least, affected their attitude to establishment figures. Having grown up in California (all three are native Californians) during the Berkeley campus riots which took place during the late 1960s, these university-educated, middle-class men were used to raillery and protest against the status quo, and spent the formative years of their formal, intellectual development at an institution with a radical history and connotations.

Discussing why these periods of transition and change failed to disrupt the company, Long explains that, because Singer and Winfield 'left one at a time, [...] there were always two people in the mix that had been doing it regularly, so I was never in a position where I was the only one'.⁸⁵ This ensured that their onstage dynamic never shifted significantly and remained consistent with the production's original structure. Long suggests that the success of these changes was, in fact, 'encouraging, because it meant that we learned that you didn't have to teach people to [perform the roles] exactly like this person did, as long as somebody served the function that they needed to serve'.⁸⁶ Citing the first change, from Singer to Martin, Long explains that the Daniel character consequently changed from a shape-shifting, adaptable entity into an immovable, stolid force, and that Martin's background as a clown allowed them to explore a range of new performance techniques and approaches:

Daniel [Singer] was like being onstage with quicksilver. He was very fluid in the way that he moved. If you pushed Daniel, it was like his body melted away from you and then came back – he was like that silver guy in *Terminator 2*. He was a very interesting character to have in the middle. Then Reed came in and he was like a rock. If

⁸⁵ Long, 29 September 2017.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

you bumped into Reed you just bounced off him. He didn't move, he just fixed you with this gaze. Both Reed and Daniel were able to serve the same purpose in the sense that they were the centre of the show, but the way that they did it was very different.⁸⁷

Given Daniel's position at the centre of the RSC's trio in *Complete Works*, serving as a governing force amidst the opposition of Jess and Adam, it was a significant discovery for the RSC that this character could work equally well, whether they moved around the other two, or absorbed their difference and repelled it by sheer force. Singer and Martin also had the shared attribute of being the company's 'straight man'. Martin explains how, 'in clowning terms, that's the white face clown or the "Stern". The "Auguste" clown is the goofy one. Daniel and I were the white faced-Stern and Adam was definitely the goofy Auguste. The third clown type is a "Character" clown'.⁸⁸ In the case of the RSC, the character clown is the pompous academic figure played by Jess and Austin. These clown types were themselves informed by the stock characters drawn from the tradition of *commedia dell'arte*, the popular form of comedy which emerged in sixteenth-century Italian theatre.

Not only did these successful transitions convince them that they could survive the departure of founding members, but it suggested that the show could evolve and remain fresh by introducing new actors to the company. Long concludes that they 'discovered that you could incorporate other people's personalities into the show as long as you kept that central dynamic intact'.⁸⁹ Given their later use of a repertory system which would tour multiple plays simultaneously, this was an important moment in the RSC's evolution from a theatre company into a viable business, built on the franchise model of *Complete Works*. It is evident that commercial success opened many doors for the RSC, which has resulted in the transformation of the company from a fringe troupe of vaudevillians into an international theatre brand. Singer reflects wryly that

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Martin, 24 April 2018.

⁸⁹ Long, 29 September 2017.

[w]hen we embarked on extensive tours, we tried to get Shakespeare Festivals interested in booking us. They all snubbed us, and we had the impression they thought our little comedy was crass and insulting and unfit for their stages. That remained true until after the long-running London production established itself as popular with mainstream audiences and critics and made good money. Now our show is regularly performed by Shakespeare festivals, alongside Shakespeare's plays.⁹⁰

The company's reputation developed still further when *Complete Works* transferred to the Criterion Theatre and began a nine-year run from March 1996 to April 2005, during which time it was nominated for Best Comedy at the Laurence Olivier Awards in 1997. It was performed 3,744 times, becoming the longest-running comedy play and fourth longest-running play overall in London's West End, to date.

The company's early work can be described as a UK/US fusion of Stoppardian-Californian faire culture, adapting Stoppard's reduction and subversion of *Hamlet* for their highly physical, open-air performances. If the Renaissance faires brought the RSC together, shaped their performance style, and introduced them to techniques which resulted in financial success, then Stoppard was the recognised catalyst for their methods of reduction and ironic inversion of Shakespeare's work. Singer and Winfield's shared experience of Stoppard's work prior to their collaboration gave the RSC an early point of reference for the practical abridgement of Shakespeare. I suggest that, through the circumstances of their formation and their geographical oscillation between America and Britain during the formative stages of their existence, the RSC's first play emerged as a semi-autobiographical work that drew on the founding members' personal struggles economically to sustain their company while creating this, their first play. Their roots in the countercultural Renaissance faire tradition, which blended American nostalgia for an English

⁹⁰ Singer, 5 April 2016.

past with contemporary, 'hippie' ideals, also ensure that, from its genesis, theirs was a theatre of opposition and contradiction.

2

'Dis-stole, more like': *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)*

Introduction: Where is *The Complete Works*?

The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged) was the Reduced Shakespeare Company (RSC)'s original production and remains the benchmark against which all the company's other work is compared. The play provided a structural template for those that followed, such as *The Bible: The Complete Word of God (abridged)* and *All The Great Books (abridged)*, both of which condensed pre-existing material into fast-paced, metatheatrical productions. In other plays, such as *The Complete History of America (abridged)* and *The Complete History of Comedy (abridged)*, however, the company applied this reductive methodology to a series of historical events rather than to literary works. *Complete Works* has defined the company's international reputation, watched by hundreds of thousands of people across the globe both in person and online, translated into numerous languages and staged by many professional and amateur companies.¹ Yet, as I showed in my introduction, until now the play has not received comprehensive critical attention to match this popular awareness.

In this chapter, I present the first extended close reading of the play, working through each discrete section of the text to explore how the RSC enlist a specific aspect of Shakespeare's work, life or legacy, and not only weave the texts together but also produce the metanarrative of three actors attempting to tackle an insurmountable feat. Due to the company founders' ongoing

¹ A television film of *Complete Works*, recorded for PBS in 2001, has been viewed 840,306 times, commented on 596 times and received 10,815 'likes' on YouTube up to Friday 24th May 2019. The play has been translated into thirty languages. According to Broadway Play Publishing Inc.'s data records for professional and non-professional productions, which date from to September 2015 to November 2020, the RSC have licenced 228 nonprofessional and 4 professional productions of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)* and 538 nonprofessional and 65 professional productions of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged) [revised]* in the United States and Canada alone.

processes of revision, *Complete Works* has continued to evolve over the course of its thirty-one year history and this will also be considered by means of the original 1994 published script, its 2007 revision, and my personal access to the currently unpublished 2018 update. In 'Re-Revising Shakespeare', a chapter written by Jess Winfield for the book *Shakespeare and Me*, he reflects on the question of the "authoritative" text² for *Complete Works*. The play was first performed in 1987 and has since been performed worldwide by numerous theatre groups, who adjust the text in keeping with their location and update the show's topical references to suit contemporary audiences, a practice which is actively encouraged by the RSC in their instructions for performance within the published scripts. In the 2007 revision, for instance, the writers use an asterisk at the beginning of the script to indicate 'topical/cultural references that the cast should consider revising as needed for the current time/location',³ while in the introduction to *America*, they explain this recommendation in greater detail:

There are a number of topical references in the script. The humor and relevance of these will fade over time so each production may update these few particular spots. This is not to say that scenes should be rewritten (which is, in fact, strictly prohibited) but rather we are giving you permission to change a punchline or reference.⁴

Although performers still require written permission to perform and cut the text, pay a licensing fee and are prohibited from using the name 'Reduced Shakespeare Company' either in publicity or performance, the RSC actively licenses the mutation of their script by allowing companies freely to adapt references to suit their own location or period. This was shaped by the founders' own development of *Complete Works*. Daniel Singer explains that

² Jess Winfield, 'Re-Revising Shakespeare' in *Shakespeare and Me: 38 Great Writers, Actors, and Directors on What the Bard Means to Them – and Us*, ed. Susannah Carson, (London: Oneworld Publications, 2013), p. 196.

³ Daniel Singer and Jess Winfield, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged) [revised]* (Reduced Shakespeare Company, 2007), p. 1.

⁴ Adam Long, Reed Martin and Austin Tichenor, *The Complete History of America (abridged)* (New York: Broadway Publishing Inc., 1999), p. x.

‘when eating dinner before a tour performance, we’d ask the local waitress/bartender “what’s the local scandal, what’s your sports team, what does everyone around here hate?”, so that we could stick in a few topical jokes. Audiences eat that stuff up’.⁵ The fact that each particular performance of *Complete Works* had been curated in accordance with the idiosyncratic customs and features of their location helped foster the illusion for theatregoers that the performance was exclusive to them, thereby giving the RSC’s audiences a greater sense of ownership and investment in the production.

Based on these personal experiences, the company have continued to authorise different versions of the original script and encourage reinterpretation of their material, while also extending the RSC brand through the widespread performance of their work, which this artistic freedom engenders. Thus, while the RSC protect their name, an asset central to their brand identity – which might be considered ironic given its comic inversion of a prominent UK theatre property – the relative level of freedom which they allow performers of their work embraces these adapters within the franchise of the company. Referring to ‘a truly amazing’⁶ three-woman performance of *Complete Works* which he witnessed, Singer argues that this is the play’s most significant legacy: ‘while some companies perform the work as written, word-for-word, its essential structure allows companies to update, adapt and otherwise customize the work to suit themselves. This means it can never go out of style or lose its relevance’.⁷

The rules and restrictions placed by the company on the use of their material somewhat begs the question as to whether the authoritative text for *Complete Works* should be regarded as the 1994 original published version. Undoubtedly, the answer is complicated by there being three ‘official’ RSC versions of the text: the 1994, 2007 and 2018 scripts. Also, by revising their own work, are the RSC implicitly suggesting that any company wishing to perform *Complete Works* from 2007 and 2018 onwards should only use that

⁵ Daniel Singer, Personal interview, E-mail, 25 August 2015.

⁶ Daniel Singer, Personal interview, E-mail, 26 August 2015.

⁷ Ibid.

version? Winfield reveals, for instance, that ‘90% of troupes that perform the show in the US choose to do the revised version’⁸ and Singer states that their decision to revise the play was motivated by a desire to ‘to have the revised show reflect the digital world in common culture’.⁹ However, Austin Tichenor recalls that when they performed the revision, ‘we resisted incorporating too much technology’.¹⁰

This creative conflict between the impulse to update anachronous references while preserving the play’s visual impact in performance is made particularly clear in its opening section, during which Adam comically mixes up his set of index cards, with the result that a short description of Shakespeare’s life mutates into a Hitler biography. The 2007 revision was originally intended to change this action to feature Adam reading from a smartphone. However, during rehearsals, the company found that, while the change worked on a referential level, it was a poor substitute for the slapstick impact of Adam dropping and muddling his cue cards in front of the audience. Such adjustments reveal the company’s commitment to adapting their own material in order to maintain both its contemporary relevance and comic appeal, while maintaining the traditional techniques that produce more effective onstage physical comedy than can be derived from watching an actor read from a portable device. The revision does not amend significant plot and character details or dispense with any of the plays reduced in the 1994 original. Instead, the company took the opportunity to replace outdated cultural references with contemporary examples. This includes notable examples such as the substitution of the original conclusion of ‘Rap Othello’, during which Iago ‘[I]oaded up his bags, / And moved to Beverly... / ...Hills, that is’,¹¹ a reference to The Clampetts’ theme song of the 1960s American sitcom *The Beverly Hillbillies*, for him instead receiving ‘his own TV... / show, that is. [...] ‘Desperate Houseboats’’,¹² an allusion to the HBO comedy drama

⁸ Jess Winfield, Personal interview, Skype, 18 April 2018.

⁹ Daniel Singer, Personal interview, E-mail, 25 August 2015.

¹⁰ Austin Tichenor, Personal interview, Skype, 19 August 2015.

¹¹ Jess Borgeson, Adam Long and Daniel Singer, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)* (New York: Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, 1994), p. 36.

¹² Singer and Winfield, p. 26.

series *Desperate Housewives* (2004-12) and a simultaneous harking back to Adam's confusion over the mooring issue of the play's title.

Complete Works is a play which clearly is intended to be staged, and which relies significantly on the physical aspects of performance derived from its Renaissance faire origins. For that reason, should the definitive version of the play be its initial 1987 performances in California and Edinburgh, given that these were the iterations of *Complete Works* that informed its transfer to a script? Clearly, any answer to this question of authority will be judged according to the perception of whether a play is primarily defined on the stage or the page. In 'Where is *Hamlet*?', Margaret Jane Kidnie posits that '[w]hether one is speaking of *Hamlet* or the *Mona Lisa*, the work is [...] less a thing or an object, than it is an unbounded diachronic series of events'.¹³ Has the RSC's script for *Complete Works*, whether through their own or others' processes of revision, similarly evolved to the stage where it is impossible to judge the play as a textual object, given its unpredictable variation from performance to performance? 'The ideology of print is so powerful',¹⁴ Kidnie suggests, that 'performance, by comparison, is authentic insofar as it can reproduce the text'¹⁵ and that '[a]uthenticity [...] always already present in the text, inevitably eludes performance; performance is measured in relation to the text in degrees of *infidelity* and *inauthenticity*'.¹⁶ The fact that the founders continue to sanction unofficial versions of their play and have themselves revised the official script suggests that the text is a fluid and changeable variable which is open to reinterpretation. Winfield's views corroborate my suggestion that the RSC's work does not follow the 'ideology of print' that Kidnie critiques. His ambiguous conclusion to the question of which *Complete Works* is the authoritative version, is 'of course, that they all are, and that none is. A play exists in four dimensions; its documentation in text is merely a two-dimensional snapshot of it at a given moment in time'.¹⁷ He supports this by

¹³ Margaret Jane Kidnie, 'Where is *Hamlet*? Text, Performance, and Adaptation', in *A Companion to Shakespeare in Performance*, eds. Barbara Hodgson and W.B. Worthen (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), p. 102.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 104; author's italics.

¹⁷ Winfield, 'Re-Revising Shakespeare', p. 196.

analysing the ‘*Who, When, Where, and for Whom*’¹⁸ of *Complete Works* and how these factors shaped the RSC’s early years as well as their artistic development.

In this close reading, I will explore how and why the RSC focus on particular areas of Shakespeare’s work and cultural life. To this end, I will refer to the two versions of the play: its first 1994 publication and the 2001 television performance featuring Adam Long, Reed Martin and Austin Tichenor for the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), which was adapted for television by Long. I have chosen the original script because it reflects most closely the version of *Complete Works* that developed at the Renaissance faires. My analysis will, consequently, refer to the characters by the forenames of the actors who originally portrayed them, rather than by the name resulting from the colour of their Converse sneakers. The second version, the PBS Special, has been chosen for its facility to allow viewers to revisit and connect with the play since it was uploaded in full to YouTube in 2012 by a user named ‘TheLoveableMan2’. Tellingly, the RSC have made no efforts to have it taken down, such is the video’s popularity, although Winfield has also uploaded a range of older archival material via his personal YouTube profile. Stephen O’Neill suggests that ‘[w]ithin the culture of video-share [...] more traditional determinants of value based on distinctions between high and popular culture come under pressure’¹⁹ and, in this instance, the YouTube video has, arguably, displaced the RSC’s live performances and scripted versions of *Complete Works* and become an authoritative text in its own right, shaping viewers’ initial exposure to the company and their performance techniques. The video’s comment section also reveals that this, rather than the original script or performance, may well be the version against which others are judged and compared:

Accidentally caught this on tv in high school and me and my parents almost died laughing. A few years later we attended a performance of it in Tarpon Springs. It was a little different, like a joke about

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 184.

¹⁹ Stephen O’Neill, *Shakespeare and YouTube: New Media Forms of the Bard* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 26.

Romeo saying, ‘call me but love’ and one of the guys singing ‘Suicide is Painless’, which aren’t in this production, but it was still pretty funny. This is the definitive version though. The best!²⁰

I’ve seen *The World, The Bible, and William Shakespeare*. They were all hilarious. That bald guy had me rolling. Seeing it on video doesn’t quite do it justice.²¹

In the first comment, the user’s words suggest that the enjoyment of the video influenced the choice to see the RSC in person, also noting how that production differed slightly from the ‘definitive version’ on YouTube. This does not suggest that YouTube is viewed here as the definitive platform for the RSC’s content, but it does reveal that this particular audience member perceives the actors who performed the PBS Special as the definitive cast for *Complete Works*. This is despite two of the performers not having been in the original RSC cast and, given the number of times the video has been viewed and ‘liked’, it is unlikely that this user’s attitude and experience are unique.²² While the second comment also expresses admiration for the RSC, the user’s reaction is different, claiming that watching the production on YouTube cannot quite compare with the experience of a live performance, implying that the authoritative version would be whichever iteration of *Complete Works* had been experienced in person. These two contrasted accounts demonstrate the range of perspectives available on YouTube and the various attitudes by which a user’s opinion on textual authority is determined.

O’Neill explains that ‘[a]s a video enters YouTube’s databank, it is not

²⁰ Jadora Hino (2017), Re: *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)* [YouTube video], Retrieved from <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yqmfrqAVeK0>> [Accessed 17 April 2018].

²¹ u2good2b4gotn (2017), Re: *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)* [YouTube video], Retrieved from <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yqmfrqAVeK0>> [Accessed 17 April 2018].

²² The decision to use Long, Martin and Tichenor in the PBS special was itself a contentious one. Singer and Winfield wished to appear in the filmed version alongside Long and, as Winfield reveals, ‘after retiring from the RSC, we retained the rights to appear in any television version of the show that was ever recorded’ (18 April 2018). However, by the time this was broached to the company, Long, Martin and Tichenor had been performing in London’s West End since 1995 and the television producers wished to use the cast that they had seen, rather than the original members.

subject to a prior set of aesthetic determinants. Nor does YouTube assume any editorial oversight in relation to content uploaded to the site, apart from the requirement that users agree to its terms and conditions'.²³ My following scene-by-scene analysis reveals that this version is itself an adaptation for film and, consequently, performs particular scenes directly to camera for the home viewer, rather than staging them solely for the theatre audience.²⁴ This conferral of authority has undoubtedly shifted with the twenty-first century arrival of a plethora of online video platforms, all of which have made access to performances such as the RSC's more widely available than ever. As O'Neill suggests, '[a]s digital objects, all videos are equal: this is the YouTube logic of cultural relativism. Value is determined by user search and crucially by the algorithm, which maps and refines use patterns to arrive at the most relevant search results'.²⁵

Although this increased accessibility might be regarded as having made access to theatre more of a democratic process, these platforms have also been instrumental in cementing a particular performance of a play in the minds of viewers, affecting their reception of any subsequent version, as suggested above by the first YouTube comment. Both the digital upload of this television special and the live show have shaped the perception of *Complete Works*, albeit in different ways: one allows the viewer to rewind and focus on specific scenes and jokes, while the other showcases the virtuosity of the performers, no matter which troupe of actors it features. Having been translated into thirty languages, performed worldwide and toured globally, it is likely that as many people (if not more) may have seen *Complete Works* in a live performance as those represented by its YouTube views. Consequently, if textual authority is judged by the frequency with which a particular version is watched and re-watched, the film and live performance have equal but different types of authority, both of which will be compared and contrasted in the close-reading, in order to investigate how the company adapted their material for different

²³ O'Neill, p. 26.

²⁴ This is in keeping with the recent proliferation in cinemas of live broadcasts of Shakespeare's plays from venues such as the National Theatre and Royal Shakespeare Company, whereby communal audiences are provided with events that attempt to replicate the experience of watching a live theatre performance.

²⁵ O'Neill, p. 26.

media.

Act 1

▪ Preface and Biography

The play begins with a short introduction by Daniel, who first lists the rules which the audience must follow: no photography, recording of the show, eating, drinking or smoking. He then informs them that '[s]hould the theater experience a sudden loss of pressure, oxygen masks [...] will drop automatically [...]'.²⁶ This parodies the safety address delivered by an airline flight attendant, both rooting their production in a commercial context, and drawing the audience's attention to their surroundings, and by continuing 'please take a moment now to locate the exit nearest your seat',²⁷ he completes the process of removal of any vestige of theatrical artifice. Daniel next outlines the company's task of Shakespearean reduction as though this is their first time, promising to 'attempt a feat which we believe to be unprecedented in the history of theater',²⁸ thus underlining for the audience the illusion that they are about to witness a one-off, never-before-seen event. Finally, he introduces Jess, who, as 'one of California's preeminent Shakespeare scholars'²⁹ will 'provide a brief preface'³⁰ and Adam, who appears from a seat in the stalls to present 'a brief biography of the life of William Shakespeare'.³¹

The positioning of Jess and Adam, respectively onstage and offstage immediately establishes the conflict that drives the action of the play's first act. Jess is given a grand introduction by Daniel, while Adam walks onto the stage from the auditorium, having posed as an audience member. The RSC's highbrow/lowbrow dynamic is established from the outset, with the academic figure positioned above the audience members to represent the cultural hierarchy, which the rest of the play proceeds to undermine. The scene also

²⁶ Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 1.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 2.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid, p. 5.

establishes Daniel as the show's master of ceremonies, ensuring the smooth running of the production as well as acting as the go-between, keeping a balance between his two contrasted colleagues.

Adam's first role in the play is to convince the audience that he is one of them. This becomes clear during Jess's pseudo-schoolmaster attempt, via a show of hands, to ascertain the audience's Shakespearean knowledge by asking 'how many of you here tonight have ever seen or read any play by William Shakespeare'.³² In the PBS Special, and in the majority of recorded performances, almost every audience member raises a hand, which results in Jess's immediate attempt to leave the stage in panic. Daniel, in a comic aside to his colleague, reassures him that '[t]hey don't know Shakespeare from Shinola',³³ which paraphrases the American colloquialism 'you don't know shit from Shinola', (a brand of shoe polish) thereby disparaging the audience's knowledge of Shakespeare. Jess consequently sets out to separate 'the wheat from the chaff'³⁴ by asking how many of the audience have seen *All's Well That Ends Well* and, finally, *King John*.

Clearly, by choosing two less well-known plays, he hopes to maintain his position as the academic authority with control over the comparatively unknowledgeable audience. This is the moment when Adam, representing the audience's collective voice, enters the action. The RSC's stage directions describe how 'ADAM, *in street garb*, raises his hand in the third row',³⁵ further underlining the company's origins by describing Adam's 'garb',³⁶ the popular expression for the costume of street performers at Renaissance faires. Spotting him, Jess asks this apparent 'volunteer' to describe what *King John* is about, prompting the first of many factual inaccuracies made by Adam throughout the show: 'It's about a hunchback'.³⁷ Evidently, he has mistaken *King John* for Shakespeare's more often staged history play, *Richard III* and its eponymous hunchback monarch.

This mistake prompts Jess's fervent tirade, in which he rails against

³² Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 3.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 4.

³⁵ Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 4; authors' italics.

³⁶ Rubin, p. 1.

³⁷ Ibid.

popular culture and its erosion of 'our society's collective capacity to comprehend – much less attain – the genius of William Shakespeare'.³⁸ This 'university lecture',³⁹ as Kidnie describes it, 'slowly and ironically transforms into its performative near-relation, the evangelical television sermon'⁴⁰ and, following this preface, Adam's Shakespeare biography descends from an accurate description of playwright's birth, early years in Stratford-upon-Avon and success in London, into an account of Adolf Hitler's life. Kidnie also observes how he 'nervously enters with cue cards as though making a school presentation'⁴¹ and, indeed, Adam's error occurs when he appears to have mistaken one set of notes for another:

ADAM: [...] After 1606 his dramatic production lessened, and it seems that he spent more time in Stratford. *(next card)* There he dictated to his secretary, Rudolf Hess, the work 'Mein Kampf', in which he set forth his program for the restoration of Germany to a dominant position in Europe.⁴²

Kidnie's description of the use of props and Long's hesitant delivery as being school-related is particularly apt when this seamless shift from Shakespeare to Hitler is interpreted as akin to the student who, having prepared two separate presentations for different classes, English Literature and History, has mixed these up in his satchel or folder, much to the amusement of his classmates (audience) and bemusement of his teachers (Daniel and Jess). Kidnie believes that:

This extended introduction highlights the educational regimes through which Anglo-North American students are typically brought to a knowledge of Shakespeare's work, with the comedy

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Margaret Jane Kidnie, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation*, (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 142.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 7.

depending on the audience being readily able to mark the company's ludic interventions in everyday performative events such as the university lecture and school presentation.⁴³

This opening scene thus analyses the process by which its audience members first experienced Shakespeare and, tellingly, tests their aptitude through Jess's direct questions, an intervention born out of the practice of audience engagement at Renaissance faires. The RSC tacitly acknowledge that Shakespeare is associated with scholastic examinations and that, as a consequence, the playwright has negative connotations for students from an early age, due to their potential failure in such tests and their consequent feelings of inferiority where Shakespeare's work is concerned. It is worth noting also that Adam's schoolboy error is not the only aspect of the educational process mocked in this opening scene. During his introduction of Jess, Daniel tells the audience that his colleague 'has a bachelor's degree from the University of California at Berkeley, where I believe he read two books about William Shakespeare'.⁴⁴ This self-aware joke satirises the small amount of work that it has taken to make Jess an expert, and implicitly pokes fun at undergraduate students' frequent lack of effort, even in a top educational establishment such as Winfield's actual alma mater.

▪ **Masterpiece Theatre**

With the preface and biography completed, the RSC begin the delivery of their promise to 'capture, in a single theatrical experience, the magic, the genius, the towering grandeur of "The Complete Works of William Shakespeare",⁴⁵ with an extract from *As You Like It*. Performed by Jess, the chosen passage is the four opening lines of Jaques's 'All the world's a stage' speech, and the stage directions show him 'in Shakespearean attire and Converse high-top canvas sneakers, sitting in the Masterpiece Theatre chair and holding the "Complete Works" book. He regards the audience smugly for a moment, opens the book, and

⁴³ Kidnie, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation*, p. 142.

⁴⁴ Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 2.

⁴⁵ Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 2.

reads'.⁴⁶ This image both evokes and parodies the opening address given by the British journalist and broadcaster, Alistair Cooke, in his introductions to Masterpiece Theatre.⁴⁷

This PBS drama anthology series, which Cooke presented from 1971 until 1992, is known in America for broadcasting a number of prominent imported British productions, many of which were produced by the BBC, including *I, Claudius*, *House of Cards* and *Jeeves and Wooster*. Jess's address manipulates this familiar image to frame Shakespeare as a similarly imported British classic. The choice of Jaques's speech serves two specific purposes: firstly, it satirises its frequent decontextualisation to serve different purposes from its melancholy mission in *As You Like It*, and, secondly, it accurately reflects the RSC's method of reduced performance: '[o]ne man in his time plays many parts'.⁴⁸ Repeating this final line after he completes the four-line quotation, Jess reflects 'how true'⁴⁹ Shakespeare's words seem, and, by means of this passage, segues into introducing the RSC's two-man reduction of *Romeo and Juliet*, performed by Daniel and Adam.

▪ ***Romeo and Juliet***

In this first scene, the RSC focus on showcasing their vaudevillian virtuosity as fast-paced reducers and physical performers, rather than delivering the specific forms of satire that appear later in *Complete Works*. The section also most resembles their early work, with few metatheatrical interruptions or pop culture references, remaining the most consistent in performance since its inception, and relatively unchanged in the three different versions of the script.

The actors begin by emphasising the purpose of *R&J* as the intended

⁴⁶ Ibid, pp. 8-9; authors' italics.

⁴⁷ In the play's premiere at the Paramount Ranch, the extract length and placement of Jacques's speech were different. Jess delivered it in full and performed the speech at the beginning of *Complete Works*. It was designed to deliver a naturalistic moment to the audience and undercut the expectation of a vaudevillian performance with proof that the actors could deliver Shakespeare seriously. After the introduction of Adam's 'piece of work' speech in Act 2, it was shortened and moved to its location in the published script.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 9.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

introduction to their impressive feat of compression by confounding the audience's expectations about how many actors it takes to perform Shakespeare, delivering the following sequence in the manner of a circus ringmaster. Although this extract from the 1987 premiere does not feature in later performances or scripts, it indicates the RSC's early desire not merely to reflect their Renaissance faire origins but also to befuddle their audiences still further by beginning with a more emphatically reduced performance by two actors rather than the three-man show that they were expecting:

JESS: Where better to begin this tribute to the greatest of all
English playwrights

ADAM: than in Verona, Italy, with his two most beloved
characters:

ALL: Romeo and Juliet!

(They pause for applause.)

DANIEL: Of course, it would be impossible for three actors to
perform this play...

(The three company members laugh together.)

ALL: That's why we're using two!⁵⁰

The RSC's *R&J* follows the basic plot of Shakespeare's play, while offering one of the play's clearest examples of reversal and reduction, due to its comic inversion of the tomb scene and the expulsion of prominent characters from the narrative. Indeed, an inventory of the characters retained by the RSC reveals a significant omission: the absence of Mercutio. Why did they choose to remove Romeo's close friend, confidant and the character whose death provokes his vengeful desires?

The reduction focuses primarily on the two lovers; the only other roles that remain are Sampson, Benvolio, the Nurse, Friar Laurence and Tybalt.

⁵⁰ Daniel Singer, Jess Winfield and Adam Long, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)*, Paramount Ranch in Agoura Hills, California (Reduced Shakespeare Company, 1987).

Sampson and Benvolio are kept solely for the establishment of their families' feud and also to enable the company to capitalise on the thumb-biting gesture, thereby introducing the madcap physical comedy which is a key feature of *Complete Works*. The Nurse and Friar Laurence are retained because they each deliver important information to Juliet, without which the plot would collapse; the Nurse has to tell her of Tybalt's murder by Romeo in order to provoke her into fleeing, while Friar Laurence must deliver the potion to Juliet to allow the play's tragic denouement to unfold. Despite only delivering four lines, Tybalt's presence in the RSC's reduction is equally important. He provides a flashpoint in Shakespeare's play and his death reveals to the audience another aspect of Romeo's character and a different set of passions, which manifest themselves in violence rather than love. Moreover, from a narrative perspective, there would be no reason for Romeo to be sent away if Tybalt's murder had been cut, given that it provides the Prince with no option but to exile him. It also changes him irrevocably in Juliet's eyes and forces her to seek the desperate measures provided by Friar Laurence which, in turn, precipitates the couple's tragic demise.

In response to the question why Mercutio was cut from the RSC's *R&J*, Singer explains that 'when we were initially editing the texts, we had to find ways to tell the basic story with as few characters as possible. Mercutio was totally non-essential'.⁵¹ This implies that if one solely judges a character's importance by their relation to the main protagonists, and their function as a plot device, Mercutio is, indeed, superfluous. Although his death is undoubtedly crucial in Shakespeare's play, in a twelve-minute reduction that retains only 'the basic story', motivations are unimportant: the psychological minutiae of why Romeo kills Tybalt are less important to the RSC's audience than the provision of an entertaining fight scene. Moreover, Mercutio's primary function in the play is to satirise the purity of Romeo's love for Juliet, calling attention to the rapid shift in his affections from one woman to another and, as Stephen Greenblatt notes, he 'gives voice to an irrepressible spirit of mockery, a spirit that seems to challenge the very possibility of romantic love

⁵¹ Daniel Singer, Personal interview, E-mail, 18 April 2018.

or tragic destiny'.⁵² While the RSC's reasons for cutting the character were purely pragmatic in terms of plot development and cast size, it is worth noting that his absence may also be a by-product of the RSC's satirical formula. In depicting Romeo and Juliet's romantic love as teenage lust, they subvert the balcony 'scene of timeless romance'⁵³ into one in which 'he'll try get into Juliet's pants'.⁵⁴ Thus, the RSC's approach could be construed as one where, by inserting his 'Queen Mab'⁵⁵ style of bawdy language and innuendo into their *R&J* reduction, they operate as surrogates for Mercutio: they are the ones doing the mocking, so they get rid of the mocker.

In a consideration of the RSC's performance of *R&J* as a comic inversion, it is important to examine the play's history as well as its relationship to another early performance by the company. In Autumn 1982, they introduced a twenty-minute version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* into their repertoire, alongside *Hamlet*, with Long playing Puck. Although they describe it as a success, and more abridgement than parody, Winfield remarks in the 2011 retrospective that this was the point at which he, Singer and Long discovered that 'the tragedies were funnier than the comedies',⁵⁶ given that audience feedback generally favoured their *Hamlet*. This suggests that, from the first stages of their existence, the RSC's founders realised that their most successful material relied on the comic inversion of Shakespeare's tragedies, rather than on the amplification of the comedies, many of which already include parodic material. For instance, their performance of the tomb scene, in which Romeo and Juliet commit suicide, is closer to Bottom and Flute's unintentionally comic staging of Pyramus and Thisbe's demise in *Dream* than to Shakespeare's original version of the tragic demise of the two young lovers. This is made evident through the heightened tone of its slapstick comedy and exaggerated performance style, which includes the use of a ludicrously small, retractable

⁵² Stephen Greenblatt, 'Romeo and Juliet' in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd edn, eds. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), p. 897.

⁵³ Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 14.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Romeo and Juliet*, 1.4.53.

⁵⁶ Jess Winfield, 'Reduced Shakespeare Company 30th Anniversary Retrospective', 2012 <<https://vimeo.com/28343530>> [Accessed 10 April 2018].

prop knife to satirise the artifice of stage weaponry. The comparison is completed by the perceived awkwardness of one male actor not wishing to kiss the other and Juliet's melodramatic, protracted death speech, delivered by Adam.

Amy J. Riess and George Walton Williams chart the complicated history of editorial decisions concerning the order in which Shakespeare wrote these two plays, arguing that, 'from internal evidence [...] *Romeo and Juliet* is the earlier play, and that in writing *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare used the events and the language of tragedy to increase the mirth of comedy'.⁵⁷ René Weiss reports that '[t]he word diptych has been applied to them [...] as if they formed different sides of the same coin, tragedy and comedy, *Romeo and Juliet/Pyramus and Thisbe* as burlesque first cousins'.⁵⁸ The RSC's slapstick performance of *Romeo and Juliet's* death represents a physical manifestation of this relationship between the two plays. Riess and Williams suggest that the Mechanicals 'speak the broken yet recognizable language of *Romeo and Juliet* in their farcical rendition [...] garbling the phrases from the tragedy to achieve grand comedy',⁵⁹ citing the example of both scenes' repetition of the word 'come' for tragic and comic effect respectively:

In *Romeo and Juliet*, the lovers utter the word 'come' when haplessly they attempt to circumvent their fates. Romeo says 'Come, cordial and not poison' [...] after he defies the stars [...] and the consequence there hanging [...] and departs for Juliet's tomb, and Juliet says 'Romeo, I come!' [...] before she drinks her sleeping potion. In the playlet, *Pyramus and Thisby* embellish the language of *Romeo and Juliet* by twice repeating their calls to 'come.' At the sight of *Thisby's* mantle, *Pyramus* cries, 'Approach, ye Furies fell! / O Fates, come, come' [...] and *Thisby*, in concomitant mawk-ishness,

⁵⁷ Amy J. Riess and George Walton Williams, "'Tragical Mirth": From *Romeo To Dream*' in *Shakespeare Quarterly* 43:2, Summer 1992, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2870882>> [Accessed 9 April 2018], p. 214.

⁵⁸ René Weiss, 'Introduction' in *Romeo and Juliet* in *The Arden Shakespeare: Third Series*, ed. René Weiss (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2012), p. 41.

⁵⁹ Riess and Williams, p. 216.

addresses the Fates: 'O Sisters Three, / Come, come to me'.⁶⁰

Stephen Purcell cites the RSC's version of Juliet's death speech and the way it uses the word 'come' as an example of how they lampoon 'Shakespeare's style'.⁶¹ In the following extract, Adam draws the audience's attention to Shakespeare's use of repetition and delivers a crude joke by punning on the word's double meaning as a command and to describe an orgasm, implicitly questioning the extent to which the audience might question the playwright's linguistic sophistication because of this:

A/JULIET: Come civil night! Come night! Come Romeo,
 Thou day in night! Come, gentle night!
 Come loving, black-brow'd night!
 O night night night night ...
 Come come come come come!
 (aside to the audience) I didn't write it.⁶²

In performance, Long raises his eyebrows at the audience if they laugh on his repetition of 'come' in an exasperated expression which seems to offer an apology on Shakespeare's behalf, as though the playwright is to blame for both the vulgarity of the word, heightened by a range of other sexual innuendos employed throughout the performance of the deaths, as well as the supposed lack of linguistic invention apparent in the repetition of both 'night' and 'come'. Here, the RSC quickly establish that they are unafraid to draw attention to interludes where Shakespeare's work can be interpreted as crude, simplistic or repetitive. By thus demystifying his work of the aura which it has generated since it was first written, and exposing the plays to a form of reduction that condenses both their action and language, their intention is to refashion Shakespeare into a more accessible literary figure.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Purcell, p. 118.

⁶² Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 21.

In his consideration of *R&J* and *Dream* as companion pieces, Thomas P. Harrison suggests that, in 'Pyramus and Thisbe', '[t]he essentially tragic interlude becomes [...] comic only through the actors, never the plot'.⁶³ By applying this logic to the RSC's performance of *R&J* and accepting that the plot of 'Pyramus and Thisbe' is itself a series of tragic events, it becomes clear why the RSC's two-person, all-male, roughly performed version of the tomb scene recalls Bottom and Flute's performance: Shakespeare's play-within-a-play was itself a two-man approximation of a seriously played, tragic counterpart from *R&J*.

▪ *Titus Andronicus*

In *R&J*, the RSC lay the foundation for *Complete Works* by subverting the audience's expectations about how many actors are required to perform a well-known play, and the extent to which a serious drama can be transformed into a vaudevillian comedy. In the scene that follows, their focus shifts away from reducing Shakespeare's plays towards satirising interpretations of his work. In particular, they lampoon productions which are driven by a director's commitment to a concept rather than to the text itself:

DANIEL: Ladies and gentlemen, in preparing this unprecedented 'Complete Works' show, we have encountered this problem: how to make these 400-year-old plays accessible to a modern audience. One popular trend is to take Shakespeare's plays and transpose them into modern settings.⁶⁴

Daniel's introduction to this scene suggests that they view their work as being distinct from conceptual Shakespeare. Their Renaissance faire background, which relies on a different form of artifice – that of a fantasy land for the

⁶³ Thomas P. Harrison, 'Romeo and Juliet, A Midsummer Night's Dream: *Companion Plays*' in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 13.2 (University of Texas Press, Summer 1971) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40754146>> [Accessed 9 April 2018], p. 209.

⁶⁴ Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 26.

audience and actors to inhabit physically, instead of the director's envisaged setting – would undoubtedly have contributed to this position. The second part of Daniel's introduction switches its focus to Shakespearean criticism, extending the parody of higher education begun in Jess's preface:

DANIEL: [...] Jess has traced the roots of Shakespeare's symbolism in the context of a pre-Nietzschean society through the totality of jejune circular relationship of form, contrasted with a complete otherness of metaphysical cosmologies, and the ethical mores entrenched in the collective subconscious of an agrarian race.⁶⁵

The arcane vocabulary and philosophical ideas contained in this section, amounting to what Purcell describes as 'a wickedly accurate spoof of academic jargon',⁶⁶ are designed to represent what might be viewed by Shakespeare novices in their audience as indicative of having arrived in an unofficial 'private-members-only' club. Thus, in Daniel's speech, the RSC lampoon two central bastions of highbrow Shakespeare: the director and the academic.

The chosen material for this satire is the playwright's first tragedy, *Titus Andronicus*, which has experienced a resurgence in popularity since the turn of the millennium due to its gory reputation and a body count unmatched by any other play in Shakespeare's canon. Perceived by both creatives and commentators as embodying a no-nonsense approach to the revenge tragedy genre, stripped of *Hamlet* or *Othello*'s reflective minutiae, *Titus* has connected well with modern aesthetics of violence, including genres such as slasher movies and video nasties. The play contains a level of brutality and frequency of violent acts which are often ahistorically compared with the filmography of director Quentin Tarantino, as suggested by Alan A. Stone's flashy but somehow apposite labelling of it as 'Shakespeare's Tarantino Play'.⁶⁷ Equally,

⁶⁵ Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 26.

⁶⁶ Purcell, p. 118.

⁶⁷ Alan A. Stone, 'Shakespeare's Tarantino Play' in *Boston Review* <<http://bostonreview.net/archives/BR25.2/stone.html>> [Accessed 21 November 2017].

Alice Jones's report on the Royal Shakespeare Company's 2013 production in the Swan Theatre affirms that:

Michael Fentiman, making his directorial debut at the RSC, confirms that the show will feature 'buckets of blood', and a final banquet scene 'like something out of Tarantino'. 'Films like *Django Unchained* prove that the kill rate in a play like *Titus* is not a wholly unattractive thing to a modern audience', he says.⁶⁸

Comparisons such as these may be rooted in an ahistorical reading of Shakespeare's text, and influenced by design and direction choices. However, it is equally likely that they are primarily conceived to help popularise the production and give it cultural currency, through the bestowing of a shared, relationship with a known, contemporary artist or work, thereby attracting potential audience members who might, otherwise, be uninterested in Shakespeare. This is particularly common when the play is one such as *Titus*, which, despite its recent rise in popularity, does not share in the perception of prestige accorded to Shakespeare's more famous works.

Tarantino released his first feature film in 1992, five years after the RSC wrote the additional material required for their first Edinburgh performances of *Complete Works*. Therefore, their *Titus* is unconnected to his work, other than in the way in which it anticipates the predisposition of theatre institutions and directors to connect their work with a well-known pop culture figure, idea or concept in order to transform Shakespeare into a marketable commodity for a mainstream audience. Despite having predated Tarantino, however, the company updated the scene in the PBS Special to acknowledge the connections made between the director's ultraviolent work and Shakespeare's play, in which Reed (in the Daniel role) declares that he 'hopes no one was too offended by *Titus Andronicus*. Shakespeare, as a young writer, seems to have

⁶⁸ Alice Jones, 'RSC's *Titus Andronicus* carries heavy warning as production ups the blood-squirting gore Tarantino-style' in *The Independent* <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/news/rscs-titus-andronicus-carries-heavy-warning-as-production-ups-the-blood-squirting-gore-tarantino-8609415.html>> [Accessed 21 November 2017].

gone through a brief Quentin Tarantino phase'.⁶⁹ In doing so, they satirise this analogy in a neat paradox, by blaming Tarantino, a contemporary director, who has himself faced criticism for the extensive violence in his work, for Shakespeare's 'blood and guts period'.⁷⁰

Their choice to reimagine *Titus* 'as a cooking show'⁷¹ also lampoons concept-driven Shakespeare and offers the audience an alternative satirical angle to that of *R&J*, which it follows in the performance of *Complete Works*, as explained by Singer:

When we sat down to write *Complete Works* we realized that if each play was adapted the same way [...] it would be too repetitive. We wanted variety and considered lots of different approaches. *Titus Andronicus* is a pretty obscure play, and we thought the funniest thing about it was the pie baked with the murdered rapist. Voilà, we gave it a cooking show format, initially riffing on chef Julia Child (back in the days before Food Network etc.) [...] that's an example of us placing a Shakespeare play in a 'high concept' setting, albeit a very short and comical one.⁷²

The RSC unconsciously anticipated another cultural trend by setting their *Titus* in a kitchen, given that this setting has recently been adopted in 'high concept' Shakespeare productions, notably in the case of three different *Macbeth* adaptations: the film *Scotland P.A.* (2001), the television episode *Shakespeare Re-Told: Macbeth* (2005) and sections of Rupert Goold's 2010 film version of his 2007 stage production. Singer's account also names Julia Child, an American television personality and one of the first celebrity chefs, as the scene's initial inspiration. Purcell believes '[m]uch of the show's humour relies on a perceived incongruity between Shakespeare and popular forms'.⁷³

⁶⁹ *Reduced Shakespeare Company: The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)*, dir. Paul Kafno [DVD] (AcornMedia, 2003).

⁷⁰ Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 31.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 27.

⁷² Singer, 18 April 2018.

⁷³ Purcell, p. 118.

The RSC's use of Shakespeare's language in *Titus* is contrasted with *R&J*, where interjections, ad-libs and breaks of character are minimal and the company perform unbroken passages of the text. In this scene, Titus's murderous threats to his daughter's rapists, Chiron and Demetrius, become embedded within the cooking instructions:

“And when that he is dead,” which should be [...] right about now,
 “let me go grind his bones to powder small / And with his hateful
 liquor temper it; / And in that paste let his vile head be baked...” At
 about 350 degrees. And 40 minutes later, you have the loveliest
 human head pie...⁷⁴

With the quotation marks signifying where Shakespeare's text begins and ends, the company reduce the brutal imagery and grisly events of *Titus* into a farcical context which makes a comic travesty of the serious themes being explored, namely cannibalism and revenge against rapists. This is the scene in *Complete Works* that treads closest to being in questionable taste, given that it performs a tacit mockery of physical disability through Adam's performance of the tongueless Lavinia as a mute, who speaks in incomprehensible gibberish. This, by association, might also be construed by audience members to make light of the lasting physical and mental consequences of Lavinia's rape. On the other hand, by using satire to confront the fine line between farce and horror often trodden by mainstream contemporary productions of *Titus*, the RSC draw attention to the ludicrously high number of deaths and the unsettling domestic setting in which Titus has his final revenge on Chiron and Demetrius's mother, Tamora. In a scene of ultimate inversion, the RSC are playing for laughs, by placing the horrific process of a mother unknowingly being fed her sons in a pie, into the familiar and cosy context of a food programme.

The scene concludes with Jess and Adam casting a couple of audience

⁷⁴ Borgeson, Long and Singer, pp. 29-30.

members as the play's 'gracious lord' and 'dread queen',⁷⁵ waving a prop pie in their direction and proclaiming that '[i]t's finger-lickin' good'.⁷⁶ Their use of the strapline of the American fast-food chain Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), concludes their relocation of Shakespeare's play into the world of contemporary American culture and cuisine. Finally, pleased with their joke, which is delivered as though improvised, the now-handless Adam and Jess fail in their attempt to congratulate each other with a high-five, thus completing their comic inversion of another Shakespearean tragedy, where the gory excesses of *Titus* are undermined through slapstick and the equating of cannibalism with the fast-food industry.

▪ **Othello**

Promising now 'to explore the genius evident in Shakespeare's more mature plays',⁷⁷ the RSC's next parody moves from television cooking shows to connect Shakespeare with another form popularised by Americans: rap music. In this sketch, the company turn their parodic intentions inwards to reflect on their racial status as white performers and the impact this has on their performance. Left alone to research *Othello*, Adam interprets the 'Moor' of the play's full title to mean 'a place where you tie up boats',⁷⁸ an error in keeping with his earlier Shakespeare/Hitler biography. He consequently arrives onstage '*with plastic boats on a string draped around his neck*',⁷⁹ proceeds to repeat the epilogue to *R&J*, replacing their names with 'Othello and his Desdemono',⁸⁰ and stabs himself to death with the boats. After Daniel and Jess arrive onstage to correct his mistake, the trio are forced to improvise and find another way to perform the play. Realising that 'we don't really have the physical characteristics necessary to portray' *Othello*, Daniel and Jess conclude that 'due to physical limitations, we are unable to perform "Othello, the Moor of Venice," so we'll move on'.⁸¹ However, by approaching the situation

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 30.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 31.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid, p. 32.

pragmatically and from a performance-orientated stance that places his character in direct opposition to the cautious, theory-minded Jess, Adam solves the problem by beginning to rap the plot of Shakespeare's play. The guise of spontaneity is maintained when Daniel and Jess, caught up in the excitement of Adam's moment of inspiration, join in:

- ADAM:** Here's the story of a brother by the name of Othello
He liked white women and he liked green Jello
- JESS:** *(catching on quickly)*: Oh, yeah, yeah. Uh...
And a punk named Iago who made hisself a menace
'Cos he didn't like Othello, the Moor of Venice.
- ADAM:** Now Othello got married to Des-demonia,
JESS: But he took off for the wars and he left her alone-a.
- ADAM:** It was a moan-a
JESS: A groan-a
- ADAM/JESS:** He left her alone-a.
- DANIEL:** *(finally catching on and joining in)*: He didn't write a
letter and he didn't telephone-a!⁸²

The broken language and anomalous attempts to fit rhymes together by simply ending them with the same character, helps to emphasise this as a parody of rap rather than a serious bid to deliver the contextualisation of Shakespeare within a hip-hop context or linguistic framework similar to current artists and educators such as Akala. The RSC accompany their rap with beat-boxing and hip-hop posturing, throwing their hands in the air, finger-pointing and crossing their arms in mock displays of toughness, further emphasising the company's parodic intentions.

The subversive impulses contained in this scene, mixing the plot of *Othello* with what was an emerging artistic form in the 1980s, can be

⁸² Ibid, p. 33.

connected to the term ‘bisociation’,⁸³ which Purcell appropriates from Arthur Koester’s 1964 book *The Act of Creation*, to describe ‘the creative act of connecting previously unconnected ideas’.⁸⁴ He states that, for Koestler, ‘normal life [...] requires us to operate on only one plane of thought at any given time, whereas in order to understand a joke based on incongruity, its audience must be thinking on two at once’.⁸⁵ In watching and listening to ‘Rap Othello’, which does not feature any of Shakespeare’s text, the audience are asked to operate precisely in this way. Thus, in order to comprehend the meaning of the material, they must both recognise the plot of *Othello* in the troupe’s rap retelling and contemplate the reasons why this transposition can be considered to be funny. The company’s transferral of *Othello*’s story into this specific medium also exposes the ethical implications of white artists utilising black culture. In America, this has proven particularly controversial in the case of African-American cultural appropriation, from blues to hip-hop.

The RSC’s treatment of the reduction is as literal an act as Adam’s boat mistake: by simulating the process of improvisation in order to fill the vacant space in the scene left by his error, they imply that Shakespeare’s most famous black character will instinctively merge into a medium which was, at their time of writing in 1988, dominated by non-white rappers. The exception to this pre-eminence were the Beastie Boys, coincidentally, another white, all-male trio, who combined elements of white and black culture, helping to popularise the crossover genre of rap rock, and had released their debut album, *Licensed to Ill* in November 1986, seven months before the first performance of *Complete Works*. The RSC add another intertextual layer to the rap by imitating the Beastie Boys in their PBS Special, delivering it directly to cameras which move shakily, performing close-ups on their faces and quickly zooming in and out, in a performance style reminiscent of the anarchic video for the Beastie Boys’ 1986 single *(You Gotta) Fight For Your Right (To Party!)*.

The rap further satirises the practice of older artists and educators

⁸³ Stephen Purcell, *Popular Shakespeare: Simulation and Subversion on the Modern Stage* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 111.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

attempting to appear ‘hip’ by appropriating a prevalent pop culture phenomenon of the time. Singer has suggested that the RSC were one of the first companies to connect the ‘previously unconnected idea’ of similarities in the language used by Shakespeare and rappers. In performance, the audience is invited to engage in an *Othello* plot summary through the medium of hip-hop, a process which requires them simultaneously to consider the incongruity of Shakespeare’s plot set in that context, alongside the comic inappropriateness of ‘three white boys ripping off black culture’.⁸⁶ He further reflects that, with rap now ‘the most popular music in the world, other *Othellos* done in hip-hop style, and, of course, the astounding success of [hip-hop musical] *Hamilton*, we’re not even sure there should be a Rap version of *Othello* in our show anymore, since it seems overdone and almost trite in a show that’s supposed to feel spontaneous and fresh’.⁸⁷

The RSC were clearly ahead of their time in the creation of a rap-style Shakespeare pastiche. Hip-hop parody is regularly put to use by white musical comedians such as The Lonely Island and Flight of the Conchords, as a result, the satirical impact of ‘Rap *Othello*’ has been unquestionably reduced. Thus, what the RSC conceived as a rap parody, has transformed into a hip-hop Shakespeare parody owing to hip-hop’s massive increase in popularity since *Complete Works* was written, as well as the appropriation of Shakespeare by rappers. In the next chapter, I will examine these issues in greater depth using the both the company’s adaptation and further exploration of rap music for radio, and again in the final chapter, in an analysis of what impact the RSC have had on the hip-hop theatre company, Q Brothers.

▪ The Comedies

In the scene that follows ‘Rap *Othello*’, the RSC examine the intertextuality visible in the playwright’s work itself through their parody of the recurrent narratives, characters and settings of Shakespeare’s comedies. In the introduction to this sequence, the RSC draw the audience’s attention away

⁸⁶ Adam Long, Reed Martin and Austin Tichenor, ‘The Comedies’ in *The Reduced Shakespeare Company Radio Show* (Laughing Stock Productions Ltd., 1994).

⁸⁷ Singer, 18 April 2018.

from the focus of their two previous sections, namely, the process of adaptation to which Shakespeare is subjected (*Titus*), and the playwright's compatibility with modern cultural trends (*Othello*), to examine Shakespeare's status as 'a genius at borrowing and adapting plot devices from different theatrical traditions'.⁸⁸ This statement, made by Daniel, is immediately interrogated by Adam who, in a continuation of his irreverence for Shakespeare's literary reputation, suggests to the audience that 'Shakespeare stole everything he ever wrote'.⁸⁹ In the 2007 revised script, which names the trio by the colour of their sneakers rather than their given names, Daniel's pronouncement is reassigned to the Jess figure and the company more heavily emphasise the consideration of Shakespeare as a literary thief:

BLACK [Jess]: [...] He was a genius at borrowing and adapting plot devices from these different theatrical traditions.

GREEN [Adam]: Isn't that usually called 'plagiarism'?

BLACK [Jess]: Hey! Shakespeare didn't 'plagiarize,' he 'distilled.'
(*exits*)

GREEN [Adam]: Dis-stole, more like.⁹⁰

Jess acknowledges Shakespeare's process of adaptation, but pompously assumes the playwright's version to be the preferred one, implied through the purifying notion of distillation, inadvertently contradicting the observation he has just made about Shakespeare's 'genius' as a borrower. In his pithy, three-word retort, Adam takes 'bisociation' to a higher level, by achieving several effects: firstly, in the coining of the apparently simple hyphenated verb '[d]is-stole'⁹¹ to describe Shakespeare's action, he makes a parodic putdown of Shakespeare as a creative thief who drew upon and reshaped the ideas of his creative forebears. In addition, he distorts the use of the word 'distilled', with

⁸⁸ Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 36.

⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 37.

⁹⁰ Singer and Winfield, p. 27.

⁹¹ Ibid.

its overtones of purity, to represent an action that is altogether more furtive. Adam is appropriating the company's own 1994 *Complete Works* script, where the reference does not appear, thus epitomising the way the company reinvent themselves to remain culturally relevant. Literary theft and Shakespearean plagiarism are concepts to which the writers of *Long Lost* would return and will be explored in more detail in Chapter 4.

In contrast to the implicit connection that the RSC's comic re-enactment of the tomb scene makes between *R&J* and *Dream*, the intertextuality of Shakespeare's comedies is addressed explicitly by the company. They label Shakespeare as 'a formula writer' who used the same idea '[o]ver and over and over again' and, finally, address the playwright directly, asking '[w]hy did you write sixteen comedies when you could've written just one?'.⁹² Accordingly, they propose to take 'the liberty of condensing all sixteen of Shakespeare's comedies into a single play',⁹³ a solution clearly intended to parody Shakespeare's own process of borrowing, adapting and recycling pre-existing narratives and characters. The resultant synthesis of Shakespeare's comic tropes and characters begins with two comically-elongated titles that conflate the names of fifteen comedies: thus, 'The Comedy of Two Well-Measured Gentlemen Lost in the Merry Wives of Venice on a Midsummer Night's Twelfth Night in Winter' and 'Cymbeline Taming Pericles the Merchant in the Tempest of Love As Much As You Like It For Nothing'.⁹⁴

The company then deliver their comedy bricolage, narrating the story of '[a] Spanish duke [who] swears an oath of celibacy and turns the rule of his kingdom over to his sadistic and tyrannical twin brother'.⁹⁵ The 1994 script stipulates that this be performed with each actor standing in an individual spotlight, '*wearing tailcoats and comedy headgear*'⁹⁶ and reading the plot from a script, rather than acting out the narrative. This section of the first version was originally performed as a juggling act, as Singer describes: 'the concept of

⁹² Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 37.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*; author's italics.

repetitive plot gimmicks was mixed with the juggling of stereotypical props'.⁹⁷ The gimmicks listed in their composite reduction include shipwrecks, lost twins and cases of mistaken identity, culminating in a chaotic fifth act which parodies the ending common to a Shakespearean comedy in which nearly every character appears onstage, hidden identities are revealed, and many meet each other for the first time:

ALL: Act Five!

DANIEL: The duke commands the fairies to right their wrongs.

ADAM: The pages and the bimbos get into a knock-down drag-out fight in the mud...

JESS: During which the pages' clothes get ripped off, revealing female genitalia!

DANIEL: The duke recognizes his daughters!

ADAM: The duke's brother's son recognizes their uncle...

JESS: One of the bimbos grows up to be Vanna White...

DANIEL: And they all get married and go out to dinner.

ADAM: Except for a minor character in the second act who gets eaten by a bear, and the duke's brother's sons who, unable to pay back the old Jew, give themselves lobotomies.

ALL: And they all live happily ever after.⁹⁸

The contrast between the last two lines of this extract also satirises the categorisation of certain plays as comedies; those which feature darker themes or a tragic comeuppance for a character such as Shylock, to whom Adam's final line alludes. Singer explains that the decision to change this section from a juggling act into a static, narrative sequence was motivated by both ambition and necessity:

⁹⁷ Singer, 18 April 2018.

⁹⁸ Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 41.

When we arrived in Edinburgh and were about to open the show, we felt that we could do a better job writing something cleverer than us just constantly harping about how lame Shakespeare's comedies were. Also, the 'reader's theatre' presentation gave us a few minutes to catch our breaths in what was already a very exhausting show to perform.⁹⁹

Singer's comments highlight the physical intensity and stamina demanded by the RSC's plays. He also suggests that the company were keen to develop a more nuanced critique of the comedies that went beyond their parodic, physical translation of Shakespeare's 'juggling' of his plays' various tropes into their own literal juggling act. By transforming this scene into the least physical part of their show, the RSC not only succeeded in allowing themselves some respite after the frenetic opening half hour, but also focused the audience's attention more acutely on the theory behind their conflation of the comedies. Thus, by acknowledging Shakespeare's recycling process, they pinpointed the way in which this serves to undermine traditional notions of greatness.

▪ **Macbeth**

The scene that follows immediately after the Comedies section highlights the RSC's greater interest in the inversion of tragedy. Introducing their next scene, Adam tells the audience that 'we've found that the Comedies aren't half as funny as the Tragedies. Take for example, Shakespeare's Scottish Play'.¹⁰⁰ The notion that *Macbeth* might be considered comic, despite containing ghosts, witches and murdered children, is not without critical support. Eric S. Mallin, for instance, calls it '[t]he funniest Shakespeare play'¹⁰¹, suggesting that '*Fawlty Towers* could be a fairly effective adaptation of *Macbeth*',¹⁰² through association with John Cleese and Prunella Scales's performances as the manic

⁹⁹ Singer, 18 April 2018.

¹⁰⁰ Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 41.

¹⁰¹ Eric S. Mallin, *Godless Shakespeare* (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 89

¹⁰² *Ibid*, p. 92.

Basil Fawlty and his sharp-tongued wife, Sybil, as a natural fit for the play.

The RSC's abbreviated *Macbeth* explores broader ideas concerning the play and its cultural reputation, other than the comic potential that might be found in moments such as Macbeth's deadpan admission to Lennox after he murders Duncan that it 'was a rough night' (2.3.57), or, indeed, the section which Mallin believes to be most suggestive of a *Fawlty Towers* interpretation, when Lady Macbeth attempts, in the banquet scene, to prevent her guests from noticing that her husband is becoming progressively unhinged. Instead, the RSC, first of all, focus on the theatrical superstition that *Macbeth* is a cursed play and that 'you're really not supposed to talk about it in a theater unless you're performing it'.¹⁰³ This is demonstrated through Daniel and Jess's intervention before Adam makes that mistake, interrupting his introduction just in time to stop him saying the Scottish play's name.

The company reduce the play to a basic summary of its key plot points, ignoring Lady Macbeth entirely, to focus solely on the events that directly contribute to Macbeth's death: he meets the Witches; he asks the audience why he should fear Macduff; Macduff tells Macbeth that he 'was from my mother's womb untimely ripped';¹⁰⁴ the two men fight, and Macduff kills him. The RSC are more interested in parodying the play's setting than exploring the plot itself, presenting a stereotypical American perception of Scottish stereotypes: haggis, football and an incomprehensible dialect. Consequently, after they promise that 'after much thorough research',¹⁰⁵ they are able to perform *Macbeth* 'in perfect Scottish accents',¹⁰⁶ the company deliver the entire scene in '*nearly impenetrable Scottish accents*',¹⁰⁷ adding the prefix 'Mac' to the majority of their lines and using a number of phrases associated with the Scottish dialect, such as '[s]ee you, Jimmy'.¹⁰⁸

The scripted version, in which the lines are written phonetically, indicates the inauthenticity of these accents and, consequently, the switch in

¹⁰³ Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 42.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 45.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 44.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid; my italics.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 45.

mood from the previous scene's direct interrogation of Shakespeare's cultural status to a more basic form of parody, which may have been influenced by a desire to poke fun at the Scottish audiences whom they encountered during their early Edinburgh Fringe performances:

J/MACBETH: [...] Lay on, ye great haggis-face.

(They fence)

A/MACDUFF: Ah, Macbeth! Ye killed my wife, ye murdered my babies, ye shat in my stew.

J/MACBETH: Och! I didnae!

A/MACDUFF: O, ay ye did. I had t' throw half of it away.

The confrontation between Macbeth and Macduff is thus reduced to a lowbrow scene that relies on toilet humour alongside a veiled reference to the stereotype of Scottish meanness, in the 'waste-not-want-not' implication that the other half of the faecal 'stew' had been consumed. A further layer of parody is added by means of the visual joke of Macbeth's head being kicked into the audience, evoking a further, contemporary comparison with the veteran Scottish rock performer, Rod Stewart, who is known to kick a football into the crowd during his concerts. Adam seizes the moment of final lowbrow inversion, by combining Macduff's victorious proclamation with further Scottish colloquialisms, in his cry '[b]ehold where lies the usurper's cursed head. / Macbeth, yer arse is out the windie'.¹⁰⁹

▪ **The Roman Plays**

The company move straight from *Macbeth* into their conflated version of *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, treating the play as a pair, by having Antony, played by Jess, proclaim 'Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears. I come to bury Caesar [...] so bury him, and let's get onto my play'.¹¹⁰ Adam's ensuing performance of Cleopatra's suicide involves him leaving the stage to

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 47.

feign vomiting on the audience after being bitten by the asp. This repeats his interpretation of Juliet's death, and results in the production's first severe breakdown when Daniel and Jess turn on their colleague. Failing to understand what he has done wrong, Adam is informed that he has 'this bizarre notion that all of Shakespeare's tragic heroines wear really ugly wigs and vomit on people before they die'.¹¹¹

Jess again attempts to educate his colleague, emphasising the division between the two characters by using academic language, which Adam misinterprets, telling him that *A&C* is 'a romantic thriller about a geopolitical power struggle between Egypt and Rome'.¹¹² Adam responds with misguided enthusiasm, telling Jess that 'Shakespeare's geopolitical stuff is my favourite stuff. [...] what was that one he wrote about how nuclear energy affected the Soviet Union? [...] It was called "Chernobyl Kinsmen" and it was intense'.¹¹³ Following the pattern set by previous scenes, Daniel and Jess correct his mistake, informing him that the correct title is, of course, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. This exchange is a prominent example of what Long describes as his character's primary attributes: 'innocence and enthusiasm and a pleasing lack of self-awareness'.¹¹⁴

The RSC's exploration of Shakespeare's Roman plays is notably underpowered in comparison to other parts of *Complete Works*. By farcically reimagining *Titus* in a modern context and performing it separately from the other Roman plays, the RSC choose not to treat it as a member of this group, instead treating it as a black comedy. *Coriolanus* is almost entirely ignored, with the exception of Adam's objection to the performance of *Coriolanus* due to 'the "anus" part. I think it's offensive',¹¹⁵ a bawdy joke which evokes 'Brush Up Your Shakespeare', a song from the 1948 musical *Kiss Me, Kate*. The fact that the RSC disregard some of Shakespeare's most political plays – nullifying *Titus*'s potential as a critique on military leadership in favour of sensationalising its violence through the form of farce, reducing *Coriolanus* to

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 48.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid, pp. 48-9.

¹¹⁴ Long, 29 September 2017.

¹¹⁵ Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 57.

a bum joke and addressing *Caesar* and *A&C* only insofar as they can be considered companion plays – suggests that they are less interested here in satire than in physical, burlesque humour. However, it may also be that, apart from Caesar’s assassination, Cleopatra’s asp and Titus’s pie, such plays lack the recognisable images on which the RSC’s form of parody relies for comic effect.

▪ **The Problem Plays**

The mention of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, which Adam complains that he’s never heard of, allows Jess to segue into another scholarly lecture, which this time focuses on Shakespeare’s problem plays. He begins by attempting to defend their validity and theatrical quality:

BLACK [Jess]: [...] ‘Two Noble Kinsmen’ actually falls into the category of Shakespeare’s plays that we pre-eminent Shakespeare scholars refer to as the ‘Problem’ plays, or in some circles, the ‘Lesser’ plays,’ or simply, the ‘Bad’ plays. And yet, not all of the bad plays are completely without merit. In fact, one of them, ‘Troilus and Cressida,’ is hardly crap at all.¹¹⁶

This extract, which is taken from 2007 revised script, amends an error by the company in the original 1994 version, in which Jess refers to the problem plays as ‘The Apocrypha’.¹¹⁷ This term refers to works by Shakespeare of which his authorship, either as a sole or co-writer, is questioned, including *The Birth of Merlin* and *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, rather than those plays which defy genre categorisation, such as *All’s Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure*.

Jess addresses the allegedly highbrow members of the audience, as though they belonged to a higher circle, separate from the less initiated, denying the latter access to these plays, through the language of exclusivity. The construction of this lecture further cements Jess’s distance from the audience, just as Adam has moved literally and figuratively closer to them, by

¹¹⁶ Singer and Winfield, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged) [revised]*, p. 35.

¹¹⁷ Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 49.

parodying the academic fascination with texts which may hold little or no interest for the average theatre-goer. This serves to heighten the particular aspect of the highbrow/lowbrow cultural divide that is addressed by this section of the play: the division between academics and audiences. The apologetic tone of his introduction, which ultimately concedes that ‘the Apocrypha’ may be comparatively less well-known than Shakespeare’s other work for the reason that they are simply bad, serves to mock Jess’s position as the company’s resident academic and represents the beginning of a shift towards a more pragmatic, practice-based approach to Shakespeare which manifests itself in the play’s second act.

The RSC engage in every ‘spirit’¹¹⁸ listed by Douglas Lanier to describe Shakespearean fan fiction – ‘critique, anarchy, pleasure, recuperation and participation’¹¹⁹ – using parodic versions of academic lectures, physical reinterpretations of plays and audience interaction. In the *Troilus and Cressida* parody that follows on from Jess’s introduction, they use each of these simultaneously, to produce a critique of Shakespeare’s legacy in academia, performance and popular culture. Here, Adam fulfils the role of anarchic disrupter, questioning Jess’s scholarly authority and, by association, that of Shakespeare, given that Jess is emblematic of everything that he, Adam, dislikes and fears about the playwright, or rather, his cultural reputation, notably linguistic complexity, bookishness and a lack of physical engagement. For instance, after Jess begins to expound on *Troilus and Cressida*, stating that ‘I actually discuss it at some length in my soon-to-be-released book about Shakespeare, entitled ‘I Love My Willy’’,¹²⁰ Adam incorrectly interprets this as a cue for practical, rather than textual, engagement:

JESS: [...] maybe tonight we could do a kind of quick improvised version of ‘Troilus and Cressida’ based on this chapter.

ADAM: Oh, I love interpretive performance art. It’s so...

¹¹⁸ Lanier, p. 104.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 50

(searching for the word) ...pretentious! We could use 'Troilus and Cressida' as a jumping-off point to explore deeper themes like the transient nature of life and mythology involved in the arising and dissipation of forms.

DANIEL: Yeah! Get some props!

JESS: Now wait just a minute. I was thinking of a more straightforward, scholarly approach –

ADAM: Naw, screw that. *(He exits.)*¹²¹

After further misunderstanding, in which Jess reads from his monograph, Daniel pragmatically asks his colleague if 'there [is] something in there about the plot',¹²² and Adam brings a battery-operated Godzilla toy onstage, he finally loses patience with the 'scholarly approach' and, addressing the audience, opines that

ADAM: I will NOT do dry, boring... vomitless Shakespeare for these people, 'cause it'll just turn you off. I mean, that's what happened to me. When I was a kid I used to sit there in class, while we were supposed to be studying Shakespeare, and I'd be looking out the window at all the kids playing ball, and I'd be thinking to myself, 'Why can't this Shakespeare stuff be more like sports?'¹²³

▪ The Histories

Until this point, Daniel and Jess have attempted to control and sublimate Adam's anarchic opinions and tendencies, correcting his mistakes and interrupting his performance whenever they perceive it to have overstepped the boundary between actor and audience. This outburst represents the first moment in *Complete Works* when they begin to embrace his ideas and

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid., p. 51.

¹²³ Ibid., pp. 52-3.

spontaneity. Responding to their request for clarification on what exactly he means, Adam states that ‘sports are visceral, they’re exciting to watch. I mean, take the histories for example. With all those kings and queens killing off each other, and the throne passing from one generation to the next. It’s exactly like football, but you do it with a crown’.¹²⁴ The company react to this by using American football to illustrate this passage of the crown throughout English history, staging every play in a literal ‘game of thrones’.

In addition to both History tetralogies, the RSC include *King John*, *Henry VIII* and, perhaps controversially, *King Lear*, a play normally classified as a tragedy. Instead of appearing in the chronological order of their historical existence or the sequence in which Shakespeare is believed to have written them, the appearance of each king matches the order of the plays in the First Folio. Consequently, the RSC begin with King John and finish with Henry VIII. In this scene, the RSC appropriate individual quotations as sporting commands in a similar way to their incorporation of lines from *Titus* into cooking instructions. For instance, after he takes to the field, Daniel’s Lear addresses his colleagues in the manner of a football coach, telling them:

D/LEAR: “Divide we our kingdom in three.” Cordelia, you go long...

(JESS re-enters, throws a penalty marker and whistles play dead.)

ADAM: A penalty marker is down.

(JESS makes a hand signal and points at LEAR.)

Fictional character on the field. Lear is disqualified, and he’s not happy about it.¹²⁵

This one-line use of *Lear* demonstrates this process of de-contextualisation, aping the sports-field practice of naming players by their surname, while summarising Lear’s banishment of Cordelia and punning on the phrase ‘go long’, to describe both her banishment to France and the footballing command to describe a player running forward to catch the ball. Moreover, the RSC also address the categorisation of *Lear* as a tragedy, suggesting that the title

¹²⁴ Ibid, p. 53.

¹²⁵ Ibid, pp. 54-5.

character is out of place in this history-focused scenario and, therefore, must be disqualified. They also satirise Shakespeare's own use of his sources, such as Holinshed's *Chronicles*, and his manipulation of historical events to suit his particular narrative interests and requirements.

Using a prop crown to represent the ball, the company toss it from member to member, each monarch appearing only for his death, which is represented by the loss of the crown and its advance to the successor. The sporting analogy used to represent the process of succession is, thus, decidedly apt and, exemplified by the speed of the game and brevity of each king's appearance, describing precisely the ephemeral nature of 'the hollow crown' (*Richard II*, 3.2.156) which Shakespeare explores throughout his History plays. Beneath the ensuing physical comedy lies a genuine attempt to reclaim Shakespeare for a popular, and, particularly, a youth audience, at whom Adam's earlier schoolroom memories were primarily directed.

After completing the game with Henry VIII and a 'TOUCHDOWN for the Red Rose',¹²⁶ Adam asks to borrow an audience member's programme in order to check that, as he believes, they have already performed every play. Excitedly telling the audience that '[w]e might be able to let you out a little early tonight',¹²⁷ he creates the idea that the actors are as keen as their audience to get through this production quickly and unscathed. Working their way through the canon, Adam states that they 'did all the Histories just now',¹²⁸ Daniel assesses that they 'covered the Comedies in a lump'¹²⁹ and the Tragedies, with the exception of the 'offensive'¹³⁰ *Coriolanus*, are also judged to have been completed. However, immediately afterwards, they simultaneously realise their one glaring omission: *Hamlet*.

Adam balks at the prospect of staging what he perceives to be this 'really serious, hard-core play',¹³¹ worried that 'I just don't think that I could do justice to it'.¹³² This is in sharp contrast to Jess's self-professed academic

¹²⁶ Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 55.

¹²⁷ Ibid, p. 56.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid, p. 57.

¹³¹ Ibid, p. 59.

¹³² Ibid.

authority figure, who tells Adam that ‘we don’t have to do justice to it. We just have to do it’¹³³ and labels him a ‘Shakespearean wimp’,¹³⁴ as he pursues a fleeing Adam from the theatre. Daniel, the compere, is left to placate the audience and improvise until his two fellow cast members return. In the PBS Special, this section of the play is expanded to reflect the character’s desperate attempts to continue entertaining the audience by any means necessary. Drawing on the range of skills learned as a Barnum & Bailey Circus clown, Reed (in the Daniel role) proceeds to pull grotesque faces for the audience, play the ‘William Tell Overture’ on his windpipe and, finally, eat fire.

This conflict represents the culmination of Jess and Adam’s ideological divide, precipitating the play’s interval and cementing Daniel’s role as the company’s pragmatic leader, who will attempt to keep the show running smoothly regardless of this calamitous division. Singer has remarked that the Daniel character is the member of the RSC troupe most attuned to the requirements of show business and who, consequently, places the needs of the audience above his own interests much more readily than Adam or Jess. Whilst rooted in the slapstick, fourth-wall-breaking conventions of vaudeville, this moment also highlights more serious notions about the ways in which the RSC’s formerly united ensemble becomes fractured, which are evident through the narrative arc of a conflict between stereotypically highbrow and lowbrow attitudes, as represented by these two characters. These proclivities develop during the first half of the play, from which they subsequently recover, resulting in rebuilt trust during Act Two.

Act 2

▪ Stalling and Sonnets

The second act of *Complete Works* opens as though the closing events of the first, which forced Daniel to call an early interval, have not happened. In the PBS version, Reed leaps onstage wearing a metal cap and brandishing a sword,

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid, p. 61.

eager to commence the first scene of *Hamlet*. In a dumb-show performance, he pauses for a moment, waiting for Bernardo's line 'who's there' (1.1.1), then turns his head to see only a vacant space where his RSC colleague should be. He looks enquiringly from side to side then turns around in a complete circle before glowering at the audience and, with a resigned expression, sighs loudly and stalks offstage, throwing his sword to the ground as he exits through the stage-right gap in the scenery. Almost immediately, he then re-enters through the stage-left opening, accordion in hand, and plays a lively waltz with a stony-faced expression. At the tune's conclusion, the audience whoop and clap, before Reed halts their applause by saying 'please, don't patronise me'.¹³⁵

In this particular version, Reed Martin's clowning skills help to emphasise the conflict between the character's clear frustration at not being able to continue, and his determination to ensure that the audience remains entertained. The exuberance of his vaudevillian performance belies his agitation at being left alone on stage, which, if played convincingly, can create a real sense of insecurity for the audience. Indeed, for *Complete Works* to function as a comedy structured on the basis of conflict and resolution, the audience must be made to believe that there is a real chance that the other two actors will not return. In the 1994 script, Daniel opts to play for time by asking the audience whether they had 'a nice intermission'¹³⁶ and whether 'there was a long line in at the Ladies' room',¹³⁷ more in the manner of a comedian than of Reed's later circus performer. The stand-up and improvisational impulses, which the original company learnt throughout their development at the Renaissance faires, are thus incorporated into the play's structure.

Daniel's next stalling technique introduces Shakespeare's sonnets into *Complete Works*. He explains that this is the scholarly Jess's idea, who, he tells the audience, 'called him during the interval'¹³⁸ to suggest that, until he and Adam return, Daniel 'should cover the sonnets. [...] Shakespeare wrote one hundred and fifty-four sonnets. I've condensed them down onto this three-by-

¹³⁵ Kafno, 2003.

¹³⁶ Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 65.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

five card [...] and I was thinking maybe what we could do is pass it among the audience'.¹³⁹ The disjunction between the tiny card and the number of sonnets creates a farcical image that takes the concept of reduction to its most literal level.¹⁴⁰ In the PBS performance, this is heightened by Reed passing the card to an audience member in the front row and hurrying them to pass it on, accompanying their reading with the previous jaunty melody on his accordion, thus creating a further schism between the quiet act of privately contemplating the sonnets and the spirited tune produced by Reed. The sonnets are represented here as an addendum to Shakespeare's plays, with the implication that their meaning can be deduced in a scant space of time, from a piece of card so comically inadequate as to render them illegible.

The card has barely left the first audience member when Jess and Adam finally enter, the latter being dragged onstage, an unwilling lamb to the theatrical slaughter. Amid Adam's continued protestations that *Hamlet* is 'just so big. It's got so many words',¹⁴¹ Daniel removes him backstage, whereupon Jess, somewhat bombastically, introduces it as 'perhaps the greatest play ever written in the English language'.¹⁴² He follows his colleagues, and, after an audible offstage argument, the audience hears a loud slap. A moment later, Daniel and Adam simultaneously run onstage from the two entrances, with their backs to each other, and start the scene with which the act should have begun: '[t]he battlements of Elsinore castle, round about midnight. Two guards enter'.¹⁴³

▪ Hamlet

Before considering the RSC's *Hamlet*, it is essential to re-examine the importance of Tom Stoppard's *Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth* (1979) for the

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ The RSC's level of attention to detail in this moment, even though it is intended only as an interlude until the main action of the play can resume, is indicated by Martin's divulgence that, 'although they were illegible because they were so shrunken, there were actually reduced copies of sonnets on both sides of the card – not 154 sonnets – but maybe 40 or so on each side of the card'. (Personal interview, E-mail, 14 September 2018).

¹⁴¹ Ibid, p. 66.

¹⁴² Ibid, p. 67.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

company's creation and methods of reduction. Stoppard incorporated his *Fifteen Minute Hamlet* (1976), into this later work, which Singer cites as an influence. As documented in the previous chapter, but worthy of closer analysis, the significance of Stoppard's play led to Singer's half-hour *Hamlet*, which, he explains, evolved into the version performed in *Complete Works*:

The "Hamlet" portion of Act One was about 40 minutes long, as I recall, and had a cast of about ten. [...] The script was all the most famous lines compacted together, and it was very funny, even without the actors making it deliberately comedic.¹⁴⁴

Stoppard's prologue, in particular, reads as a 'Hamlet's Greatest Hits' compilation, toying with the audience's knowledge of the play through truncation and conflation:

Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.
To be or not to be that is the question.
There are more things in heaven and earth
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.¹⁴⁵

Elsewhere in the text, Stoppard reduces entire scenes to the briefest of exchanges, including 'a three-line condensation of the Nunnery scene'¹⁴⁶ which, Christy Desmet argues, produces comedy for an audience through 'ironic deflation of all the critical ink spilled over this scene'.¹⁴⁷

To be, or not to be (he puts a dagger to his heart)
Claudius and Ophelia enter.

¹⁴⁴ Daniel Singer, Personal interview, E-mail, 1 May 2018.

¹⁴⁵ Tom Stoppard, *Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth* (London: Samuel French, 1979), p. 33.

¹⁴⁶ Christy Desmet, 'Paying Attention in Shakespeare Parody: From Tom Stoppard to YouTube' in *Shakespeare Survey* 61, ed. Peter Holland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 230.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

that is the question.

Ophelia: My lord –

Hamlet: Get thee to a nunnery!

*Ophelia and Hamlet exit.*¹⁴⁸

Desmet argues that, '[i]n Stoppard's version, there is no complex motivation behind Hamlet's cutting words to Ophelia; here, the man who famously could not make up his mind, just acts',¹⁴⁹ thus providing both a critique of the Prince's famously indecisive verbosity and a challenge to the many critical interpretations surrounding *Hamlet*. Inspired by Stoppard, the RSC's reduction of Shakespeare's play similarly strips it bare of its academic baggage and, as Desmet suggests of *Fifteen-Minute Hamlet*, produces for its audience 'the comic effects that follow when such an emotionally fraught exchange is reduced to a curt shorthand'.¹⁵⁰

A further connection exists in the imagined version of a decisive, modernised *Hamlet* in the satirical action film *Last Action Hero* (1993) where a young boy, while watching Laurence Olivier's 1948 film, and Hamlet's hesitation in 3.3, with his dagger held over the praying Claudius, urges him: 'don't talk, just do it'.¹⁵¹ The boy's last three words quote Nike's famous trademark, coined by the multinational sportswear company in 1988. The scene morphs into a 'fantasy trailer for a *Hamlet* action film, with Hamlet, played by [Hollywood action star and body builder] Arnold Schwarzenegger, spouting smart-ass tag-lines as he slashes and machine-guns everyone in sight'.¹⁵² Lanier argues here that the highbrow/lowbrow 'opposition is unmistakable: Shakespeare, the quintessential representative of overly intellectualized, outmoded high art, is set against the 1980s action film, all anti-establishment rage and unhesitating fisticuffs'.¹⁵³ Evidently, the *Hamlet* being critiqued by *Last Action Hero's* director, John McTiernan, is Olivier's,

¹⁴⁸ Stoppard, p.

¹⁴⁹ Desmet, p. 230.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ *Last Action Hero*, dir. John McTiernan, 1993.

¹⁵² Lanier, p. 44.

¹⁵³ Ibid, p. 45.

rather than Shakespeare's, and thus the primary target of his satire is not Shakespeare's play but interpretations of it by a previous generation. However, as Lanier explains, 'the sequence's campy excess also critiques the preposterous conventions of action films themselves, measuring them against the restraint of Olivier's Prince'.¹⁵⁴ Like Stoppard and the RSC's versions of *Hamlet*, *Last Action Hero* inverts and condenses both plot and text into a hyperbolic, postmodern appropriation of the play, as demonstrated by taglines which quote or rearrange Shakespeare's text: 'something is rotten in the state of Denmark and Hamlet's taking out the trash',¹⁵⁵ 'no one's going to tell this sweet prince good night'¹⁵⁶ and 'to be or not to be? Not to be'.¹⁵⁷

Although the first performances of *Complete Works* predate Schwarzenegger's Hamlet by six years, they do address the intertextuality of decisive action heroes and indecisive Danish princes at the beginning of the 1994 published version. This involves Adam mistakenly suggesting that they don't need to cover *Hamlet* within their remit of Shakespeare's canon because he 'thought it was a Mel Gibson movie',¹⁵⁸ referring to Franco Zeffirelli's 1990 film, in which Hamlet was played by Gibson, who, like Schwarzenegger, was more noted for his appearances in action franchises such as *Mad Max* (1979) and *Lethal Weapon* (1987) than in Shakespeare productions. The reference was later updated in the RSC's 2007 revision to cite the *Hamlet*-influenced Disney film *The Lion King* (1994). This is not only more suitable for younger members of the audiences but, as an adaptation rather than a version of *Hamlet*, like Zeffirelli's film, it made a more coherent point about the liminal nature of originals and adaptations in the public consciousness, as represented by the Adam figure's parodic confusion over which came first:

GREEN [Adam]: Shakespeare didn't write 'Hamlet,' did he?

RED [Daniel]: Sure he did.

GREEN [Adam]: What's it about?

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ *Last Action Hero*, dir. John McTiernan, 1993.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 59.

BLACK [Jess]: You know, the young prince struggling with his conscience after his uncle murders his father?

GREEN [Adam]: Dude, that's 'The Lion King'.¹⁵⁹

As with his other moments of confusion throughout the play, Adam plays this deadpan, and his feigned ignorance lampoons those who dismiss Shakespeare as highbrow or inaccessible, and who may, indeed, be unaware of the fact of the playwright's influence on popular culture, such as Disney. This implicitly queries *Hamlet's* pre-eminence as the blueprint for adaptations that follow and which, therefore, are sometimes considered secondary to it. Adam's 'mistake', however, accords Shakespeare and Disney equal reverence and status in the collective imagination, an idea to which the RSC would return in *Long Lost*.

Singer explains that the comedy influences that inspire their work are often embedded into the performance of *Complete Works*, rather being than explicitly visible within the text, and that these influences as well as Shakespeare's characters, are treated as equals rather than being assigned a cultural status of 'high' or 'low':

We learned about comedy from those influences, but it was never important to make obvious references to them. In fact, there really aren't any in the script. Early on, we would use things like Bugs Bunny's 'of course you realise DIS means WAR!' but not everyone in the audience recognises a quotation like that, so literal quotations from our influences disappeared. Adam's performance, especially his Juliet and Ophelia, was very inspired by Harpo Marx. The faux violence in the show is reminiscent of the Three Stooges. When Jess's Hamlet was feigning madness, he did John Cleese's famous Silly Walk. Juliet calls Friar Lawrence 'Obi-Wan [Kenobi]' because *Star Wars* is now as eternal as Shakespeare.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Singer and Winfield, p. 41.

¹⁶⁰ Singer, 18 April 2018.

These influences and their application are reflected throughout the RSC's *Hamlet*. In the first scene, between Bernardo and Horatio, the performance begins in the manner of a live-action cartoon strip, with the two characters moving in sync, mirroring each other's gestures and speaking the play's title, 'Hamlet, Prince of Denmark', in unison. Directly after this, they jump simultaneously and sprint offstage, while Hamlet enters from the other side of the stage, leaps in the air, and lands to strike a theatrical pose for the audience, who promptly applaud.

By casting the bookish Jess in this role, the RSC satirise academics as frustrated thespians. Singer suggests that he 'is wildly giddy at the chance to play the best, most intellectually satisfying role in the history of theatre'.¹⁶¹ However, this enthusiasm comes at a price, when Jess buckles under the pressure of having to perform Hamlet's 'to be or not to be' speech. In the 1994 script, he completes the first five lines and then forgets his lines, beginning to improvise and, finally, he '*collapses in a heap*'.¹⁶² In the PBS Special, Austin does not get beyond the first few words. His failure begins when he drops to his knees to begin the speech, only for the spotlight to focus on the opposite corner of the stage. Attempting to save the situation, Austin awkwardly shuffles into the light and strikes the same theatrical pose, arms held melodramatically in the air. The audience's laughter increases as Austin attempts to quieten them in order that they might admire his rendition of Hamlet's most famous speech, as a quiet, introspective and psychologically complex moment to be best appreciated in silence. When the audience prove too unruly, he collapses, and his colleagues rush onstage to his aid.

This presentation of feigned actorly collapse under the combined pressures of the speech's history in performance, its cultural reputation and his inability to control an audience does, however, address a real challenge faced by actors who play Hamlet in any type of production, parodic or otherwise. The trauma which Jess experiences as Hamlet in *Complete Works* directly addresses the actor's perception of a specific dramatic moment, and that this may often be at odds with the audience's expectations. In the PBS

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 80.

Special, Austin confronts the audience directly. As their laughter continues to build, his request for silence becomes increasingly aggressive:

AUSTIN strikes a theatrical pose and the audience applaud. He moves his hand, takes a deep breath, and is about to speak when there is an audible giggle from the audience. He holds a finger up to his lips for silence and hushes them. The laughter increases, and he tries to begin again. He next asks them to 'shut up, please', straightens his jacket and composes himself. The laughter continues, and he repeats, more insistently, 'shut up!' When the laughter does not abate, he pulls out his sword and shouts 'what part of "shut up" don't you understand?' Holding the sword out, he finally manages to deliver 'to be...', before collapsing to the ground.¹⁶³

Thus, the *Hamlet*-induced pressures that Adam's character had anticipated at the end of the first act are subsequently transferred to Jess/Austin's character, the very person who had earlier pontificated on the unparalleled brilliance of the play. Each of them, in different ways, represents the expectations and pressures that surround the play, due to its cultural cachet and familiarity: Adam baulks at the idea of performing it and Jess breaks under the burden of having to deliver Hamlet's most definitive lines. Therefore, it is highly significant that, during this moment of delegation of pressure, when Adam steps in to save both Jess and the situation, that in so doing, he brings an end to their ideological feud, thus bringing about his narrative redemption. Long describes how the 'through-line in *Complete Works* is based on the three characters. The character who starts off as the underdog is the one who completely saves the day when *Hamlet* falls apart and then everybody comes together'.¹⁶⁴ They achieve this through the performance of Hamlet's 'piece of work' monologue, delivered by Adam, cutting only the first two and last two lines in order to reconfigure it as a soliloquy rather than as a speech delivered

¹⁶³ This transcript is taken from my personal observation of Austin Tichenor's performance in the 2001 PBS Special of *Complete Works*.

¹⁶⁴ Long, 29 September 2017.

to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. For the first time in *Complete Works*, the rest of the speech is uncut, without any breaks in Shakespeare's text and, as the script stipulates, delivered '*simply, quietly and without a trace of interpretation*':¹⁶⁵

ADAM: Right. Well, there's this one speech that goes:

"I have of late, but wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises; and indeed, it goes so heavy with my disposition; that this goodly frame the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy the air, look you; this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestic roof, fretted with golden fire, why it appears to me no more than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is man; how noble in reason, how infinite in faculty, in form and moving how express and admirable; in action how like an angel; in apprehension how like a god. The beauty of the world, the paragon of animals; and yet to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me".¹⁶⁶

The unbroken flow of the speech produces exactly the reflective moment which Jess has just failed to deliver, from the character from whom they least expect it, thereby consciously confounding the audience's expectations. In the PBS Special, Long's performance follows the script's instructions precisely, running his remark that 'there's this one speech that goes'¹⁶⁷ straight into the soliloquy, in order to create the impression that his lack of interpretation is a consequence of this being an impromptu performance, which has been forced upon him by Austin's collapse. Long's unhurried and quiet delivery of the speech is in direct contrast to the breakneck speed with which the RSC mostly perform *Complete Works*; therefore, it stands out as a dramatic moment,

¹⁶⁵ Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 81.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

designed to surprise the audience and provoke the silence which Austin fails to create.

This draws another line of distinction between the relative success of their respective approaches to Shakespearean performance; here, while the Jess character, played by Tichenor, is unable to escape from his regimented belief in a melodramatic reading that requires the hush of an unruly mob, the Adam character's untutored approach and unconscious ability to key directly into Hamlet's numb apathy generates the audience's silence, without apparent effort. This suggests that Adam's practical, audience-involving approach is to be favoured over the heightened, distancing alternative represented, in this moment, by Jess. Long explains that his 'character might connect with an audience because the Adam character spends more time with the audience than anybody else does,'¹⁶⁸ and he takes any opportunity to be with them 'because of those gaps in his knowledge. He doesn't understand that once an actor is onstage he's supposed to stay onstage'.¹⁶⁹ This is indicative of how, for Daniel and Jess, the stage is constructed as the centre of their world within the play and does not extend beyond those confines and boundaries.

For Adam, on the other hand, the whole theatrical space is a playground because, fundamentally, he does not view it as a theatrical 'space' in the first place. His instinct to break the fourth wall is beyond premediated thought or instinct: it is simply his default state of being. He is raw, innocent and untutored to the point where theatrical conceits are alien to him and this, therefore, allows him dramatic freedom and unfettered access to areas of performance which are closed off to his more initiated colleagues, giving him a direct link to the audience. Thus, having spent the first half of *Complete Works* demonstrating Shakespeare's malleability with a number of popular forms, the RSC here draw their audience's attention to the potential power of Shakespeare's observations on humanity when laid bare and unaccommodated, without interpretation. In doing so, they return to the implicit question, first addressed in their cooking-show version of *Titus*, of whether the conceptual gimmicks and interpretive baggage that some

¹⁶⁸ Long, 29 September 2017.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

directors and academics attach to Shakespeare's work are suitable and helpful in stimulating its enjoyment and understanding for contemporary audiences.

The culmination of Adam's cross-dressing appearances throughout *Complete Works* is in the character of Ophelia. It comes as a shock to him, near the play's conclusion, when Daniel reveals that '[t]here are no more scenes with Ophelia'.¹⁷⁰ The following exchange critiques the abrupt ending to Ophelia's role in *Hamlet* and, further, the lack of representation which Shakespeare gives one of the play's two main female characters:

ADAM: No, c'mon. I'm up for it.

DANIEL: That's all Shakespeare wrote.

ADAM: Well, what happens to her?

DANIEL: She drowns.

ADAM: Oh. Okay. (*Exits.*)¹⁷¹

Although Adam's representation of Ophelia's death is a farcical reduction, throwing a cup of water in his own face to signify drowning, nonetheless, it delivers a physical visualisation of her death, which Shakespeare denies his audience. The RSC's wider approach to Ophelia in *Complete Works* consequently expands her character somewhat more than it reduces it.

Having rescued Jess from *Hamlet*, Adam faces his own crisis of confidence, complaining that he's 'not in the right costume',¹⁷² and insisting that 'Ophelia is a very difficult and complex character'.¹⁷³ Daniel suggests that '[a]nybody could play the character',¹⁷⁴ prompting him, along with Jess, to recruit a female volunteer from the audience to play Ophelia. Adam, feeling snubbed, rebels yet again by re-entering the audience and describing the impromptu performer as 'some bozo'.¹⁷⁵ Jess's only directorial request to the volunteer is to scream when he delivers Hamlet's command to '[g]et thee to a

¹⁷⁰ Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 95.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 96-7.

¹⁷² *Ibid.* p. 82.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

nunnery'.¹⁷⁶ In a tacit parody of overtly complex thespian readings, Adam complains after the scream that '[y]ou obviously had no idea what was going on inside Ophelia's head'.¹⁷⁷ Then, somewhat contrarily, warming to the volunteer idea, he suggests that they might benefit from 'a supportive environment',¹⁷⁸ in which the audience can accurately represent 'a Freudian analysis'¹⁷⁹ of Ophelia's inner monologue:

ADAM: [...] Maybe we could get everybody to act out what's going on inside of Ophelia's head. Like, divide everybody into Ophelia's Id, Ego, and Superego –

JESS: Oh yeah, like a Freudian analysis!

ADAM: Yeah, a Floydian analysis!

JESS: Cool! I'll get the Ego.

*(JESS grabs a guy out of the audience and hustles him up onstage.)*¹⁸⁰

This moment unites Jess and Adam in the shared purpose of applying an academic reading of *Hamlet* with a practical approach which will involve the audience directly. Although Adam has clearly misunderstood Jess's terminology, confusing Sigmund Freud with Pink Floyd, without realising it, he has arrived at the practical conclusion that a Freudian reading of *Hamlet* might give the volunteer a better understanding of the play and, consequently, help her to deliver a stronger scream as Ophelia. Long views this as an example of Adam representing the Everyman figure, able to delineate ideas on behalf of the audience without needing to root them in theoretical discussion:

I wanted him to be somebody who was really interested in Shakespeare and the philosophy behind Shakespeare. He was

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 83.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 84.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, pp. 84-5.

somebody who was just interested, intellectually, in a lot, but he'd never formally been trained in anything, so he only had the sketchy grasp of things. He understands Freudian psychology because somebody told him about it one day while they were having a drink together and so he's got this idea of this Id, Ego and Superego and he thinks it's great. The same with Shakespeare: he's picked up a little bit of a lot of things. So, the character wasn't intended to be a complete idiot. He was supposed to be this wide-eyed enthusiast who had huge gaps in his knowledge. That's why he can mistake Shakespeare's life for Hitler's and not quite understand what he's done until it's way too late.¹⁸¹

Long's testimony on his character suggests that Adam, rather than being a fool or uninitiated Shakespearean, is fascinated by the fundamental reasons for Shakespeare's continued popularity. He is able to think and theorise about these questions because, unlike Jess and Daniel, he does not take Shakespeare's greatness as a given. This is one of the reasons why he functions as the audience's portal into the drama. The reflection Long makes that 'he's picked up a little bit of a lot of things' also represents, to some extent, an undergraduate figure who has never specialised in any specific subject but wishes to taste a slice of everything, unlike Jess, who specialised in Shakespeare to the detriment of anything else, and Daniel, the pragmatist who is more enthusiastic about Shakespeare for business than artistic reasons.

However, Jess and Adam are finally able to reconcile their ideals and views of how Shakespeare should be interpreted to produce a critical/practical hybrid. This also allows Daniel to excel in his role as the play's organiser, by dividing the audience into Freud's structural model of the psyche. Consequently, this impromptu workshop session represents the fulcrum of *Complete Works*; the synergetic moment at which each RSC member works at the peak of his individual and collective powers, thus:

¹⁸¹ Long, 29 September 2017.

Adam = audience participation

Jess = intellectual engagement

Daniel = pragmatic organisation

The RSC subsequently guide their audience through their respective tasks as the Id, Ego and Superego. The front three rows are asked to play the Id as ‘confused, [...] wishy-washy [...] awash in a sea of alternatives’,¹⁸² which results in them waving their hands in the air and chanting ‘maybe... maybe not’.¹⁸³ Ophelia’s ego is represented solely by the, this time, male volunteer, who is asked to sprint the length of stage in order to represent how ‘[a]t this point in the play her ego is flighty, it’s confused... it’s an Ego on the run’.¹⁸⁴ Finally, the Superego is divided in three parts:

ADAM: [...] Now section A is the masculine part of Ophelia’s brain, the animus, so to speak. And I’d like you to use Hamlet’s line for this. I’d like you to say, “Get thee to a nunnery!” [...] Okay, Section B. You’re the voice of vanity, saying, for God’s sake, do something with yourself. Put on some makeup or something – (*to the Volunteer*) no offense – really, this is straight out of the Shakespearean text. (*back to the audience*) I’d like you all to say, “Paint an inch thick!” [...] Okay, now Section C, we’ve saved you for last, because we’re going to use you to draw this into a modern context, because we want Ophelia to be relevant to women of today. So maybe she wants power... but she doesn’t want to lose her femininity [...] and she just feels like saying, ‘Look cut the crap Hamlet, my biological clock is ticking and I want babies now!’¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Ibid, p. 85.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, pp. 87-8.

The climax to this set of instructions is supposed to represent the tempest of emotions inside Ophelia, which in *Hamlet* culminates in her suicide, so there is a deeper point being made by the RSC beneath the parody of academic interpretation and workshop theatre. From a practical perspective, Singer explains that they

were directly inspired by a show at the 1987 Edinburgh Fringe by the National Theatre of Brent. They got the audience involved in a huge, physical interaction that was hysterical. Later, when we expanded the show from one hour to an hour and a half, we seized upon this idea to explore Ophelia's psychological state with the audience interacting.¹⁸⁶

The resulting visual and aural cacophony of the Id, Ego and Superego represented physically, both on and offstage, encapsulates the company's brand of intellectual vaudeville, where highbrow Shakespeare is rendered 'low' and accessible through its association with the inclusion of an audience participation component that is also a common device during pantomimes. This further serves to represent a successful coalition of the three actors' personal tastes and purposes, and, contrary to the way in which their attempted workshop of Jess's *Troilus and Cressida* monologue failed earlier in Act One, represents the learning process which the company has undergone throughout the course of the play's narrative.

Prior to their final virtuosic display of *Hamlet* performed fast, faster and backwards, the company deliver a serious moment to rival Adam's 'piece of work' speech, when its three actors lie prostrate on the ground, the lights fade to black and, for a moment, the audience is led to believe they may not rise again. This second instance of unexpected pathos is preceded by a combination of different sections of Hamlet's final lines, as delivered to Horatio in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, to create a new soliloquy which is instead delivered directly to the audience by Jess:

¹⁸⁶ Singer, 18 April 2018.

J/HAMLET: [...] *(to the audience)*

You that look pale, and tremble at this chance
 That are but mutes, or audience to this act;
 If ever thou didst hold me in thy hearts
 Absent thee from felicity awhile;
 And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
 To tell my story. The rest is silence. *(He gags,
 convulses, then dies in a beautifully balletic
 pose.)*¹⁸⁷

In this passage, the RSC create a composite version of Hamlet's final three passages of speech in 5.2, immediately following the death of Laertes. They cut Horatio's interjection, the entrance of Osric, and change the line '[i]f thou didst ever hold me in thy heart' (*Hamlet*, 5.2.288) to become plural. Although the RSC's use of 'thou' as plural is incorrect, this nonetheless transforms the meaning of the line from the Prince's heartfelt plea to Horatio into a request that the entire audience remember and continue to retell Hamlet's story. This extends the line's meaning to include the audience more directly and also gives Hamlet's death a greater metatheatrical power in terms of its representation of the RSC's own acknowledgement of the completion of their task.

The speech is also notable for its stage directions, which are emphasised more directly in the 2007 revision: '*He dies. Beautifully. Simply*'.¹⁸⁸ Evidently, it has to be delivered by the actor without a trace of irony or irreverence, compared with the audience participation section on Ophelia's Id, Ego and Superego which precedes it or, indeed, the encore that follows. In performance, it serves as an unexpectedly poignant moment, as well as a reminder to the audience of *Hamlet's* dramatic power, to which Tichenor alludes:

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 103.

¹⁸⁸ Singer and Winfield, p. 69.

The great thing about that monologue is that it's a moment of stillness which recognises that underneath all the lampoonery there is a respect for the text and that the text, without any bells and whistles, without any crazy, comic commentary, is still amazingly powerful. The audience also goes 'holy crap, these actors can do it for real'. I think that's always a lovely discovery.¹⁸⁹

Tichenor, thus, describes an invitation to admire the skill and virtuosity of the RSC performers as actors, rather than solely as parodists, and, in doing so, connects the company to the vaudeville performers of the nineteenth-century.

In this moment, the RSC again switch theatrical gears, moving away from the broadly comic rendition of *Hamlet's* final act, which conflates Hamlet and Laertes's fight into cross-dressing farce, complete with cartoonish 'swish' and 'flick' sounds to match the clash of their swords. The spotlight focuses on Hamlet surrounded by the dead and the company fulfil their artistic imperative to 'under promise and over deliver',¹⁹⁰ which Tichenor suggests has continued to be a central tenet of the RSC's work, and its ability to reduce and, at the same time, confound audiences' expectations about the possibility for a three-person company to deliver abbreviated Shakespeare. While Daniel, Jess and Adam rise up, bow, and 'live to fight another day', Shakespeare's characters remain dead at the end of each performance. Hamlet's simultaneous acceptance of death and plea for Horatio to immortalise his narrative serves here as the RSC's coda to their comedy, suggesting to the audience that, not only can they do this 'for real', but that, as much as they parody his work, they are fundamentally paying homage to Shakespeare.

The play's true finale comes in the spectacle of watching the company intensify their process and performance of reduction. The trio perform the play in under three minutes and, for their encore, repeat the trick in thirty seconds and, finally, backwards: a feat of theatrical engineering which involves Adam spitting forth water in a demonstration of Ophelia's reverse drowning. The success of their performances consequently relies as much on thespian

¹⁸⁹ Austin Tichenor, Personal interview, Skype, 19 August 2015.

¹⁹⁰ Austin Tichenor, Personal interview, Skype, 26 April 2018.

ability and virtuosity as on the written text, as Richard W. Schoch acknowledges with reference to nineteenth-century Shakespearean burlesques, concluding that ‘while a good measure of the burlesque’s humour was written into the script, the success of any production rested largely with the actors, who were called upon to demonstrate an impressive range of histrionic skills in performances’.¹⁹¹ Despite acknowledging that they ‘very rarely deviate from the script or improvise new lines’,¹⁹² RSC actor Matthew Pearson reveals that the company’s actors are similarly asked to be flexible, or at least appear to be, in their approach to their audiences and performance locations.

Peter Brook suggests that ‘a popular audience usually has no difficulty in accepting inconsistencies of accent and dress, or in darting between mime and dialogue, realism and suggestion’¹⁹³ and, by developing their work at the faires across California, *Complete Works* was clearly shaped by the RSC’s encounters with spectatorship of this kind. In this scene, the most explicit demonstration of these multiple registers, which the company expect their audience to assimilate, is seen in the tonal dichotomy between the pathos of Jess’s delivery of ‘the rest is silence’ and the ensuing, raucous encore. Ironically, the instigator of this final vaudevillian feat is Daniel who, despite previously having been the most controlled and focused member of the trio, loses control in the excitement of the audience’s applause and suddenly declares ‘[y]ou’ve been fantastic, ladies and gentlemen. We shall do it BACKWARDS!’¹⁹⁴ His two colleagues stare at him in disbelief and reluctantly comply, while Jess parodies the (now) anachronous process of rewinding a cassette tape to catch alternative song lyrics by dryly encouraging the audience to ‘[b]e sure to listen for the Satanic messages’.¹⁹⁵

The RSC’s stage directions describe the backwards *Hamlet* as ‘*an exact reversal of the lines, movements, gestures and blocking of the first encore, like a*

¹⁹¹ Richard W. Schoch, *Not Shakespeare: Bardolatry and Burlesque* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 14.

¹⁹² Matthew Pearson, Personal interview, London, 18 January 2017.

¹⁹³ Peter Brook, *The Empty Stage* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2008), p. 75.

¹⁹⁴ Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 107.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

movie reel run backwards'.¹⁹⁶ Martin observes that 'in the circus we think of clowns as basically living cartoons. If the clown could jump off something, their neck stretches, their body falls and then their head catches up – that's a clown ideal. I think Jess, Adam, and Daniel did a brilliant job of making living cartoons in the *Hamlet* section'.¹⁹⁷ The combination of clowning experience, Renaissance faire development and cartoonish aspirations coalesce at this moment to produce the RSC's live-action animation aesthetic at its most vivid and the theatrical effect, coupled with the jocular pretence that the entire process is improvised for the audience, increases its impact as a grand finale. *Complete Works* can be construed as a reduction of Shakespeare's plays by a troupe of ideologically opposed actors who attempt to keep to their promise of abridgement, while metatheatrically reconciling their individual disparities as performers. Such tensions drive the action to produce conflict amidst the farce.¹⁹⁸

Conclusion: 'Here's A Strange Alteration!'

Since I began this project, the question of textual authority has been further complicated by the existence of the as yet unpublished 2018 update of the script. Co-edited by Singer, Winfield and Long, this newest revision continues the founding members' process of adapting and rescripting their innovatory work and is illustrative of their determination to remain relevant. In a direct reference to the company, Schoch has reflected that '[t]he very language which first made Shakespeare burlesques so breathlessly up-to-the-minute now makes those same plays so hopelessly out-of-date [...] every theatrical era

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Martin, 24 April 2018.

¹⁹⁸ In a performance for the Milburn House Symposium at the University of Warwick on Wednesday 25 May 2016, I performed, with two other actors, James Baxter-Derrington and Sam Lawrence, a half-hour reduction of *Complete Works*, stitching together a shortened version of the company preface, *R&J*, *Titus*, *Macbeth* and 'Rap Othello'. Despite the omission of the connecting threads between each reduction and the absence of *Hamlet*, (due to the time constraints posed by the event) the audience were able to understand the discrete collection of sketches, delivering positive feedback and confirming they had viewed and enjoyed our version of *Complete Works* as a short revue performance. This personal experience suggests that, if necessary, the play can operate effectively without its metanarrative.

dates itself, and no doubt audience members will exchange bewildered looks during some far distant revival of the [RSC]'s *The Compleat Works of Wllm Shkspr (abridged)*'.¹⁹⁹

It has become common practice in the late twentieth-century and early twenty-first century for the creator of a highly successful franchise to take a much beloved work and adjust it through new edits or prequels and sequels that reveal information which inherently changes the meaning of their original. Examples of this cultural phenomenon include George Lucas's *Star Wars* prequels (1999-2005) and his recuts of the first film trilogy, as well as J.K. Rowling's social media revelations about significant characters in her *Harry Potter* series as well as *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (2016), the co-authored theatrical sequel, and Ridley Scott's *Alien* prequels *Prometheus* (2012) and *Alien: Covenant* (2017). In every instance, the architect of each specific universe encountered criticism, whether for changing details of the original to suit their own revisionist history, by divulging details about major characters, or unravelling a mystery which fans may prefer to remain unaddressed. The decision to create prequels and sequels, especially when creators return to their franchise, often appears to be financially rather than artistically motivated, particularly when dealing with such lucrative intellectual properties as *Star Wars*, *Harry Potter* or *Alien*.

While *Complete Works* may not be as high-profile as the above-listed examples, and its creators have not modified details to the same extent as Lucas, Rowling or Scott, the RSC founders' decision to formalise these changes by making them permanent in new, published versions of the play somewhat negates their open invitation for other companies to reinterpret *Complete Works*. It suggests, instead, that this is the new gospel to which their devoted flock should adhere. Singer, Winfield and Long's edits are undoubtedly designed to avoid the cultural obsolescence predicted by Schoch. Nonetheless, specific redactions in the RSC's revisions also reveal details which retroactively problematise the original. For instance, their choice to exorcise 'Rap Othello' from the 2018 script update in favour of a short ukulele

¹⁹⁹ Schoch, p. 37.

vaudeville skit suggests that the company may, somewhat belatedly, be recognising the implicit racism of this sequence, in which three white men appropriate rap music and hip-hop culture to deliver a parody of one of Shakespeare's most prominent non-white characters. I will discuss this adjustment in greater detail during Chapter 5, where I explore the rap's legacy within hip-hop Shakespeare. In the following chapter, I examine how the process of revision has not been exclusive to its original writers and performers. In 1993, the company recorded their six-part radio series for the BBC World Service and based it on *Complete Works*. However, they quickly discovered that, not only would the play require adaptation to fit a new medium, but also that such a relocation would necessitate an act of expansion by this theatre of reduction.

3

'Audio Footnote Time': Reduced for Radio

Introduction: Shakespeare 'Underheard'

Throughout the course of their work, the Reduced Shakespeare Company (RSC) have critiqued and parodied Shakespeare's afterlife beyond the confines of theatre. Since the founding members' departure, the company have gone on to engage with diverse artistic platforms, encompassing various television appearances, ranging from the American game show *Jeopardy!* and a Sky-commissioned reduction of the drama series *Lost*, to the recent publication of their *Pop-Up Shakespeare* book. However, away from the stage, their most sustained success has been through the medium of audio, two notable examples of which are the six-part series *The Reduced Shakespeare Radio Show*, which was recorded in 1993 and broadcast by the BBC World Service in 1994, and their ongoing *Reduced Shakespeare Company Podcast*, which has aired weekly since December 2006.

In this chapter, I will begin by reviewing the research into Shakespearean radio broadcasts in order to frame my discussion of the RSC's contribution to this medium within a pre-existing critical conversation. The second part will analyse in detail each episode of the series, assessing what the company chose to recycle and revise from *Complete Works*, and the resultant long-term influence on their identity and subsequent work. Studying the *Radio Show* is crucial in revealing the RSC's methodology and the implementation of their adapted and developed material. The chapter will conclude by assessing the podcast's importance in respect of their brand, development and audience expansion, exploring why this underexplored form in Shakespeare studies has proved to be a natural fit for the RSC's writing and performance exigencies.

Austin Tichenor, who co-wrote the radio series and hosts the podcast, has suggested that 'the possibilities opened up by the *Radio Show* were that we

could work in more than one medium. It gave us the confidence so that that we felt we were able to write *Reduced Shakespeare: The Complete Guide for the Attention-Impaired*.¹ Thus, it is crucial to investigate how the company's work on radio contributed to their artistic development and diversification. Although the RSC have made their name by reducing weighty, serious topics, the subject matter and the specific medium within which they operate are of equal importance to their satirical approach. Tichenor says that 'no matter what medium we're working in, we always try to use, incorporate, and make fun of the language of that medium [...] so we created audio footnotes and theme music, we made jokes about radio silence, and we played with sound. Basically, we used all the tricks of radio'.² This is evidenced by the devices they simultaneously use and lampoon throughout *Radio Show*, as will be demonstrated in my analysis of each episode, and the running jokes throughout the entire series.

Radio broadcasts have not only produced a multitude of Shakespearean adaptations, but the preservation of performances, including those which predate recorded film and television, also provide the critic with a wealth of potential case studies. It is therefore plausible to suggest that, given the growing interest in how theatres have changed or adjusted their stage productions to suit the needs of live theatre broadcasts, similar attention might be paid in the future to how radio served this role prior to the advent of film and television. Shakespeare criticism has yet to address the world of podcasts, despite the existence of potential case studies besides the RSC, such as BBC Radio 4's 2012 series *Shakespeare's Restless World* and the ongoing *Shakespeare Unlimited* by the Folger Shakespeare Library (FSL). However, a limited number of scholars have begun to discuss the playwright's presence on radio, notably Susanne Greenhalgh and Douglas Lanier, the latter of whom suggests that

despite more than 100 years of committing Shakespeare to record,
the impressive body of audio recordings of his plays and poems,

¹ Austin Tichenor, Personal interview, Skype, 5 February 2018.

² Austin Tichenor, Personal interview, London, 18 January 2017.

much of which remains active in the commercial catalog, has been largely ignored by scholars of mass media Shakespeare, crowded out by the attention paid to performances on film and TV.³

Indeed, various examples exist of Shakespearean parody on radio which both predate and succeed the RSC's *Radio Show*. For example, The Firesign Theatre, the surreal American comedy group, produced *Anythyng You Want To* (2001), a CD re-release of what Lanier refers to as 'an extraordinary Shakespearean parody first recorded in 1972 as *Not Insane* and expanded a decade later as *Shakespeare's Lost Comedie*'.⁴ This is a clear precedent for the RSC's work in *Long Lost*: indeed, the four-man company are cited as a key influence by RSC members. They began on air on the Los Angeles radio programme *Radio Free Oz* in 1966 and, like the RSC, found success at Renaissance faires. Rachel Lee Rubin explains that 'the group's members first became involved in the shaping of the faire as individuals [...] later, bringing their avant-garde approach back to the faire in a show called "The Sword and the Stoned"'.⁵ Lanier's illustration of *Anythyng You Want To*'s collage of plays, tropes and confusingly similar names demonstrates The Firesigns' clear influence on the RSC's later Shakespearean mash-ups, both on stage and radio:

Touching on scenes from *Lear*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *The Tempest*, as well as more general Shakespearean motifs, *Anythyng* relates a preposterous battle for the Phlegmish throne between the founding Edmund and his bastard twin Edmund Edmund. Lampooning Shakespeare's conventional gestures toward social order, the play ends with the rightful heir Edmund and his father accidentally dying when, knives in hand, they rush to embrace.⁶

³ Douglas Lanier, 'Shakespeare on the Record' in *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance*, eds. Barbara Hodgdon and W. B. Worthen (Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), p. 416.

⁴ Douglas Lanier, 'WSHX: Shakespeare and American Radio' in *Shakespeare After Mass Media*, ed. Richard Burt (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 211.

⁵ Rachel Lee Rubin, *Well Met: Renaissance Faires and the American Counterculture* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2012), p. 120.

⁶ Lanier, 'WSHX: Shakespeare and American Radio', p. 211.

Further described by Lanier as being '[r]ife with highbrow and pop allusion',⁷ The Firesigns' work, and this play in particular, are unquestionable precursors to that of the RSC, through the shared experience of the faire environment, the influence of *The Goon Show* and the mockery of performance and naming conventions in Shakespeare's plays, as demonstrated in the above description of their *King Lear* parody, which both highlights the potential confusion for audiences in distinguishing between the names of the bastard Edmund and the legitimate Edgar and offers a parodic comment on the same phenomenon in *The Comedy of Errors*, which features two sets of twins with identical names.

A year after the RSC's *Radio Show* was broadcast, the BBC aired another comedy series, *Desmond Olivier Dingle's Compleat Life and Works of William Shakespeare* (1995), the six episodes of which focused on Shakespeare's life, plays and legacy, and, like the RSC's work, featured celebrity guests, sound effects and parodies of theatrical and academic conventions. These included a failed Shakespearean masterclass delivered by the actor John Barrowman, and a disastrous field trip to Stratford-upon-Avon, in which the four-person Royal Dingle Company attempt to interview the humorous fictional character, Adrian Mole, instead of Adrian Noble, who was the Royal Shakespeare Company's artistic director at the time. The series was written by and featured the comic playwright and actor Patrick Barlow, who appears as his alter-ego, Desmond Olivier Dingle, artistic director of the National Theatre of Brent.

As mentioned in my introduction, Barlow's work contains parallels to the RSC's. His adaptation of *The 39 Steps*, for instance, features only four performers and is performed in a fast-paced, irreverent, metatheatrical style. A key difference between the two radio series, however, is that Barlow's features real celebrities, who either parody themselves or highlight the Royal Dingle Company's incompetence, whereas the RSC impersonate their guests in order to parody the radio interview itself. Nonetheless, the presence of Shakespearean radio comedy, which diverges from the plays and focuses instead on lampooning the conventions of both Shakespearean form and the

⁷ Ibid.

medium of radio, suggest that this area is ripe for more extensive research.

Greenhalgh explains that ‘historically it has [...] been one of the most unacknowledged and often ephemeral forms of Shakespearean remediation, and, partly for this reason, one which has received the least critical attention. In this sense Shakespeare has more frequently been “under” than “over” heard’.⁸ However, the lack of critical coverage of Shakespeare on radio, in comparison with film and television, may be as much a case of timing as it is popularity. Lanier outlines the reasons for this as ‘the predominantly visualist orientation of modern and postmodern media culture, the pop cultural cachet attached to Shakespeare films, and the coming of age of scholarship on mass media Shakespeare during the 1990s’ Shakespeare film boom’.⁹ It is therefore reasonable to suggest that this teen Shakespeare upsurge shaped the form and language of modern Shakespeare adaptation studies.

Lanier also argues that ‘the popular perception of audio recording’¹⁰ is an important factor in its lack of analysis. He suggests that ‘[i]t has been seen as film or theater manqué; as a dead medium, superseded by film, videotape or DVD; or merely as a technological means for making a record of a performance rather than as an art form with its own distinctive history and aesthetic conventions’.¹¹ The expression ‘manqué’ is used here to present radio as the poor relation of visual media with which it cannot hope to compete. Furthermore, the disparagement of radio as a form that is useful only to record rather than generate creativity may explain why scholars appear less naturally inclined to explore it as subject matter in discussing the adaptation and continuing relevance of Shakespeare in popular culture.

However, as Greenhalgh observes, ‘though it once seemed destined for obsolescence and replacement by newer visual technologies, [radio] has proved surprisingly resilient, flexible, and mobile’¹² and is able to serve ‘as a private, intimate voice to accompany mundane everyday activities, and create

⁸ Susanne Greenhalgh, ‘Shakespeare overheard: performances, adaptation, and citations on radio’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Popular Culture*, ed. Robert Shaughnessy (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 175.

⁹ Lanier, ‘Shakespeare on the Record’, p. 416.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Greenhalgh, pp. 178-9.

alternative worlds of the imagination'.¹³ This is especially applicable to everyday activities that require the individual's visual awareness, such as a work commute, where radio can continue to fulfil an important, autonomous role, unconnected to the visual stimuli of film or television, which is also traditionally a collective, social experience. Moreover, although formerly associated with communality before its replacement by television as the family's preferred entertainment medium, radio has, to an extent, developed into an individual sensory experience that offers the listener the opportunity to be entertained while undertaking other tasks, or to populate a narrative with their own imagination.

The Reduced Shakespeare Company Radio Show

The Reduced Shakespeare Company Radio Show provides a useful document of the company's first stage show and their process of editing material for new media, providing the critic with 'a stable "textual" object, allowing for much closer, analytic modes of listening made possible by repetition'.¹⁴ Greenhalgh supports Lanier's view, suggesting that '[a]ll these technical resources have the potential to enable and encourage criticism and theoretical consideration both of the Shakespeare broadcasts that have long been preserved and those that are only just beginning to be noticed through the opportunity for repeat listening'.¹⁵ Broadcast in 1994, *Radio Show* was the result of a visit by Peter Brown, Colin Collino and Mike O'Brien of Laughing Stock Productions to see *Complete Works* onstage in London. Having enjoyed the show and seen potential for an audio adaptation, they proposed a six-hour radio series to the company's three core members at the time: Tichenor, Adam Long and Reed Martin.

After pitching it to a number of broadcasters, the show was subsequently picked up by the BBC World Service. Due to the company's touring

¹³ Ibid, p.179.

¹⁴ Lanier, 'Shakespeare on the Record', p. 418.

¹⁵ Greenhalgh, 'Shakespeare overheard', p. 176.

commitments and desire to record the series in the UK, they wrote the show while on the road, with the three members each taking two episodes. Long undertook Episodes 3 and 4, which focused on ‘The Histories’ and ‘The Tragedies’, Martin took responsibility for Episodes 1 and 6, ‘Romeo and Juliet’ and the invention of ‘Shakespeare’s Little Known Trip to America’, and Tichenor created Episodes 2 and 5, centred on ‘Hamlet’ and ‘The Comedies’. The decision to break them down into these sections was influenced both by their categorisation in the First Folio and structure in *Complete Works*, which dedicates the greatest amount of time to *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*, as Shakespeare’s ‘most popular’¹⁶ and ‘greatest’¹⁷ works.

In addition to writing to deadlines amidst the pressures of touring, the other problem facing the company was how to meet the demands of producing a radio show that would be based upon ‘excerpts from the *Complete Works* show’,¹⁸ despite it being required to be double the play’s ninety-minute length. Tichenor also suggests that ‘so much of that show was physical that it wasn’t going to translate’¹⁹ aurally. Eventually, he explains, ‘we used everything we could, which added up to about eighteen minutes, which was roughly 10% of *Complete Works*. Eighteen minutes of the ninety minute show is verbal and the other seventy-two minutes are physical, so we had to write one hundred and sixty-two minutes that would play on the radio’.²⁰ Consequently, Martin recalls that ‘eighteen minutes or less’²¹ of *Complete Works* were retained, the only sections relatively unchanged being ‘Rap Othello’ and the History Cycle represented as a game of American Football.

One solution they found for writing more than two-and-a-half hours’ worth of new material while touring was to ensure that ‘the design of the show was free form. When we were under a lot of writing pressure, you could just

¹⁶ Adam Long, Reed Martin and Austin Tichenor, ‘*Romeo and Juliet*’ in *The Reduced Shakespeare Company Radio Show* (Laughing Stock Productions Ltd., 1994).

¹⁷ Adam Long, Reed Martin and Austin Tichenor, ‘*Hamlet*’ in *The Reduced Shakespeare Company Radio Show* (Laughing Stock Productions Ltd., 1994).

¹⁸ Austin Tichenor, Episode 405: ‘Reduced Radio Show’, *Reduced Shakespeare Company Podcast* (Reduced Shakespeare Company, 2014).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Tichenor, 18 January 2017.

²¹ Tichenor, Episode 405: ‘Reduced Radio Show’.

write something ten seconds long and if it was funny we'd find a place for it'.²² The series was shaped by this approach, with each episode moving between introductions, interludes and closing remarks between the three company members, which connect each sketch and, through the inclusion of interviews, sports commentary, archived recordings and musical performances, frequently parody the medium of a radio show itself. This is heightened by the creation of the impression that the show switches between a number of radio frequencies and also includes adverts, disclaimers and scripted mistakes in an exaggerated reflection of the live broadcast.

Radio Show bears similarities in tone and delivery to previous work by The Firesigns, who, as Lanier describes, were adept at 'blending inventive sound design, stream-of-consciousness parody, and complex wordplay into what were, in effect, postmodern radio plays [...] Rife with highbrow and pop allusion'.²³ Greenhalgh, likewise, discusses the use of radio by another of the RSC's comic inspirations, The Goons. Their 'popular BBC comedy series, *The Goon Show*, subjected Shakespearean speech and plot fragments to a vocal makeover [...] in a performance of the "Once more into the breach" speech from *Henry V*, which mimicked Olivier's delivery in his 1945 film version, with the clipped tones of an RAF wing-commander and vocally produced explosions'.²⁴ This combination of surrealism and topicality, 'which was widely recognized as an "embodied utterance" of the postwar experience',²⁵ resonates throughout *Radio Show*, from running gags about contraception and underage sex to a psychedelic voyage to the centre of Shakespeare's mind.

▪ **Episode 1: *Romeo and Juliet***

To understand the full significance of *Radio Show* in relation to the RSC's history, it is necessary to survey the content and focus of these episodes, an exercise which also offers a constructive contribution to the underexplored

²² Ibid.

²³ Lanier, 'WSHX: Shakespeare and American Radio', p. 211.

²⁴ Susanne Greenhalgh, 'Shakespeare and Radio' in *The Edinburgh Companion to Shakespeare and the Arts*, eds. Mark Thomas Burnett, Adrian Streete and Ramona Wray (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 9.

²⁵ Ibid.

field of Shakespeare and radio. The first episode, 'Romeo and Juliet', focuses equally on Shakespeare's tragedy as on establishing jokes and features that are repeated in each of the six episodes. These include Reed's irritation at Austin qualifying his statements with additional synonyms, the use of Foley and sound effects, including a 'sound effect of the week'²⁶ and 'audio footnote time',²⁷ all of which also help to supplement the material recycled from *Complete Works*. This final example serves as the audio equivalent of a dramatic aside and represents the company's subversion of Shakespearean academia. In the first of many such moments, Austin introduces the audience to the RSC's on-air approach to Shakespearean adaptation:

Alert listeners will no doubt have noticed that this is an adapted version of *Romeo and Juliet*. In this modern age of seven-second soundbites and diminished attention spans, the practice of translating classical works of literature into the modern vernacular is becoming more and more common. This is done to maintain the flagging interest of you, the discerning radio listener, and also for the benefit of the actors, a term we use in its most generous sense.²⁸

Each instance of 'audio footnote time' is framed by the company singing these words together in harmony, with the added sound effect of reverb, to enhance the ironic grandiosity of these footnotes and, consequently, parody their use in critical literature. This is also a feature of the RSC's written work, since both the published script of *Complete Works* and their satirical reference book, *Reduced Shakespeare: The Complete Guide for the Attention-Impaired (abridged)*, include irreverent footnotes at the expense of academic conventions and notable Shakespearean actors, and, most frequently, self-deprecating allusions to the company members themselves, as suggested by the previous quotation.

²⁶ Long, Martin and Tichenor, 'Romeo and Juliet'.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

This episode also introduces the listener to the various levels of fictional conflict which exist within the company. In a similar way to their stage shows, the RSC structure the instalment as a process of overcoming these internal struggles, which range from the petty, where Adam repeatedly mocks Reed for being bald, to more serious, ideological differences such as Austin pursuing a more deeply methodical and laborious approach to Shakespearean analysis than his two colleagues. However, the divisions between each character are more imperceptible than in *Complete Works*. Although Adam's character is still picked on by his fellows for being the most childish, Reed and Austin's roles are less fixed. For instance, Austin is more prone to joining in with Adam's distracting antics, such as at the beginning of this episode when they both unsuccessfully attempt to describe an elaborate, unnamed object which generates sound effects. The skit, which concludes with Adam pondering 'how would we describe this for the listeners at home',²⁹ also parodies the differing expectations of radio and theatre audiences.

Reed retains his onstage role as ringmaster, preventing each episode from descending into chaos, but also occasionally adopts the role of authority figure, usually represented by Austin. During a recurring sketch, in which Austin interviews a celebrity guest with a, sometimes, tenuous connection to Shakespeare's work, Reed appears as the personality, speaking in his own voice without any attempt at an accurate impersonation. These guests, who have included Helena Bonham Carter, Oprah Winfrey and Princess Diana, are also all female, thus heightening the surreal ridiculousness of Martin's non-impressions. The conversations run for a few minutes before Austin asks the celebrity to describe themselves to 'the listeners at home',³⁰ at which point Reed describes his own physical appearance and is ironically revealed by Austin to be 'Reed Martin: Professional Impressionist'.³¹ This is a further section of the episode which introduces the RSC's evident enthusiasm for disrupting listener expectations and, through the fact that Reed is quite clearly not the named guest being interviewed, they succeed in parodying radio's

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

capacity to conceal truths and draw the listener into a more illusory space than is possible through visual media. The sketch also includes Austin requesting Reed's advice on becoming an impressionist, at which point Reed describes the development of his talent by using the metaphor of training to become a monk. This suggests a deference from Austin's character towards Reed's, and further complicates the RSC's on-air dynamic, making it more difficult to locate the visible boundaries and fixed definitions of their stage personas.

Radio Show forced the RSC to adapt their theatrical material for a non-visual medium and to cut sections which relied heavily on physical comedy. In Episode 1, the key moment retained from *Complete Works* is the 1.1 conflict between the Montagues and Capulets. The fight scene is adjusted for radio by the addition of exaggerated sound effects to replace the sounds of clashing swords. This not only parodies the conventions of those radio plays where such processes are used to heighten tension and atmosphere, but also roots the series in the tradition of Looney Tunes animations, which strongly inform their stage work. Indeed, the medium of radio allowed the RSC to explore these cartoon influences more extensively, taking the principles of Looney Tunes, which were foundational in the company's approach to fast-paced, physical reductions of Shakespeare, and applying these conventions to a radio series. Long describes the importance of this influence, listing the 'vibrancy of the characters, the impeccable timing, the careful choreography. Each cartoon was like a comic ballet, with orchestral underscoring beneath every move'.³² The fight between the Capulets and Montagues is similarly underscored by sound effects, which escalate into levels of cartoon violence that follow the structure of a confrontation between the warring Looney Tunes duo, Wile E. Coyote and the Road Runner, or Hanna-Barbera's cat and mouse combination, Tom and Jerry.

Tichenor affirms that other pivotal animations were 'the *Rocky and Bullwinkle* cartoons of the early 1960s, which would include interstitial series such as *Fractured Fairy Tales*'.³³ These featured short reductions of stories such as *Pinocchio*, *Sleeping Beauty* and *The Turtle and the Hare*. Although child-

³² Adam Long, Personal interview, E-mail, 18 October 2017.

³³ Tichenor, 5 February 2018.

friendly, the adaptations were irreverent and usually updated both the setting and language of the tale, sometimes transposing the original for satirical effect, such as in their *Little Red Riding Hood*, in which the eponymous character runs a shop named 'Red's Riding Hoods' in 'the Hollywoods' and follows the unsuspecting 'Walter Wolf' in order to purchase his skin for a demanding elderly woman. The episode culminates in 'Red' getting her comeuppance after impersonating the wolf's grandmother and being sold by Walter to the customer instead, after which he 'goes into the fur business for himself'.³⁴ Consequently, the episode reverses the structure of the original version, in which the marauding wolf pursues the young girl. It also satirises economic ruthlessness, and features metatheatrical interruptions from the narrator, who frequently converses with the fictional characters.

These dramatic devices were clearly influential on the RSC, who habitually interrupt sketches and scenes, both onstage and on radio, to remind their audience of the absence of the fourth wall. Tichenor explains that this 'sensibility influenced much of my writing. The jokes where the narrator would say, "night falls" and you'd hear a big crash backstage. I think that playing with the form, but also engaging with as many of the senses as you can – visual, sound, realism, absurdity - because I think, in animation, and definitely on radio, you have to create everything'.³⁵ The Capulets and Montagues sketch begins with 'hair-pulling'³⁶ and 'stomach-punches'³⁷ and, after the Prince's interjection, concludes with 'machine guns'.³⁸ The interruption itself draws metatheatrical attention to the fact that the Prince's command to '[t]hrow your mistempered weapons to the ground' (1.1.80) must be ultimately ignored in order for *R&J* to function. Therefore, when the Prince asks for 'an end to this feud',³⁹ he is met with the reply that 'then there'd be no play',⁴⁰ forcing him to tell the other actors to 'carry on then'.⁴¹ By thus

³⁴ 'Fractured Fairy Tales -- Red Riding Hood' [YouTube video], 4 August 2013 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RksxFR-uMaI&t=32s>> [Accessed 25 July 2018].

³⁵ Tichenor, 5 February 2018.

³⁶ Long, Martin and Tichenor, *Romeo and Juliet*.

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

concluding the Prince's order with a return to hostilities, rather than to the temporary peace of Shakespeare's play, the RSC ask the listener to share in their conspiracy of ignorance about the well-known plot of 'Shakespeare's most popular play',⁴² just as the viewers of *Fractured Fairy Tales* are required to suspend their disbelief when watching the irreverent inversions of well-known fables and folk tales.

Contrary to the stage version, the RSC's aural reduction of *R&J* explores the origins of the Montague-Capulet feud, rendering it utterly banal by using both Italian and Italian-American stereotypes to reveal that it began when Juliet accidentally insulted 'Papa Montague'⁴³ by acknowledging the baldness he conceals by wearing a wig of spaghetti. The joke deftly connects the theatrical conflict with the episode's ongoing feud within the RSC between Adam and Reed, concerning the latter's own baldness, and this link between the narrative of Shakespeare's play and the RSC's reduced version roots the episode firmly in the tradition of *Complete Works*, notably during the *Hamlet*-focused second act. The reasons for familial divisions are further lampooned in a parody of Romeo's arrival at the Capulet's ball in 1.5, during which, after Romeo accidentally curses the Montagues, Benvolio reminds his friend that 'your family *is* the Montagues, imbecile, you hate the Capulets'.⁴⁴ This gives voice to the possibility that audiences watching Shakespeare's *R&J* may become confused about the difference between the two families, the fact that the playwright gives relatively limited explanation for why they became enemies, and the frustration that their enmity ends at the expense of the protagonists' lives.

Another theme that runs throughout the episode is that of Romeo and Juliet's young age, and its connection to modern ideas surrounding underage sex, a taboo that has been addressed elsewhere in *R&J* parodies.⁴⁵ This censure

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid, my italics.

⁴⁵ The BBC mockumentary *Cunk on Shakespeare* delivered a recent example. During a mock interview, Professor Stanley Wells informs the spoof documentarian, Philomena Cunk, that Juliet is aged thirteen in Shakespeare's play. Cunk responds by telling Wells that she's 'not surprised their families are trying to split them up [...] I'd have rung the police' (Brooker, Hazely and Morris, 2016).

is introduced in a section where the RSC parody the radio convention of the listeners' call-in, during which Austin assures one disgruntled, conservative caller that

we believe in the old ways. That children should learn about sex on the streets and back alleys, not in a cold, clinical way from their parents or teachers. Yes, I think we need to keep a healthy mystique about sex and the best way to do that is through paranoia, half-truths and misinformation.⁴⁶

In self-righteously reminding listeners that 'the Reduced Shakespeare Company believes in traditional family values',⁴⁷ Austin's interaction with this fictional caller, played by Reed, not only parodies the unpredictable nature of such live broadcasts but also employs a central theme of Shakespeare's play to satirise ideas about the nature of 'traditional family values' and how these can be distorted. Indeed, this maxim is often milked by certain American politicians in their attempts to appeal to voters, despite their declared adherence to such values being frequently and hypocritically compromised by their own personal activities. Thus, in this episode, as well as in the second, which focuses on *Hamlet*, the RSC use the medium of radio to confront a number of problematic topics that exist both in Shakespeare's plays and, indeed, in Western contemporary society.

The episode ends by addressing the matter in the first of three hip-hop parody songs which appear in the series, reminding the audience to 'rap your Willie'.⁴⁸ This follows the summary offered by the episode's guest, played by Austin, who delivers his 'novice'⁴⁹ impression of 'Dr. Ruth',⁵⁰ known to millions as the late-night talk-show sex therapist and television personality. She says that 'to conclude, I wanted to point out that *Romeo and Juliet* illustrates the dangers of unprotected sex. This of course underscores the central dilemma of

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

this play: how do you deal with teenage sex responsibly and still make the words of Shakespeare interesting?'.⁵¹ Answering this two-part question, the RSC perform a rap featuring a double-pun on the double-meaning of 'rap your willie' to describe the act of rendering 'Willie' Shakespeare relatable through the medium of hip-hop while simultaneously promoting safe sexual intercourse through the use of condoms, as indicated by the slang use of 'willie' to mean penis. In a spoken word outro which quotes *R&J*, Austin makes this wordplay explicit:

You and your partner may be star-crossed lovers but, when the heavens rain, remember to use your rubbers. Whether you use a condom, the inner-tube of a tyre or just some plain, old plastic wrap, be sure to rap your willie.⁵²

The first episode thereby concludes with material that parodies the role of radio as a public broadcasting service, with its frequent disclaimers, as well as the façade of presenters who must be seen to present a neutral, balanced position on any number of topics.

▪ **Episode 2: *Hamlet***

In this episode, the RSC further subvert radio's purpose as mass media through one of their most explicitly political acts of parody in a section that introduces subliminal messaging. This takes the form of a Satanic interruption to a disclaimer delivered by Reed, who assures the listeners that, despite the episode's exploration of the play's supernatural elements,

the BBC and the Reduced Shakespeare Company deny any relationship with or endorsement of Beelzebub, Old Scratch, Mephistopheles, the Antichrist or any other names by which Our Father in Heaven's Nemesis, the Devil, is known. We do not

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

sanction Satanic worship and any implied support of Lucifer is expressly disavowed. The BBC and RSC stand firmly behind sweetness and goodness and light.⁵³

The following interjection then takes place, delivered in a pitch-shifted and distorted voice that prevents the identification of which actor is performing the role of Satan:

Follow me, my evil warriors. I demand your obedience. Hear my words. Go forth and commit the following acts of worship: wear bell bottoms, subscribe to e-mail, listen to The Carpenters, give generously to the arts, watch the original Star Trek, vote Democrat and clean your rooms. The Dark Lord commands it.⁵⁴

The episode then returns to *Hamlet*, but not before the Satanic voice abruptly interrupts Martin by inserting the words 'Dark Prince'⁵⁵ into the title of 'Hamlet, Prince of Denmark'. These subliminal messages are a reminder of the quip made at the end of *Complete Works* when, prior to the company performing *Hamlet* backwards, they tell the audience to 'be sure to listen for the Satanic messages'.⁵⁶ The orders issued by Satan, particularly concerning patronage for the arts and his political recommendation, align him with left-wing, pro-artistic ideals, in contrast to the generic platitudes delivered by Reed's saccharine announcer, who concludes his disclaimer by explaining that the RSC follow 'all the other positive Judaeo-Christian values, well mostly Christian values, but you know what we mean'.⁵⁷ The political undercurrents of both the 'Romeo and Juliet' and 'Hamlet' episodes, where the RSC satirise how conservative views towards issues such as sex education can have potentially damaging consequences, are a key development from *Complete*

⁵³ Long, Martin and Tichenor, 'Hamlet'.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Jess Borgeson, Adam Long and Daniel Singer, *Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)* (Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 1994), p. 107.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Works, where it is the politics of theatre and Shakespeare's legacy that are more directly addressed.

The episode continues with the emphasis on the supernatural themes present in Shakespeare's play by reframing it as 'a good, old-fashioned ghost story'.⁵⁸ Much of the *Hamlet*-focused section in *Complete Works* relies on physical comedy and, consequently, very little of the stage version remains in this episode. Thus, instead of approaching their *Hamlet* parody from the position of three actors who are fearful of tackling this significant text, the RSC use the conventions of the radio play to explore and reconfigure the play's genre. This involves a range of pop culture references to horror films, for instance, by means of sound effects, such as the staccato stabs of strings memorably featured during the iconic shower scene in Alfred Hitchcock's film *Psycho* (1960), that are heard during Hamlet's murder of Polonius. Elsewhere, when Hamlet decapitates Claudius using a chainsaw, telling him that 'in Denmark no one can hear you scream',⁵⁹ they paraphrase the promotional tagline for sci-fi horror film *Alien* (1979) whilst simultaneously evoking the influential slasher movie, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974).

The episode culminates in the dead rising on 'this Night of the Living Bard',⁶⁰ which is a reference to a further subgenre of cinematic horror: *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), which is viewed as progenitor of the zombie movie. R.M. Christofides has suggested that '[t]he living dead walk through *Hamlet* before the gravedigger unearths the skeletons of the long deceased'⁶¹ and, although the RSC's parody here largely serves to conclude the episode's running theme of a horror-based *Hamlet*, it also evokes the ending of Shakespeare's play through the inference that, despite Claudius's demise and Fortinbras's entrance, the shadow of Hamlet and his actions may live on to haunt Denmark, at the very least, through his request for Horatio 'to tell my story' (5.2.291).

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ R.M. Christofides, *Shakespeare and the Apocalypse: Visions of Doom from Early Modern Tragedy to Popular Culture* (London: Continuum, 2012), p. 22.

During the episode's conclusion, the RSC retain the final, condensed version of *Hamlet's* entire plot from *Complete Works*. However, in contrast to the stage version, the actors neither enact this reduction three times, nor perform it backwards, given that its central impact for a theatre audience lies in watching them physically recreate their earlier actions in imitation of a film that is first sped-up and then rewound. Instead, they parody another radio genre, the sports commentary, by setting their *Hamlet* in the athletics-based context of an 'attempt to break the world record for the fastest ever performance of *Hamlet*'.⁶² The rapid, forty-one second *Hamlet* that follows on Austin's 'ready, set, go'⁶³ is a verbatim performance of the sequence in *Complete Works*, with the addition of a fast-forwarding cassette tape sound-effect enhancing its reinterpretation for radio.

The setting is further emphasised first by Austin's explanation that the previous record holders should be discounted because 'their Ophelia tested positive for steroids and was disqualified'⁶⁴ and then by Adam's subsequent celebratory pronouncements, to the sound of cheering crowds, after the attempt proves successful. The episode also establishes this parodic approach to competition during the fencing match between Hamlet and Laertes, which Reed describes in the manner of a sports commentator, beginning by informing listeners that 'foils are the weapon of choice today'.⁶⁵ This can be construed as a fuller realisation of Adam's pronouncement in *Complete Works* that he wishes 'this Shakespeare stuff could be more like sports'⁶⁶ and their wider exploration of the topic in *The Complete World of Sports (abridged)*.

▪ **Episode 3: The Histories**

The American Football game, which follows Adam's outburst in *Complete Works*, forms the basis for the third episode's exploration of Shakespeare's history plays. The RSC call on the analogy created by Adam that 'the throne passing from one generation to another' is 'exactly like playing football, but

⁶² Long, Martin and Tichenor, 'Hamlet'.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 53.

you do it with a crown'⁶⁷ and expand it into a fully-realised narrative. This is played as the 'Monarch Cup Pregame Show',⁶⁸ with Martin and Tichenor as commentators and Long as a field reporter. They satirise the build-up to a high-profile sports event, including the commercial breaks typical of such coverage, which the RSC lampoon by means of a Henry VIII parody where the monarch advertises a marital advice service, culminating in the recommendation: 'don't lose your head over marital problems, have your wife lose hers'.⁶⁹ The episode also includes an extended version of Adam's Shakespeare-Hitler biography confusion in *Complete Works*, here involving the sports commentators in frequent attempts to cut to interview clips with Shakespeare's King Richard, only for various American Kings and Richards, such as Stephen King and Richard Nixon, to appear instead, prompting Reed to curse 'bungling British incompetence'.⁷⁰

The pre-game show culminates in Adam's field reporter catching a mascot, removing its head and subsequently being sucked inside. The head is implausibly revealed to be Shakespeare's, which provides the RSC with the opportunity to make use of sci-fi influenced sound effects and ambient music to create a psychedelic soundscape, as Long moves closer towards 'the core of Shakespeare's genius',⁷¹ in a quest to answer the question: what was the source of Shakespeare's inspiration? In the next chapter, the concept of the uncovering and identification of a theoretical explanation for the playwright's virtuosity will be explored in relation to *Long Lost*: however, it is germane to draw attention to its appearance in this radio episode, particularly given that the journey into Shakespeare's head is framed here as a magical, other-worldly trip, in a manner that anticipates the emphasis on themes of magic in *Long Lost*. Furthermore, coupled with the audio footnotes, it delivers an additional parody: that of the academic's quest to comprehend Shakespeare's life and work.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Adam Long, Reed Martin and Austin Tichenor, 'The Histories' in *The Reduced Shakespeare Company Radio Show* (Laughing Stock Productions Ltd., 1994).

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

The climax of the scene also satirises the commercial imperatives and interests of mass media over intellectual and artistic exploration, when Reed interrupts Adam, as he about to submit the categorical explanation about Shakespeare's genius, by telling him that 'we need to pause for a commercial break'.⁷² The surrealism conjured by this particular moment is one of the most obvious tonal connections between *Radio Show* and the RSC's radio precursors, *The Goons* and *The Firesign Theatre*. The American radio journalist and National Public Radio host Robert Siegel described it in a 1994 interview with the RSC as 'radio in the spirit of the *Goon Show* and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*'⁷³ and further sums up the company by explaining that 'if you can imagine the humour of the Berkeley campus and the humour of the burlesque hall melded into a single performance – one funny, smart, sophomoric, slapstick, bawdy show – then you can imagine the Reduced Shakespeare Company'.⁷⁴

▪ **Episode 4: The Tragedies**

The fourth episode begins with Austin's reverential direct address to the audience, which parodies both Bardolatry and a further audio subgenre: meditation and mindfulness tapes, which are designed to soothe and relax the listener.

Now, before we begin this programme of perhaps the greatest works ever written in the English language, let's take a moment to cleanse our aural palates, shall we? For the next thirty seconds, let's prepare to receive the words of the immortal bard by relaxing our ears and calming our minds. On the count of three, I'd like to invite our listening audience to take a few deep breaths and close your eyes.⁷⁵

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Austin Tichenor, Episode 577: 'Thanks, Robert Siegel', *Reduced Shakespeare Company Podcast* (Reduced Shakespeare Company, 2018).

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Adam Long, Reed Martin and Austin Tichenor, 'The Tragedies' in *The Reduced Shakespeare Company Radio Show* (Laughing Stock Productions Ltd., 1994).

Austin's words evoke the language of religion, as he equates the receiving of Shakespeare's words with Holy Communion. There are also overtones of hypnotism, through his invitation to the audience to close their eyes following a countdown, at which point, Adam's interjection of 'unless you're in a car',⁷⁶ parodies the incongruity between meditative recordings and their listeners' possible danger if they adhere literally to instructions, humorously assuming once more his role of practical Everyman, which harks back to *Complete Works*.

The company then, ostensibly, focus on Shakespeare's tragedies, apart from *R&J* and *Hamlet*, which they have already covered separately. However, the episode does not include *Troilus and Cressida*, *Timon of Athens* or *Coriolanus*, three plays that are ignored perhaps due to their relative obscurity and lack of recognisable imagery for a listenership unlikely to be familiar with these less regularly performed plays. Indeed, the definition of parody, given by the OED as a 'literary composition modelled on and imitating another work, esp. a composition in which the characteristic style and themes of a particular author or genre are satirized by being applied to inappropriate or unlikely subjects'⁷⁷ suggests that the RSC cannot subvert or exaggerate a play 'for comic effect'⁷⁸ without some knowledge of the subject on the part of their audience. Moreover, both *Troilus* and *Timon* feature Thersites and Apemantus, acerbic characters who already provide a level of satirical comment on the action of their respective plays: Thersites, for instance, comments on the ugliness of war through his crude and relentless insulting of higher-status characters. Thus, as with the absence of Mercutio from their *R&J* in *Complete Works*, the RSC eschew these particular plays because Shakespeare's own creations already deliver a level of satirical commentary that would make these plays less conducive to mockery.

Instead, they repurpose a more significant amount of material from *Complete Works* than in any other episode, using the sketches which focus on *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. The episode also

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ OED definition of 'parody'.

⁷⁸ Long, Martin and Tichenor, 'The Tragedies'.

features a reduced, eighteen-second *Lear*, which strips the play down to key events: Lear's banishment of Cordelia, Lear's rage against the storm and Edmund and Lear's deaths, each event linked by cartoonish sound effects. Reed justifies this by explaining to Austin that 'I figured Shakespeare used too many words, so I decided to kick out all the unimportant stuff and get right to the sex and the killing'.⁷⁹ Austin responds by asking him if he could play a recording of his 'favourite scene from *King Lear*',⁸⁰ to which Reed asks whether it is 'the storm scene'⁸¹ or 'the cliff scene'.⁸² Austin's reply represents a key example of the contrast between their attitudes throughout the series. Whereas Reed focuses enthusiastically on well-known highlights from the text, Austin chooses an extract from Oswald's death speech to Edgar in 4.6, thereby lampooning highbrow culture by demonstrating his greater erudition with an esoteric example that is less likely to be familiar to Shakespeare novices. However, closer inspection reveals another reason for Austin's choice: in his reply to Reed's question of 'what's so great'⁸³ about this scene, he explains that 'The Beatles play it at the end of *I Am The Walrus* man, goo goo g'joob'.⁸⁴ This references both the song's chorus and the fact that this extract, taken from a BBC Third Programme broadcast of *Lear*, is, indeed, audible during the final minute of the band's 1967 song, with Austin's enthusiastic allusion to the presence of Shakespeare in popular culture being illustrative of a departure (however temporary) from his professorial manner in *Complete Works*.

Adam begins the *Othello* section of the episode by reciting the first five lines of the play's final scene, during which Othello speaks to the sleeping Desdemona and contemplates whether or not he is about to kill her. This quickly switches to dialogue common to Blaxploitation films of the 1970s and then to 'Rap Othello':

Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

'Cause she done me wrong
 And if you don't hear what I'm sayin'
 You can eat a green Twinkie straight up mother.
 She been doin' the wild thing all around town
 And dissin' me and feedin' me a line o' bull.
 I'm tired of this, you know what I'm sayin',
 Othello's in the house and it's payback time.
 Yo, yo, yo, yo... here's a story of a brother by the name of Othello.⁸⁵

The radio version of 'Rap Othello' leaves the lyrics unchanged and adds a backing track which recalls the sound of 1990s rap rock through its combination of guitars and a hip-hop drum beat. This is in sharp contrast to the gentle lute rendition of 'Greensleeves' which can be heard beneath Adam's recital of Shakespeare's words and his own argot. The instrumental music replaces the live beatbox which accompanies the stage version of the rap in *Complete Works* and was composed by Nick Graham, who would later again collaborate with the RSC on *Western Civilization: The Complete Musical (abridged)* (1998), which is, to date, their only original production to feature a female cast member, Dee Ryan. This trend continues later in the episode when the RSC turn their attention to the Roman plays. After the company perform their conflation of *Caesar* and *A&C*, which is identical to the version found in *Complete Works*, Adam begins to rap over the same backing track as before, after Austin speaks the name Cleopatra, telling the listeners: 'here's the tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra / By my main man Willie, so I'm gonna rap it at ya'.⁸⁶ Reed and Austin quickly interject, telling him that 'you seem to have some bizarre notion that all of Shakespeare's tragedies can be reduced to bad rap songs'.⁸⁷ This moment adapts their criticism of Adam's repeated desire to wear terrible wigs as Shakespeare's heroines in *Complete Works* and extends his problematic assumption that characters with African heritage, such as

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

Othello and Cleopatra, can be assimilated within the language of rap music, due to the medium's African-American origins.

Despite their recycling of material from *Complete Works* throughout this episode, which also includes their exaggeratedly Scottish version of *Macbeth* as 'Scottish Highland Discs',⁸⁸ the trio devote much of the time to reimagining *Cardenio*, which is attributed to Shakespeare and John Fletcher, and was later edited and produced by Lewis Theobald as *Double Falsehood* in 1727. Gary Taylor, who attempted to reverse Theobald's alterations in a 2012 stage adaptation, explains that '[i]n 1653 the leading English publisher of plays and poetry, Humphrey Moseley, registered his copyright in a list of 42 plays. Somewhere mid-list is "The History of Cardenio, by Mr Fletcher & Shakespeare"'.⁸⁹ The collaborative play, 'based on a section from Cervantes's masterpiece *Don Quixote*, is a tragicomedy set in the Spanish mountains, populated by goatherds and shepherds, lovers, madmen and nunneries'.⁹⁰

These features are conspicuously absent in the RSC's *Cardenio*, which they reconceive as a 'long lost children's play'.⁹¹ The company remove any vestige of *Cardenio*'s plot, placing it instead in the context of Arthurian legend. The narrative follows King Arthur and Sir Lancelot's quest to save Queen Guinevere from the evil Mordred. The RSC tacitly parody the discovery of a lost Shakespeare play by setting *Cardenio* in the world of an apocryphal work: *The Birth of Merlin*. The play was first performed in 1622 and is generally attributed to Shakespeare's late contemporary, William Rowley. Although some scholars have argued that *The Birth of Merlin* is a collaborative work between Rowley and Shakespeare, most reject this attribution and view it as having been written by Rowley, possibly with another playwright.

This section also refers to Tichenor's early career as a writer for children's theatre, which began in 1984 with his adaptation of George's Bernard Shaw's 1912 play *Androcles and the Lion*. He explains that these

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Gary Taylor, 'How I found Cardenio, Shakespeare's lost play' in *The Guardian*, 18 November 2011 <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2011/nov/18/cardenio-shakespeares-lost-play>> [Accessed 27 July 2018].

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Long, Martin and Tichenor, *The Tragedies*.

experiences were of crucial importance to his development as a writer and eventual work with the RSC: 'I had all the *Monty Python* albums and my folks listened to a lot of radio comedy like the Jack Benny show. Then I started listening to The Firesign Theatre and the Goons. All of that fed into the first children's shows, which all then fed into the *Radio Show*'.⁹² This influence is particularly visible in this section, which is written and performed predominantly in doggerel which consists of comically simplistic rhyming couplets, many of which are deliberately cumbersome in their syntax. This is particularly evident when Arthur reads aloud a letter written to him from Mordred, discussing the terms of the kidnapped Guinevere's release, during which the lack of poetic sophistication is metatheatrically acknowledged by the characters within their own story:

AUSTIN: Good Arthur, tell me, what is written?

REED: It says: 'To Arthur, King of Britain,
I have kidnapped Guinevere
That is why you do not see 'er,
But if you wish to see your adorèd
Bring me Excalibur, your swor-ed.
Sincerely and forever, Mor-dred.'

AUSTIN: Oh, what a foul piece of slime.

REED: His poem didn't even rhyme.⁹³

On the one hand, the rhymes 'Guinevere' and 'see 'er' are deliberately crammed together to make the verse sound juvenile. On the other, words such as 'adored' and 'sword' are made more difficult than necessary by the company's attempt to make their language sound authentically 'Shakespearean' by pronouncing the 'e' in 'adored' with a grave accent. This results in Reed's enunciation of 'sword' which follows sounding incorrect.

There are further fourth wall breaks in the style of *Fractured Fairy Tales*

⁹² Tichenor, 5 February 2018.

⁹³ Long, Martin and Tichenor, *The Tragedies*.

throughout this section of the episode. Adam, who appears as every character other than Arthur and Lancelot, frequently uses the same accent for his many roles. This leads Reed (as Arthur) to later ask him ‘why is it Eagle of Mount McFred / That you sound like the dragon who of late is dead?’,⁹⁴ after which Austin breaks character to remind that this is ‘because it’s Adam playing both parts’.⁹⁵ This is a prominent example of how, despite the different demands of the radio medium, the RSC retain the conventions of their trio and draw the listening audience’s attention to the difficult task of performing an epic tale with just three cast members.

▪ Episode 5: The Comedies

A central feature of the fifth episode is the company’s interest in exploring theories of comedy, how to tell successful jokes and paying tribute to their comic heroes. Consequently, they retain the comedy mash-up from *Complete Works* and extend this idea to a parody of ‘Who’s On First?’, the best known comedy routine by American double act Abbott and Costello. The RSC’s version, ‘Who’s On 12th Night?’, begins with a discussion of their favourite comedy. It revolves around the shared motifs of Shakespeare’s comedies and the trio’s confusion over how to identify each play:

REED: Well, my favourite comedy is the one with the shipwreck.

AUSTIN: Er, that’s *Twelfth Night*?

REED: No, no, *Twelfth Night* is the one with the twins.

ADAM: No, Reed. *Comedy of Errors* has the twins.

AUSTIN: Well, it has two sets actually.

REED: Well yeah, *Comedy of Errors* has two set of twins, but in *Twelfth Night*, there’s *one* set of twins, a shipwreck *and* a woman disguised as a man!

ADAM: I thought *As You Like It* had a woman disguised as a man?

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

AUSTIN: It does.

ADAM: But he said that *Twelfth Night* was the one with a woman disguised as a man?

AUSTIN: Oh, well it does too, but *Twelfth Night* is set in Illyria and has twins and a shipwreck, and *As You Like It* [...] is set in a forest.

REED: [...] *Merchant of Venice* has a woman disguised as a man, and *Midsummer Night's Dream* is set in a forest.

ADAM: Oh yeah, but *Midsummer Night's Dream* is the one that's got magic spells in it, right?

REED: *The Tempest* is the one with magic spells and that's the one I was talking about.

AUSTIN: What one?

REED: The one with the shipwreck!⁹⁶

The sketch then turns into a direct version of 'Who's On First?', after Austin complains that 'the problem with Shakespeare's comedies is they're just like 70s rock bands, they're all the same'.⁹⁷ The basic concept of Abbott and Costello's routine revolves around names which can be mistaken for questions or answers, such as the word 'who' being both the name of the batsman on first base and the question being asked about 'who's on first base?'. In the RSC's version, which is performed by Adam and Austin in order to facilitate the sketch's two-person structure, they substitute this for the names of rock bands such as Yes, The Who and The Band, which allow the two actors to mislead each other constantly, such as when Adam states 'guess Who's my favourite band'.⁹⁸ The imitation of this routine pays tribute to one of the RSC's key influences and applies Abbott and Costello's comedic imbroglio to the company's acknowledgement of the consistent themes and tropes in Shakespeare's comedies, which has been satirised throughout their career,

⁹⁶ Adam Long, Reed Martin and Austin Tichenor, 'The Comedies' in *The Reduced Shakespeare Company Radio Show* (Laughing Stock Productions Ltd., 1994).

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

from *Complete Works* to *Long Lost*.

Another notable aspect of this episode is the section where the RSC again make use of comedy rap in their spoof version, 'O.T.T.' – widely recognised in popular culture as representing the expression 'over the top' – to reflect on their own comic influences as well as their attitude towards Shakespeare. They acknowledge the influence of The Goons and The Firesigns, among others, by parodying braggadocio rap in the claim that 'we don't wanna brag but we take the prize / In cutting huge things right down to size'.⁹⁹ The catalogue of influences that emerge in a verse shared between all three members serves the purpose of demonstrating to the listener that, as Shakespeare was both inspired by and freely appropriated his literary influences, so the RSC achieve the same with the following six comedic forebears:

We look to the past to be our inspirator.
 We look Beyond the Fringe to the Firesign Theatre,
 Like some Goons, The Pythons, The Stooges, The Brothers Marx.
 We gobble up influences like we are hungry sharks.
 We're not afraid to be musical vultures,
 We're three white boys rippin' off black culture.
 We'll say it, we'll rap it, whatever it takes
 To give Bill Shakespeare back the shakes.

'O.T.T.' parodies hip-hop trio Naughty By Nature's 1991 single *O.P.P.*, using the same instrumental track and verse scansion. Just as the original song never explicitly mentions what the final letter stands for (those initials spelling out 'Other People's Pussy'), so the RSC demonstrate similar restraint in never naming the 'top', instead promising to the listener: 'the last T, well that's where we take ye'.¹⁰⁰ It also serves as a mission statement for the RSC, in displaying an irreverent attitude towards Shakespeare, alongside their modus operandi of adaptation through reduction:

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

Little Billie's little better than a bear-baiter.
 He's a poet, we know it, yo, there's nothing plainer
 But above all that, the man was an entertainer
 And yo, listen up, here's the nub of my gist:
 That Shakespeare dude was a wicked plagiarist.
 He stole everything he did, like rappers he would sample
 And we ain't stupid so we follow his example.¹⁰¹

Dispelling the notion of Shakespeare as the reserve of high culture and peerless artistic originality, this verse acknowledges, indeed celebrates, Shakespeare as a writer and performer whose work, in his time, battled for ratings alongside the bear-baiting and cock-fighting so favoured by audiences of the time. The clear objective here is to emphasise that this form of crowd-pleasing Shakespeare, designed for a mass audience, has been claimed by cultural elitists and that the RSC have, in turn, set out to reclaim him. Lanier suggests that 'the history of Shakespearian appropriation is closely tied to the history of cultural stratification, that is, of how modern cultures organize their productions into hierarchies of high and low, legitimate and illegitimate'.¹⁰² By acknowledging Shakespeare's gift as a poet but suggesting that 'above all that, the man was an entertainer',¹⁰³ the RSC astutely respect his position as producer of popular culture for his contemporary audience and the subsequent incongruity, for much of modern society, of Shakespeare's work being the preserve of a theatrical and intellectual elite.

The company also equates his process of literary appropriation with the sampling of records in rap music. This is a useful term to define both how the RSC regard Shakespeare's adaptation practice and also practise it within their own work: as the rap says, they 'follow his example'.¹⁰⁴ By claiming

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Douglas Lanier, *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 21.

¹⁰³ Long, Martin and Tichenor, 'The Comedies'.

¹⁰⁴ Long, Martin and Tichenor, 'The Comedies'.

Shakespeare to be ‘a wicked plagiarist’,¹⁰⁵ the company displays its typically irreverent disdain for the notion of his supreme originality, and instead, through the device of ambiguity in the word ‘wicked’, to mean both good and bad, celebrates the fact that his act of theft removes him from the cultural pedestal to which he has been consigned, thus making him more relatable as an artist who reimagined the stories of his day to such effect.

The rap’s determination to ‘give Bill Shakespeare back the shakes’¹⁰⁶ and confession of appropriating ‘black culture’¹⁰⁷ in many ways reflects ‘the popular grotesque [which] offers a private fantasy of rebelliousness for those who have already submitted themselves to the institutional regimes and authority of high culture Shakespeare – daydreams of resistance, not open acts of dissent’.¹⁰⁸ By applying Lanier’s use of Derek Longhurst’s term, ‘popular grotesque’, to the RSC, I do not suggest that they contribute to the continued un-popularisation of Shakespeare, making jocular references that are understood only by the initiated members of their audience. Instead, they assume the position of Shakespearean satirists from an informed position, attempting to locate ‘a suitable medium, style or genre for bridging that gap between cultural registers, one that might preserve Shakespeare’s cultural authority while addressing a mass audience [which] has been a recurring issue in modern popular appropriations of Shakespeare’.¹⁰⁹

▪ **Episode 6: Shakespeare’s Little Known Trip to America**

The final episode begins by reframing the plot device at the end of the first act of *Complete Works* when the actors realise that, despite having believed that they had covered every Shakespeare play, *Hamlet* remains. The RSC translate for radio by delivering a closing summary of the series followed by the show’s closing theme music, after which a producer’s voice intones ‘boys, can you give

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Lanier, *Popular Culture*, p. 46.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

us a little bit more [...] about twenty-eight minutes?'.¹¹⁰ The RSC respond by creating the imagined narrative of a young William Shakespeare's journey to America, which Adam introduces with the explanation that 'the New World was discovered by Columbus in 1492 and then by Shakespeare's days, the first colonies had already been formed and in my research I discovered that William Shakespeare actually visited America'.¹¹¹ True to form, the RSC treat their parodic invention as a matter of documented fact and frame themselves as intrepid academics, intent on plugging gaps in the audience's knowledge of Shakespeare's life.

The story begins with Reed (who also plays Shakespeare) setting the scene in Stratford-upon-Avon, 1582. This positions the RSC's fantasy during the final part of his First Lost Years, a period of time between Shakespeare leaving school in 1578 and marrying Anne Hathaway in 1582 about which there is a conspicuous lack of documented evidence.¹¹² Consequently, the 'Little Known Trip to America' can be classified as what Lanier describes as 'Shakespop biography',¹¹³ given that it fills a blank space in the playwright's history with a tale of the company's own invention, which unfolds with Shakespeare's Stateside arrival, whereupon he meets a man named Chip (played by Adam) who takes him in as a lodger and, following the playwright's failure to make himself understood, teaches him American English. Chip later leaves him alone to go to work, calling 'parting is such sweet sorrow',¹¹⁴ which Shakespeare notes is 'catchy'.¹¹⁵ This introduces the paradox of reverse

¹¹⁰ Adam Long, Reed Martin and Austin Tichenor, 'William Shakespeare's Little Known Trip to America' in *The Reduced Shakespeare Company Radio Show* (Laughing Stock Productions Ltd., 1994).

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Popular culture often exploits and interprets the gaps in knowledge about Shakespeare's life. Lanier suggests that '[b]ecause they are tantalizing lacunae in Shakespeare's biography, two episodes have been favourites: the "lost years" (including his marriage to Anne Hathaway and early family life) and his relationship with the Dark Lady of the Sonnets' (Lanier, *Popular Culture*, 116). An example of this first area is the comedy film *Bill* (2015), which was written by and starred the principal performers of children's television series *Horrible Histories* (2009-13) and co-produced by BBC Films. The film takes place in an anachronistic period setting which presents the world of Elizabethan England peppered with references to contemporary pop culture. Furthermore, *Bill* offers a postmodern commentary on the legacy both of Shakespeare's work and his cultural reputation by combining the events of the playwright's life alongside his plays, to invent a parodic biography of his lost years.

¹¹³ Lanier, *Popular Culture*, p. 116.

¹¹⁴ Long, Martin and Tichenor, 'William Shakespeare's Little Known Trip to America'.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

adaptation, whereby a cannibalistic Shakespeare is fed his own quotations throughout the episode, and is thus inspired to write the play from which they are taken, a concept which I will explore further in Chapter 4.¹¹⁶

Shakespeare spends the evening binge-watching American TV, exclaiming ‘more than four channels? It’s a miracle!’,¹¹⁷ a humorous reference to the difference between the four main UK terrestrial channels and multitude of stations available through US satellite television. Shakespeare races through these programmes, performed by the RSC as short parodies of American T.V. genres, such as televangelist broadcasts and wrestling. The RSC frame television-viewing as a form of religious worship and eulogise the medium when Shakespeare cries that ‘there are hundreds of stations. Praise the Lord!’, followed by the proclamation by Austin (as announcer) that ‘lo, young Shakespeare’s eager mind did partake of all that many channels had to offer. He did hunker down with both remote control and Doritos in hand and yay, verily, it was good’. By combining Shakespeare’s act of binge-watching with a quotation from the Book of Genesis, the RSC parody Shakespeare process of literary creation and ‘divine’ inspiration as emanating from one of popular American culture’s most prominent exports. This imagined influence is magnified by references to films directly inspired by Shakespeare’s plays:

AUSTIN: And now be sure to stay tuned for today’s movie matinee
West Side Story, the tragic musical of two star-crossed
 young lovers.

REED: Hmm... interesting.¹¹⁸

Shakespeare awakes the next morning and tells Chip that he has been inspired by his marathon of the previous night.

¹¹⁶ The playwright meeting his own creations or hearing his own lines before he had written them is common in a number of recent postmodern Shakespop biographies, such as *Bill*, BBC sitcom *Upstart Crow* (2016-present) and the *Doctor Who* episode ‘The Shakespeare Code’ (2007). Each of these examples follow the tradition of John Madden’s *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), a romantic comedy which interweaves the playwright’s life with a number of his characters, settings and plots.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

- REED:** Look at all these keen plays I've written! *Romeo and Juliet*. Look at this!
- ADAM:** *Romeo and Juliet*, that's pretty cool... but dude, this *Romeo and Juliet* is a total rip-off of *West Side Story*.
- REED:** Yeah I know, I was watching the movie on the telly, and that's not all. Look what else I wrote. [...] *The Government Station* inspired me to write *The Comedy of Errors* and here's *Macbeth* based on Scotty from *Star Trek*. *Biker Mice from Mars* became *Winter's Tale* and *Roseanne*...?
- ADAM:** [sarcastically] Oh right, *The Taming of the Shrew*?
- REED:** Exactly! I've written sonnets, prose, comedy, history, tragedy: an entire Folio!¹¹⁹

The RSC not only equate Shakespeare's process of literary borrowing as tantamount to theft, following the thread of distillation explored in *Complete Works*, but also highlight his position as an American icon, engineered by the joke that he was inspired by these examples of US pop culture, which are themselves appropriations of Shakespeare.¹²⁰ This parodies the notion that Shakespeare has become an American national playwright, in the sense that 'Shakespeare's afterlife as the greatest playwright who ever lived is now as much an American as a British phenomenon'.¹²¹ Moreover, the RSC create the fantastical notion that Shakespeare produced a first draft of his corpus in a

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ The list of influences given by Reed (as Shakespeare) include two examples with obscure references to the playwright that are likely to be missed by general audience members without an extensive knowledge of Shakespeare, American popular culture or both. 'The Blaming of the Shrew', a 1995 episode of the television sitcom *Roseanne*, takes its name and a number of its themes from Shakespeare's comedy. 'Rocketh and Rideth', which also aired in 1995, is an episode of the science fiction animated series *Biker Mice From Mars*, in which the villains use a device to steal land from fictional places in Shakespeare's plays. This resulted in the plays ceasing to exist and, consequently, the Biker Mice enter the well-known stories to prevent this from happening. The episode, along with seven others, was written by RSC co-founder Jess Winfield.

¹²¹ Robert McCrum, 'William Shakespeare: a quintessentially American author' in *The Guardian* (9 April 2016) <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/09/william-shakespeare-a-quintessentially-american-author>> [Accessed 17 July 2018].

single evening, an idea which Martin and Tichenor would later expand in *Long Lost*.

After discovering that Shakespeare has used his credit card to buy items from the shopping channel – thus playfully framing the Bard as a consumer of mass market products, in keeping with his plays as deliverers of popular entertainment to the Early modern masses – Chip sends him back to the UK, but not before introducing Shakespeare to some familiar faces, in an example of the company’s satirical self-awareness:

- ADAM [as Chip]:** Guys, get in here! These are my friends, the Reduced Shakespeare Company. They’re going to take you back to England.
- ALL [as the RSC]:** Oh hey Will, how you doing? Pleased to meet you.
- REED [as Shakespeare]:** Nice to meet you. Why does your company bear my name?
- AUSTIN [as himself]:** Well because we plan to make you a star, my boy. We’re going to compact all your plays into one action-packed show and tour it all over the British Isles.¹²²

By concluding their series with a fantasy meeting with Shakespeare, the RSC parody still further the importance of American influence in reinvigorating the playwright’s image and work, by implying that they, as a troupe of US satirists, have a direct bearing on Shakespeare’s success. Moreover, by reconfiguring him as a ‘star’ akin to modern celebrity figures, they satirise the commodification of the playwright in the mass media era. Finally, the conclusion to this section typifies the RSC’s self-awareness of their artistic identity and relative levels of success. When Shakespeare asks whether they

¹²² Long, Martin and Tichenor, ‘William Shakespeare’s Little Known Trip to America’.

will perform his work on television, Austin admits ‘probably not, but you know how television is’,¹²³ alluding wryly to the reality that the RSC’s success has been greatest outside the medium of television.¹²⁴

It is possible to view the central structure of this episode as a forerunner to those explored and utilised in *Long Lost*. Indeed, Tichenor has acknowledged ‘that, in many ways, the invention of Shakespeare coming to America gave us the courage to write a Shakespeare-based narrative that was longer than a sketch. It was the first time we wrote a prequel to Shakespeare’s works and *Long Lost* is the ultimate first draft prequel to his works’.¹²⁵ Although Tichenor has also suggested that *Completely Hollywood (abridged)*, the second half of which follows a ‘sustained narrative’,¹²⁶ also contributed directly to their growing confidence that this format could be sustained across an entire stage show, it is important to acknowledge their radio work, and specifically this sixth episode, as a significant moment in the RSC’s narrative approach towards Shakespeare.

Reduced Shakespeare Company Podcast

Radio Show’s recurring inclusion of famous Shakespearean actors and experts has been extended in the company’s podcast, which is presented by Tichenor, by featuring real-life guests, from comic singer-songwriter ‘Weird Al’ Yankovic and actor J.K. Simmons, to prominent Shakespeare companies and academics, such as Peter Holland and Michael Witmore. Tichenor has suggested that the company would be interested in producing a second series of *Radio Show*, were it not for the international touring schedule which prohibits them from being permanently based in the United Kingdom, where the recordings took

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Aside from the PBS broadcast of *Complete Works*, the RSC’s onscreen appearances have been limited to their twenty-two minute version of Richard Wanger’s Ring Cycle entitled *The Ring Reduced* (1994), which was broadcast by Channel 4, a 2005 appearance on the game show *Jeopardy!*, a 2008 pilot for *The Week Reduced*, written and performed by Martin and Tichenor, and *Lost Reduced*, which aired on Sky in January 2010 to mark the release of the television drama’s sixth season.

¹²⁵ Tichenor, 25 April 2017.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

place. He also reveals, during a podcast conversation with Martin, that ‘the podcast was born of our desire to do another radio show’.¹²⁷ Consequently, without the fixed geographical base required to produce another three-hour batch of radio-based material, the RSC’s wish to retain and continue their audio presence has resulted in the weekly recording of a podcast, which Tichenor can conveniently record and release spontaneously wherever the company’s itinerary takes him. As a result of the podcast, the RSC met Samuel Taylor, the founder of the Back Room Shakespeare Project (BRSP), whose book, *My Life in the Shakespeare Cult*, Tichenor attests to have been an important textual influence in the writing and development of *Long Lost*. This demonstrates further the significance of the RSC’s audio presence in establishing the company as a cultural entity, outwith the environs of their onstage work.

Like their radio forebears, podcasts are sometimes viewed as secondary media, only functioning as supplements to an institution’s wider programme of work. However, among those which have consistently managed to produce episodes, most notably the Folger Shakespeare Library, podcast material can serve various important functions, supporting and promoting the institution’s own interests and events, such as in April 2016, when the RSC used it to promote *Long Lost* before its premiere at the Folger Theatre. Equally, it can explore topics of general interest to listeners, ranging from the concept of magic in *The Tempest*, to sonnet translations of contemporary pop songs. As a digital audio form, a podcast generally condenses its content into short, episode-length segments to be consumed at the listener’s convenience, and is often able to combine accessibility with a degree of expertise, mixing knowledgeability with humour and entertainment.¹²⁸ Tichenor presents the *RSC Podcast* with the tone of an irreverent expert, speaking to guests from both

¹²⁷ Tichenor, Episode 405: ‘Reduced Radio Show’.

¹²⁸ *Kermode and Mayo’s Film Review* is a successful example which demonstrates this; the movie review show, which is aired on BBC Radio 5 Live weekly and available as a podcast, pairs film writer Mark Kermode with radio presenter Simon Mayo to produce a critic/everyman dynamic. In an interview with the duo, Tim Lewis explains that ‘Kermode was the cineaste, intense and highfalutin; Mayo represented the cinemagoer who just wanted to go out on Saturday night and munch through a tub of popcorn’ (11 October 2015) describing their on-air relationship as one which plays to the high/low cultural dynamic.

the worlds of entertainment and academia in the same informal interview style, regardless of their background and reputation. He has discussed the idea of the podcast's intimacy, which complements the company's work onstage and often providing listeners who may not have seen their stage shows with an insight into the workings and developments of the RSC. He describes a typical encounter with an audience member after a show to highlight its ability to produce a different type of engagement with the company:

People come up to me after a show having just watched me act onstage for two hours and they say, 'oh, that was a great show!' Then they lean in conspiratorially and almost embarrassedly say, 'I listen to you on the podcast'. And I say 'ok, good, let's keep it a secret, don't tell anybody!' But I think the relationship is different when they hear my voice than when they see me onstage because it feels like I'm talking to *them* specifically.¹²⁹

Tichenor's taboo-like description of the audience member's confession strongly suggests that podcasts provide their listeners with the opportunity to indulge in a private interaction with the RSC, which feels personal to them, and removed from the collective experience of watching the company perform. It also reflects the idea of a passion for Shakespeare as a 'guilty pleasure', something to be secretly enjoyed but never exposed in public for fear of ridicule. The notion of Shakespeare as a boring, impenetrable writer inflicted on schoolchildren who bear this association into adulthood, is one which the RSC steadily acknowledge and aim to combat in *Complete Works*, primarily through Adam's character. The *RSC Podcast* serves a similar purpose by condensing weighty topics and ideas into short episodes, usually lasting between twenty and thirty minutes, which, as Tichenor explains, are based upon

[...] the narrative for each week's episode. For me it's always about

¹²⁹ Austin Tichenor, Personal interview, Skype, 25 April 2017.

the narrative. It took me a while to figure out what the narrative of the podcast was. [...] In the first six months of the podcast, there's a sketch or an interview that's interesting, but then I figured out that, no, people want one consistent thing [in a single episode]. So, there would then be some sort of theme that gives each episode its own *raison d'être*.¹³⁰

An episode of the *RSC Podcast* typically begins with an introduction by Tichenor about the subject of that week's edition. Some episodes revolve around internal conversations between company members and performers, both past and present, who might reflect on previous shows or discuss various aspects of the RSC's ongoing touring productions. The majority, however, are interviews between Tichenor and guest speakers, who are questioned about their current work, often leading to reflections about how this resonates with Tichenor's personal experience in the RSC. In the middle of each episode, he cuts to the podcast equivalent of a commercial break by informing listeners about current and forthcoming RSC products and events, including information about books, dates and tours. Afterwards he returns to the second part of his interview, which often concludes with a jovial outtake from the conversation. By means of this structure, Tichenor has crafted the *RSC Podcast* into a half-hour blend of humour and information, not limited to Shakespeare but expanded to include a wide range of theatre, film and literature, whilst neatly flexing the company's marketing muscle as part of the show.

This evolution from a company which was primarily concerned with condensing Shakespeare through performance into one which also includes factual material and contributions to knowledge reflects Greenhalgh's outline of the medium, stating that 'Shakespeare has gone on to inhabit the airways in multiple ways: as the subject of talks and features, and as the inspiration for musical broadcasts, as well as in the accustomed form of his plays and poetry, together with the plays and stories inspired by or borrowed from them'.¹³¹ The broad range of references and discussions, which largely focus on media away

¹³⁰ Tichenor, 25 April 2017.

¹³¹ Greenhalgh, 'Shakespeare and Radio', p. 3.

from radio itself, covered in both the RSC's radio series and podcast also supports Greenhalgh's suggestion that 'much Shakespeare reference and production also acknowledges the radio medium's ability not only to reflect upon itself, but to incorporate and critique the other mass media of publishing and cinema, and eventually television and the internet, as well as the technologies of recorded sound themselves'.¹³² Indeed, the *RSC Podcast* has enabled the company to document the development of ongoing projects in a way that satisfies the modern audience member's craving for updates and notifications. Crucially, the inclusion of external interviews with other theatre-makers, such as Q Brothers and the creators of *Potted Potter*, has provided the RSC with the opportunity to meditate on their own work, and to develop a sense of their artistic legacy, a concept that will be examined in greater detail in the final chapter of this thesis.

In a podcast episode broadcast at the time of Robert Siegel's retirement as host of National Public Radio's *All Things Considered*, Tichenor pays tribute to the broadcaster's role in the RSC's increasing global reach, proposing that Siegel was responsible for 'introducing the Reduced Shakespeare Company to the largest American audience we'd ever had up to that point'.¹³³ Clearly, while it is impossible to quantify Siegel's exact significance to the RSC's audience figures, it is, however, plausible that, by transmitting to the American public what might be interpreted as an audio version of *Complete Works*, the company was presented to potential audience members who, having listened to the *Radio Show*, would seek their onstage performances. It also encouraged them to develop their brand still further by branching out into additional media forms, such as parodic literary guides and pop-up books.

The series illustrates the RSC's commitment to exploring, adapting and implementing earlier material from *Complete Works* for different media and initiated new areas of interest for Martin and Tichenor in their exploration of further topics for reduction, such as the history of sports and comedy. Furthermore, its specific influence on their further work on Shakespeare cannot be underestimated, in particular, the seeds of 'Cardenio' and 'William

¹³² Greenhalgh, 'Shakespeare overheard', p. 176.

¹³³ Ibid.

Shakespeare's Little Known Trip to America' from which later ideas would germinate in *Long Lost*, through the exploration of lost plays and Shakespeare's imagined collision with American popular culture. As such, *Radio Show* can be viewed both as a significant bridge between the company's two Shakespeare stage reductions and a document of the RSC's dramaturgical process, whereby they worked to expand material that had originally derived its principal comic value from audacious displays of reduction.

If the *Radio Show* strengthened the RSC's ability to adapt, and widened their market reach, then their podcasts have reinforced their position, helping the company to remain relevant and visible by delivering new material to subscribers on a weekly basis via their 'computer or tablet or phone',¹³⁴ including promotional publicity about current and future productions. Thus, they ensure that the RSC remain readily available in their audience's consciousness, a sustainable business model which continues to function, while Tichenor's interviews with scholars, artists and collaborators keep the RSC concurrently in the sightline of Shakespearean academic and theatrical communities.

¹³⁴ Tichenor opens each podcast episode with these words, greeting the listener with a personalised address that takes into account the RSC's transnational reach across multiple time zones: 'good morning, good afternoon, good evening, whatever it is, wherever you are. Thanks for subscribing, streaming or downloading and listening to us on your computer or tablet or phone'.

4

'Shakespeareland': *William Shakespeare's Long Lost First Play (abridged)*

Introduction: Shakespeare's First Draft

William Shakespeare's Long Lost First Play (abridged) premiered at the Folger Theatre in 2016, the 400th anniversary year of Shakespeare's death. The original cast were its co-writers and directors, Reed Martin and Austin Tichenor and third company member, Teddy Spencer, who was retained after his participation in the 2015 workshop productions of the play.¹ It was directly inspired by Tichenor's pilgrimage to the Folger Shakespeare Library (FSL) vaults in 2010, where he asked staff members 'what would be the Holy Grail of Shakespearean scholarship and they said: "to find a play in Shakespeare's own hand"². Described as a 'fantasy'³ by Tichenor, he relates that he and Martin then speculated, 'what if we just wrote a lost Shakespearean manuscript? It could be his first play and a combination of all the plays. That idea snowballed'.⁴ Martin explains that they knew *Long Lost* 'would be a mash-up and then we were trying to figure out how it would be abridged. Maybe it would contain all the characters and at least an allusion to every single play. Then Shakespeare figures out that it's terrible and he buries it'.⁵ Indeed, the culmination of *Long Lost's* narrative is Shakespeare's metatheatrical appearance to tell his characters that, in order for his work to succeed, they must be split across multiple works, thus framing the play as 'the first draft of

¹ This chapter will refer to the real-life RSC members by their surname (Martin, Tichenor and Spencer), in references to interview material. Their fictional counterparts who appear in *Long Lost* will be referred to by their forename (Reed, Austin and Teddy).

² Austin Tichenor, Personal interview, Washington, D.C., 18 April 2016.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Reed Martin, Personal interview, Skype, 24 May 2018.

literary history'.⁶ This chapter presents my first-hand research on this previously critically unappraised work and its intertextual references to Shakespeare's plays and modern popular culture. I have chosen to dedicate a substantial portion of this thesis to *Long Lost* because of its link to the RSC's roots and its value both as a document of the company's contemporary artistic practice and an example of twenty-first century Shakespearean commemoration.

Firstly, I will conduct a scene-by-scene close reading of *Long Lost*. This will involve analysis of how the play differs structurally from the Reduced Shakespeare Company (RSC)'s previous material, its similarities to and differences from *Complete Works*, the theme of magic, how it utilises Shakespeare quotations and its various character combinations. I will also define how and why the writers wove together skeins of lines, speeches and settings to construct collisions across Shakespeare's canon and create their fantasy vision of a swathe of alternative afterlives for the playwright's characters. From interviews conducted with members of the company, as well as attendance at rehearsals and at the inaugural performance at the Folger in 2016 and at the Edinburgh Fringe in 2017, I have been able to track *Long Lost*'s development from its 2014 germination to fruition in 2018, when the script was published. The chapter will conclude by analysing the play's status as an act of both Shakespearean fan fiction and commemoration. I will evaluate the RSC's creation of an imaginary expanded universe for Shakespeare's characters, alongside the wider importance of the fan fiction genre on Martin and Tichenor's intention to create their magical homage. Finally, I will examine the connection between *Long Lost* and David Garrick's Stratford Jubilee of 1769 and assess how the play's procession of characters frame it as a twenty-first century pageant.

Act 1

▪ Scene 1

⁶ Reed Martin and Austin Tichenor, *William Shakespeare's Long Lost First Play (abridged)* (New York: Broadway Play Publishing Inc., 2018) p. 5.

Long Lost begins with a 'cloaked hooded figure',⁷ played by Austin, walking onstage, his face concealed. The script names this character as the Chorus and, after removing his hood, he delivers the Prologue, the opening lines of which combine Orsino's opening speech in *Twelfth Night* with the Prologue to *Henry V*. The RSC thus establish, from the first lines of the play, their commitment to mash-ups:

CHORUS / AUSTIN

O, if a Muse of fire be the food of love, let's eat!
 Give me excess of it, a kingdom for a stage,
 Princes to act and monarchs to behold the swelling scene!⁸

The RSC then manipulate Shakespeare's reference to the Globe's circular shape and wooden construction, and the speaker's inability to capture the visceral quality of the battlefield in *Henry V*'s Prologue in a theatrical environment:

CHORUS

[...]
 But pardon, gentles all,
 The flat unraisèd spirits that hath dared
 On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth
 So great an object. Can this cockpit hold
 The vasty fields of France? Or may we cram
 Within this wooden O, the very casques
 That did affright the air at Agincourt? (*Henry V*, Prologue 8-14).

The RSC's version includes an in-text recommendation to future performers of the play to adjust this line according to the space in which they perform, thus in keeping with the original's reference to Shakespeare's own playing space. This continues their tradition of allowing other companies to adapt RSC scripts to suit their locational and topical requirements:

⁷ Martin and Tichenor, p. 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*

CHORUS / AUSTIN:

[...]

Can we cram within this wooden “O” the very cast

(Unless your theatre is a replica of Shakespeare’s Globe, “wooden O” should be changed to reflect your performance space [i.e. “wooden O, what a beautiful re-creation!” Or “wooden O, what a converted gymnasium!” Or “wooden O, what a painted backdrop!”])

Of witches and wizards and masters and servants

And lovers and fairies and lasses and perverts?⁹

Tichenor explains that ‘like its use in *Henry V*, this speech explains to the audience what is going to happen and what their part in the events is going to be. It functions as theatrical housekeeping’.¹⁰ He also divulges that the idea derived from watching Kenneth Branagh’s *Henry V* (1989) and their wish to prevent themselves and subsequent performers of *Long Lost* from having to resort to theatrical artifice, instead comically acknowledging their limitations:

If your theatre is not a recreation of the Globe, then don’t say ‘Wooden O’, because you don’t want to lie to your audience in the first five lines. In Branagh’s film, the ‘Wooden O’ is the studio that Derek Jacobi [who plays the Chorus] is standing in, so it becomes metaphorical. I’d rather not to be quite so metaphorical when you don’t have to be. There’s comedy in telling the truth.¹¹

The Chorus also functions as an introduction to the play’s procession of characters and the central locations and themes of *Long Lost*:

CHORUS / AUSTIN:

[...]

⁹ Martin and Tichenor, p. 1.

¹⁰ Austin Tichenor, Personal interview, Skype, 5 February 2018.

¹¹ Austin Tichenor, Personal interview, Skype, 26 April 2018.

Six mighty monarchies, eight pairs of twins,
 Dysfunctional lovers, unpardonable sins,
 Fairies and sprites full of shapes and fancy,
 Men in dresses and women so pantsy,
 And oceans and forests and shipwrecks and tempests
 And spirits of love and regret and rage
 Are the *one hundred hours'* traffic of our stage.¹²

In *Complete Works*, the reference to these repetitive aspects of Shakespeare's comedies is delivered in a tongue-in-cheek manner, playfully disparaging him for recycling successful tropes, before taking 'the liberty of condensing Shakespeare's comedic diarrhea into a single, solid, well-formed lump of hilarity'.¹³ In *Long Lost*, however, rather than delivering a brief lampoon of Shakespeare's ability as a 'formula writer',¹⁴ Martin and Tichenor make it an essential part of the story. The fundamental difference between this play and the RSC's previous work is that, here, embedded in the plot device of the company's discovery of a lost Shakespearean manuscript, there is a sustained, singular narrative, which is driven by a Beatrice-and-Benedick-type 'merry war betwixt'¹⁵ two tricksters: *A Midsummer Night's Dream's* Puck and *The Tempest's* Ariel.

CHORUS / AUSTIN:

[...]

Two fairies, both alike in sorcery,
 In Fairyland, where we doth lay our play,
 From ancient grudge break to new rivalry,
 Where magic scary gets carried away.¹⁶

¹² Martin and Tichenor, p. 2.

¹³ Singer and Winfield, p. 28.

¹⁴ Jess Borgeson, Adam Long and Daniel Singer, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)* (New York: Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, 1994), p. 37.

¹⁵ Martin and Tichenor, p. 18.

¹⁶ Martin and Tichenor, p. 2.

With this speech, which adapts the Prologue to *Romeo and Juliet*, the conflict between Puck and Ariel is introduced as the play's central narrative.

▪ Scene 2

The Chorus character exits, and Austin immediately reappears as his RSC persona, together with Reed and Teddy, to present their 'incredible discovery'¹⁷ to the audience. This establishes the recurring metatheatrical conversations between the company members as the play's secondary narrative. The fictional premise is that Reed, Austin and Teddy, whilst on tour in the entertainingly named 'Titus Vandronicus',¹⁸ have found 'the most important literary discovery of the last four hundred years'¹⁹ in a Leicester car park. Four years after the discovery of Richard III's remains in just such a location, this reference immediately calls the audience's attention to the RSC's ignorance of actual archaeological developments:

REED: [...] we saw this hole. In the parking lot.

AUSTIN: And down *in* the hole, we found a pile of bones.

REED: They looked totally unimportant.

AUSTIN: But next to the bones was a bundle of papers.

TEDDY: And that bundle of papers turned out to be [...]

He exits. [...]

(As TEDDY enters with it:)

ALL: William Shakespeare's long lost first play!

AUSTIN: Now, we have had this checked and verified. There are six surviving examples of Shakespeare's handwriting. This is clearly written in *all six* of Shakespeare's hands.

TEDDY: This is his actual handwriting!

REED: And we took it to the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington DC, which holds the largest collection of

¹⁷ Martin and Tichenor, p. 3.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Shakespeare crap in the world. And as they were showing us the exit, they assured us that this is unlike anything they have in their collection.

AUSTIN: But it's not a folio.

REED: No. It's like a fake folio.

TEDDY: Yeah, it's a *faux-lio*!²⁰

By dismissing the FSL archives in this tongue-in-cheek manner and unhesitatingly acknowledging their manuscript as a fake, the RSC simultaneously signal their position as a comedy theatre troupe who had somehow invaded that hallowed academic space, while lampooning the FSL's status.²¹ Richard Schoch assesses the paradox of a supposedly irreverent play appearing at the Folger, explaining that 'the fact that a comic version of Shakespeare is being performed in a theater that shares a wall with the world's greatest Shakespeare collection tells us that we are long past believing that parody poses a threat to the Bard's genius'.²² Schoch's assessment does not suggest that the RSC have abandoned their artistic principles or decided to adopt a more explicitly reverential approach towards their source material. Rather, as the profile and capacity of the venues in which the RSC perform have increased, their blend of parody and homage has inevitably attracted high-profile institutions, such as the FSL, whose motivations for researching, performing or preserving Shakespeare, may not fully correlate with their own. By choosing *Long Lost* to be the theatrical centrepiece of their celebratory

²⁰ Ibid, pp. 3-4.

²¹ The RSC self-consciously acknowledge and lampoon the creation of their own Shakespearean forgery. The company made this explicit in their marketing campaign for *Long Lost*, filming a parodic trailer in which Martin and Tichenor are shown trying unsuccessfully to convince various FSL staff, including its Director, Michael Witmore, and Heather Wolfe, the Curator of Manuscripts, of their play's authenticity as a lost Shakespeare text, written in the playwright's own hand. It features Martin and Tichenor comically confusing Wolfe's reference to their manuscript being inconsistent with the style and period of sixteenth-century secretary hand in which Shakespeare would have written, with the term's modern meaning, insisting that 'he wrote it himself. He didn't use a secretary. This is what we're telling you'. This section concludes with Tichenor challenging Wolfe to explain how she would define their unauthenticated manuscript, to which she replies: 'a forgery'.

²² Richard Schoch, 'Reduced Shakespeare Company and the golden age of Shakespeare parodies' in *Shakespeare and Beyond* <<http://shakespeareandbeyond.folger.edu/2016/04/19/reduced-shakespeare-company-golden-age-shakespeare-parodies/>> [Accessed 7 May 2016].

programme of events, *Wonder of Will: 400 Years of Shakespeare*, performed on the anniversary day itself, the FSL helped legitimise parody as a central form of Shakespearean celebration in 2016 and, moreover, drew attention to this popular genre as an integral part of the ways in which artists and audiences engage with the playwright's work in a postmodern environment.²³

In addition to their fictional report of the lost play's rejection by the FSL academics, who, 'as they were showing us the exit [...] assured us that this is unlike anything they have in their collection', the RSC reveal 'a list of titles Shakespeare was considering'.²⁴ These include the Shakespeare/Disney hybrid '*One Hundred and One Venetians*',²⁵ the HBO television series '*Game of Thrones*'²⁶ (often compared by journalists and audiences to Shakespeare's Histories) and a reference to the fictional exchange between Will Shakespeare and Kit Marlowe in John Madden's 1998 film *Shakespeare in Love*, during which Will commends the title of Kit's new play, *The Massacre At Paris*, whereupon Kit recommends that his fellow playwright revise the plot and piratical focus of his yet unwritten work:

TEDDY: *Romeo and Ethel, the Pirate's Daughter*—

AUSTIN: Good title.²⁷

Such references to recognisable titles establish the Shakespop fusion that is a frequent occurrence throughout *Long Lost* and recall the sixth episode of the RSC's *Radio Show*, in which Shakespeare is inspired to write his plays by watching television. In particular, the company's joke that *West Side Story* was one of the original names for a Shakespeare play recycles a similar quip used on air that '*Romeo and Juliet* is a total rip off of *West Side Story*'.²⁸ This also

²³ This was apparent in various commemorative works that appeared throughout the anniversary year, such as Ben Elton's situation comedy *Upstart Crow* and Charlie Brooker's mockumentary *Cunk on Shakespeare*, both of which were featured in the programme of events for the BBC Shakespeare Festival 2016.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Adam Long, Reed Martin and Austin Tichenor, '*Romeo and Juliet*' in *The Reduced Shakespeare Company Radio Show* (Laughing Stock Productions Ltd., 1994).

establishes the RSC's irreverent practice of treating the plays and their adaptations as being interchangeable.

The narrative of *Long Lost* focuses chiefly on Puck and Ariel, thus breaking with the company's traditional spotlight on how three performers might reduce a large body of work, as they did in *Complete Works*. Significantly, however, this scene includes one of the play's few arguments about how best to stage their 'literary discovery'.²⁹ A recurring question facing Martin and Tichenor after the announcement of their return to the RSC's inaugural subject matter was how *Long Lost* might be compared to its record-breaking predecessor. In November 2015, between the play's workshop stage and rehearsal development at the Folger, Tichenor remarked on their attempt to signal the play's departure from the RSC formula on which their previous eight shows had been based:

People who say we're returning to our Shakespearean roots have been asking if we're afraid of being compared to *Complete Works*? Every show we do is compared to *Complete Works*. In fact, every show we do is modelled on the template of *Complete Works*. So, in most ways, apart from the subject matter, *Long Lost* is our biggest departure from that template. We have a two-act narrative with a distinct beginning and end. Most of it is written in verse – either actual Shakespeare, adapted Shakespeare or cod-Shakespeare – it's like a *real* play!³⁰

Tichenor echoes his previous comments on the audience's pleasure at seeing the actors 'do it for real'³¹ during the *Hamlet* finale of *Complete Works* and highlights the RSC's desire to produce an authentic text that strengthens their brand as a Shakespeare company, while breaking with the artistic model of the company's initial success. He suggests that 'all our shows are sketch shows – but they're sketch shows with a theme or plot of three idiots trying to condense

²⁹ Martin and Tichenor, p. 4.

³⁰ Tichenor, 19 November 2015.

³¹ Austin Tichenor, Personal interview, Skype, 19 August 2015.

something. In *Long Lost*, we were consciously trying to make it less vaudevillian'.³² This form of Shakespearean reduction can thus be seen as a structural departure from the company's sketches format to a continuous, autonomous storyline that engages audiences in a more traditionally linear sense. This results in a more direct focus on constructing an imagined Shakespearean narrative, with fewer scenes shared between the fictional versions of the RSC members and less reliance on the metatheatrical onstage interventions that shape the plot development of *Complete Works*. Nevertheless, *Long Lost* retains its predecessor's metatheatrical struggle of a trio staging a vast body of work, and the consequent ideological conflict regarding Shakespearean performance, as indicated by the following exchange:

TEDDY: We can't do this by ourselves!

REED: Of course we can.

TEDDY: No, we can't!

(Pointing to the manuscript)

Look at the cast list. There's one thousand, six hundred and thirty-nine characters in here!

AUSTIN: The three of us can do that.

REED: Easily. Besides, I've made some cuts.

AUSTIN: Wait, what?

REED: Yeah, we gotta be out of here in two hours.

AUSTIN: No, no, no, we've got to perform this whole masterpiece.

We have a literary responsibility!

REED: No, we have a theatrical opportunity!³³

Austin takes an ideological stance towards their '*faux-lit*' while Reed, with one eye on the clock, favours the practical approach. This conflict between Austin and Reed intrinsically links the play back to the ongoing highbrow/lowbrow clashes between Jess and Adam in *Complete Works*. The difference is that, in

³² Austin Tichenor, Personal interview, Skype, 25 October 2016.

³³ Martin and Tichenor, p. 6.

Long Lost, the arguments are reduced to a series of short interludes, rather than functioning as the overarching metanarrative that drives the themes of conflict and resolution in *Complete Works*. Teddy cuts through his colleagues' squabble to readdress the problem of performing an enormous number of characters with only three actors, telling Reed and Austin that '[i]t doesn't matter. We're still gonna need more people'.³⁴ Not only does this serve as an RSC in-joke, which will reward the company's long-term patrons with an awareness of Reed and Austin's experience in relation to their colleague, but it also deconstructs the onstage dynamic of a trio facing an apparently insurmountable task. This is designed to make the feat even more impressive when it is eventually achieved and is rooted in the company's tradition of whipping up an audience's expectations by emphasising the scale of their theatrical labours, much like a circus ringmaster.

The published script of *Long Lost* includes a cast list with precise descriptions of each member:

AUSTIN, *an enthusiastic academic*

REED, *a pragmatic tough guy*

TEDDY, *a sincere and excited innocent*³⁵

By thus specifying each character, the company align *Long Lost* with the tripartite structure and company archetypes that have been their staples since *Complete Works*. This chapter explores a number of instances where Teddy's actions and characteristics recall those of Adam in *Complete Works*, such as their shared disbelief; Teddy's, here, at the prospect of presenting such a vast array of characters; Adam's, at the overwhelming prospect of performing *Hamlet*. However, while Teddy's objection serves no dramatic function beyond provoking the conflict between Reed and Austin, Adam's outburst, by contrast, derails *Complete Works* and precipitates its enforced interval. The respective trios of both plays also differ in relation to which characters are placed in opposition to each other. In *Complete Works*, the dispute is between the

³⁴ Ibid, p. 7.

³⁵ Ibid, p. x.

‘academic’ Jess and the ‘innocent’ Adam, revolving around their respective ideological views about Shakespeare and their audience, whereas, in *Long Lost*, Austin the scholar and Reed the pragmatist are conflicted over how and whether to adapt or not to adapt. Teddy’s suggestion that they need more performers provokes a melodramatic outburst from Austin, in which he interpolates *Henry V*’s ‘St. Crispin’s Day’ speech into the context of theatrical performance, adapting the King’s address to his outnumbered troops, to convince his colleagues that they are capable of staging the manuscript without assistance. Austin’s response mirrors Henry’s reaction to Westmoreland’s lamentation ‘that we now had here / But one ten thousand of those men in England’ (4.3.16-7):

AUSTIN:

[...] The fewer men, the greater share of honour.
God’s will! I pray thee, wish not one man more.

REED:

(To TEDDY)

See what you did?

AUSTIN:

And he which hath no stomach to this fight,
Let him depart; his passport shall be made,
And crowns for convoy put into his purse;
We would not act in that man’s company.

Reed’s aside to Teddy draws the audience’s attention to his exasperation at Austin’s tendency to enter into lengthy declamations of Shakespeare’s words, which are at odds with his own pragmatism and risk alienating the audience. The stage direction that precedes Austin’s speech indicates that it should be delivered ‘*[i]n full Shakespearean bombast*’,³⁶ which suggests that he intends the speech to rouse his colleagues into action by equating the RSC’s acting ‘company’ with Henry’s ‘band of brothers’ (4.3.60). This satirises both the

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 7.

pompous actor, as represented by Austin, and his belief in the theatrical task as being somehow equivalent to a military call-to-arms, made explicit by Shakespeare's line, 'We would not die in that man's company' (4.3.38), having been amended to 'We would not *act* in that man's company'.³⁷ Reed proceeds to play a musical interlude as Austin and Teddy leave the stage, then re-enter to introduce the first Shakespearean characters of the play: Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse.

▪ Scene 3

Their duologue is a simplified reduction of Egeon's lengthy speech from the first scene of *The Comedy of Errors*, in which he tells the Duke of Ephesus, who has condemned him to death, about the separation from his wife and one of their twin sons during an ill-fated sea voyage:

DROMIO / TEDDY:

The weather started getting rough.

ANTIPHOLUS / AUSTIN:

The tiny ship was tossed

Despite the courage of the fearless crew

BOTH:

Our brothers both were lost.³⁸

By opening with *Comedy*, the RSC establish the consistent theme of mistaken identity that reoccurs throughout the *Long Lost* narrative.³⁹ Reed follows his aside to the audience by introducing Puck and then transforming into

³⁷ Ibid; my italics.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 9.

³⁹ *The Comedy of Errors*, which is one of Shakespeare's earliest comedies, has proved to be a popular play for adaptation by comic ensembles who engage in Shakespearean parody. These include The Flying Karamazov Brothers' 1987 circus-influenced production, which featured four of the juggling troupe's five members as the Antipholi and Dromios, and the 1999 hip-hop musical, *The Bomb-itty of Errors*, performed by four actors, and which featured GQ and JAQ, who subsequently formed the Q Brothers, a group who specialise in reduced 'add-rap-tations' of Shakespeare's plays. These companies seek to exploit the inherently farcical possibilities in the multi-roling and disguises used by both sets of twins throughout the play.

character by putting ‘*on short devil’s horns*’,⁴⁰ which acknowledges the character’s diabolic presence and mischievous intentions. His first lines exemplify Martin and Tichenor’s process of adaptation, and the accompanying stage directions establish Puck as a character who, unlike the Syracusans, can interact with the audience and, therefore, is able to step outside their narrative.

PUCK / REED:

What Syracusans have I come upon?

(Going into the audience to watch the actors.)

Be they good models to build mischief on?⁴¹

During the writing process, when selecting specific lines to appropriate and deciding which characters should deliver them, Martin and Tichenor utilised the Shakespeare Pro App, an internet concordance application produced by PlayShakespeare.com, which allows the user to search a digital version of the playwright’s complete works for specific words, lines or speeches. Their use of an app to splice different lines and reduce them to snippets reflects ‘the increasingly heterogeneous and fragmentary *presence* of “Shakespeare” in the increasingly digitized and globalized mediascape of the beginning of the twenty-first century’.⁴² Maurizio Calbi’s description of Shakespeare’s fragmentation suggests a fissure in the playwright’s foundations, into which artists like the RSC dig in order to uncover new, adaptable elements.

Tichenor describes this as a process of ‘excavation’,⁴³ which allowed him to slot quotations into the developing script, picking specific items that explored a particular theme within Shakespeare’s plays and reassigning these, where necessary, to a new character. For instance, he ‘needed some lines about mischief, found Don John’s line about it from *Much Ado About Nothing* and gave

⁴⁰ Martin and Tichenor, p. 9.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Maurizio Calbi, *Spectral Shakespeares: Media Adaptations in the Twenty-First Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 2.

⁴³ Austin Tichenor, Personal interview, Skype, 19 November 2015.

it to Puck instead',⁴⁴ referring to Don John's question to Borachio in 1.3 when he asks whether Claudio's marriage to Hero will 'serve for any model to build mischief on?' (1.3.37). In *Long Lost*, this line is transformed into an early indication of Puck's intentions towards Antipholus and Dromio, the first victims of his magical pranks. This recontextualisation alters the line from the Machiavellian scheming of an antagonist into the playful trickery of a comic character, which generates thought-provoking observations about the intertextual quality and possibilities of Shakespeare's work. Indeed, the RSC's fragmentation of Shakespeare serves to illustrate the fact that, throughout Shakespeare's canon, in characters such as Falstaff, Sir Toby Belch and Malvolio, the line between villain and fool is often blurred.

The scene ends in Puck transporting Antipholus and Dromio to Italy and celebrating his freedom 'until my master calls',⁴⁵ whereupon Oberon, played by Austin, offstage, summons him, thus establishing another important concept in *Long Lost*: the master/servant power balance, a dynamic that might be considered as analogous to the author/adaptor relationship. The choice of Puck and Ariel as the play's protagonists, as well as the catalysts for its storyline, offers a commentary on the status of adaptation: both are servants to their masters in their respective plays, their powers limited by Oberon and Prospero's control. By positioning these servants at the centre of the narrative and allowing them to 'run amok'⁴⁶ with their magical powers, the RSC implicitly advocate the liberation of the adaptation as servant to its master source.

▪ **Scene 4**

The next scene introduces Austin as Holofernes, the pompous schoolteacher from *Love's Labour's Lost*, before Reed enters, as himself, to prevent the character's long-winded dialogue from derailing the play's central narrative focus on Puck's magical machinations.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Martin and Tichenor, p. 12.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 15.

HOLOFERNES / AUSTIN:

Most barbarous intimation! Yet a kind of insinuation, as 'twere, in
via, in way, of explication—

REED:

(Entering still dressed as PUCK)

Woah, stop. I've cut Holofernes.

AUSTIN: What?

REED: Yeah, I've cut all of Shakespeare's pompous annoying
blabbermouths: Polonius, Egeon, Pandarus, Justice Shallow—

AUSTIN: Wait, we need at least one pompous annoying windbag.

REED: We've got you.

AUSTIN: That's true.⁴⁷

This exchange develops the ongoing disagreement between Reed and Austin about how they should approach the lost play, comments on Austin's fictional identity as a literary pedant, like Holofernes, and underscores the play's 'anarchic, improvisational structure',⁴⁸ through the company's construction of the illusion that this is the first time they have ever attempted to stage this manuscript. Matthew Pearson, who played Austin in the play's UK tour, explains the RSC's mock-extemporisation, and the audience's participation within this charade, in terms of how 'every night is the first night and of course the audience knows that, but we have that conceit that this is the first time we've ever tried it, we're going to try and do it, and who knows how it's going to go'.⁴⁹ Although this idea can be traced back to the onstage interactions between Daniel, Jess and Adam in *Complete Works*, the company have intensified the impression of improvisational daring in *Long Lost* by alluding to the other characters and scenes, which time will not permit them to perform, due to the sheer scale of their 'discovery'. This could also be construed as an act of self-satirisation, given that the RSC are attempting to

⁴⁷ Ibid, pp. 12-3.

⁴⁸ Douglas Lanier, *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 103.

⁴⁹ Matthew Pearson, Personal interview, London, 18 January 2017.

reduce something that does not actually exist, unlike Shakespeare's complete works, American history or the Bible. Reed's cuts, therefore, serve as a dramatic device, helping the action to flow and, by enacting it directly in front of the audience, lending a sense of spontaneity to the process of reduction.

Tichenor has suggested that this process of appearing to cut the text in performance is 'the only reductive part of *Long Lost*: the occasional interludes where we're pretending to cut a one-hundred-hour manuscript down to two. That's the comic reduction'.⁵⁰ He also remarks that one of the recurring tropes that were initially explored were the 'pompous, annoying blabbermouths, whether it's Holofernes or Polonius'.⁵¹ Ultimately, Martin and Tichenor realised that it would be more intriguing to 'let one stand for all'⁵² and match characters with others who would challenge or contradict them, rather than combining examples of the same archetype. This impulse is fully realised in the following scene, when Puck 'finally comes face to face with his sworn mortal enemy'.⁵³

▪ Scene 5

The next scene begins with a false start, as Teddy enters as Ariel, '*dressed in a mermaid's costume: long red wig, clamshell bra, and fish tail over her feet*'.⁵⁴ Immediately puzzled by this appearance, Reed steps out of character as Puck to ask what his colleague is doing:

PUCK / REED:

How now, spirit, whither—?

(Breaking character)

What are you doing?

TEDDY: What does it look like? I'm playing Ariel.

REED: Disney's Ariel?

⁵⁰ Austin Tichenor, Personal interview, Skype, 19 May 2017.

⁵¹ Tichenor, 5 February 2018.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Martin and Tichenor, p. 13.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 14.

TEDDY: Uh, yeah! Shakespeare's greatest creation is Ariel, the little mermaid.

This well-meaning mistake by Teddy again positions him in the Adam role, evoking the latter's innocent error in *Complete Works* when he construes the word 'Moor', as 'a place where you tie up boats',⁵⁵ rather than as part of the full title of *Othello*. Here, Teddy's mix-up over Shakespeare's spirit and Walt Disney's mermaid launches a recurring series of intertextual references to various Disney films throughout *Long Lost*. Tichenor explains that the RSC's exploration and conflation of Shakespeare and Disney's overlapping characters is 'mostly a comment on how much Shakespeare has permeated popular culture as represented by Disney, so it was a great source for a list of jokes but also a valid academic point'.⁵⁶ A list of Disneyshakes references follows Reed and Teddy's exchange, beginning with a legitimate comparison and becoming progressively tangential as it continues:

ARIEL: [...] Shakespeare's Ariel is not a Disney character.

TEDDY: Are you kidding? *All* Disney movies are based on Shakespeare!

AUSTIN: No, they're not! What's the Disney version of *Hamlet*, where the prince's father is murdered by his uncle?

TEDDY: *The Lion King*.

AUSTIN: That's a bad example. What about *Henry IV, Part 1*, where a young man shirks his responsibilities with his fat, lazy friend?

TEDDY: *The Jungle Book*.

AUSTIN: What?

TEDDY: Mowgli and Baloo.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Jess Borgeson, Adam Long and Daniel Singer, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)* (New York: Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, 1994), p. 31

⁵⁶ Tichenor, 26 April 2018.

⁵⁷ Martin and Tichenor, pp. 14-5.

This extract exemplifies the RSC's synthesis of different aspects of Shakespeare and Disney's works. By beginning with the fairly secure comparison between *Hamlet* and *The Lion King* (1994), both of which are based on the act of fraternal regicide, Teddy immediately wrongfoots Austin, whose disbelief in a suggested correlation between Shakespeare and Disney's plots and characters is indicative of his role as the highbrow authority figure. As the section continues, Teddy lists additional specific Shakespearean images, plot devices and names which can be mapped onto Disney films, examples of which include *The Winter's Tale* and *Frozen* (2013), both of which culminate in the revivification of statues; *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Parent Trap* (1998), each involving '[l]ong lost identical twins'⁵⁸ who are reunited, with comic consequences, and the (slightly more specious) argument that 'Othello is the basis of *Aladdin*'⁵⁹ because Iago, the film's evil sidekick parrot, shares his name with one of Shakespeare's most well-known villains.

With the exception of *The Lion King*, none of the films listed are directly indebted to Shakespeare's plays or have been connected to the playwright's work by their directors and writers. Teddy's *The Jungle Book* (1967) example, for instance, relies on linking the surrogate father/son dynamic between Prince Hal and Falstaff, and the latter's physicality, with Mowgli and Baloo's relationship. Meanwhile, *The Swiss Family Robinson* (1960) and *Tempest*'s shared narrative is that of a family stranded on a remote island. The primary source material for the former, however, lies in the novels by Rudyard Kipling and Johan David Wyss, rather than any work of Shakespeare's. Consequently, the RSC are able to satirise the will to believe that the playwright's work has been imbibed by every facet of popular culture, particularly in creative universes such as Disney, which continues to adapt and appropriate myths and fables as well as, more recently, recycling its own films into live-action remakes of animated classics such as *Cinderella* (2015), *The Jungle Book* (2016) and *Beauty and the Beast* (2017).

Although the RSC knowingly mock the impulse to take the adjective 'Shakespearean' and affix it to films, television and music, the specific

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 15.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

correlation that Teddy draws between the playwright and Disney makes a legitimate point about both the process of adaptation, and which stories survive and continue to flourish. The company stretch this comparison to breaking point by using examples that increasingly deviate from the legitimate *Hamlet/The Lion King* example, thereby parodying the suggestion that if Shakespeare were alive today he would be a crime writer, filmmaker, rapper or any other contemporary form of artist, truisms often pedalled by fans, commentators and artists themselves in order to trade on Shakespeare's cultural cachet. This is underpinned by Reed's comment, after being finally won over by Teddy, that '[i]f you think about it, Walt Disney was the modern-day Shakespeare'.⁶⁰

Despite its parodic execution in performance, this connection is rooted in scholarly thought and has been explored in academic criticism, as observed by Julie Sanders, who states that 'Shakespeare, a prime example [...] of a cultural repository of archetypal characters and plotlines, dipped into the folk genre of fairy tale as a stimulus for his drama'.⁶¹ She further explains that 'fairy tale and folklore serve as cultural treasuries to which we endlessly return'⁶² and that artists, such as Walt Disney, 'have all turned to the potent form of the folk tale or the fairy tale as an inspiration for their re-imaginings, postmodern or otherwise'.⁶³ In *Long Lost*, the RSC simultaneously harness these same stimuli and subvert them at every turn, in a similar way to the *Fractured Fairy Tales* which proved so influential for Tichenor in both his early work and subsequent writing for the RSC.

Sanders also draws attention to '[r]ecent comic, even parodic versions of the fairy tale [which] include the hugely popular animated *Shrek* films [...] and Stephen Sondheim's 1987 musical, *Into The Woods*. Both of these are [...] an attempt to resist the so-called 'Disneyfication' of the form'.⁶⁴ These, she suggests, attempt to critique the accepted tropes and resolutions of Disney

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 16.

⁶¹ Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 82.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid, p. 83.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

films, 'with their explicit stress on happy endings, usually consisting for their female characters in marriage and the finding of their personal Prince Charming'.⁶⁵ In further considering *Shrek* and *Into The Woods* as notable examples of narratives that draw on characters from different storylines and explore how they might interact, this thesis suggests that *Long Lost* can be considered an example of this postmodern trend.

Tichenor has himself made this connection, explaining that he began his playwriting career in the 1980s by creating children's theatre, which involved fairy tale mash-ups, including 'the book for a musical called *Goose! Beyond the Nursery*, which was a musical review of Mother Goose characters in therapy'.⁶⁶ This work proved influential when Tichenor joined the company in 1992, as he observes, reflecting that 'the RSC felt like children's theatre in the best possible ways: it's theatre that is high energy and engaging'.⁶⁷ Eventually, this became significant in the writing of *Long Lost* and the decision to combine characters from different plays. Tichenor notes that 'once we had that idea, I flashed back to *Into The Woods*, this musical I wrote, and the children's theatre'.⁶⁸ *Long Lost*, therefore, typifies the revisionist approach to the tales from which both Shakespeare and Disney borrow.

The extended skit is staged in the improvised style to which RSC audience members have become accustomed, performed as elaborate wisecracks, extemporised by Teddy in direct reaction to the films listed by his two sceptical colleagues:

REED: So what's the Disney version of *King John*?

TEDDY: *Pete's Dragon*.

REED: Nobody's seen *Pete's Dragon*.

TEDDY: Nobody's seen *King John*.

AUSTIN: What about *Richard the Third*?

TEDDY: *Hunchback of Notre Dame*.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Austin Tichenor, Personal interview, Skype, 30 March 2018.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

REED: *Midsummer Night's Dream?*

TEDDY: *Fantasia*. Magic run amok.

AUSTIN: *Macbeth*.

TEDDY: *The Black Cauldron*.⁶⁹

This section of the scene is akin to an elaborate improvisation game, whereby Teddy responds to each play name, thrown at him by Reed or Austin, by connecting it to a recognisable image (hunchbacks and cauldrons), or an uncomfortable taboo (lack of familiarity with *King John* or *Pete's Dragon*), which acknowledges the audience's respective knowledge of both Shakespeare and Disney. The RSC therein challenge and invite the audience subliminally to agree or disagree with the numerous comparisons with which the company bombard them. This is a prime example of how the RSC carefully construct a series of jokes, designed to oppose and undermine the highbrow/lowbrow cultural divide, and then execute these in an impromptu manner.

Graham Holderness delineates the difference between 'a study of "Shakespeare", rather than of Shakespeare [...] a name which [...] is merely metonymic of an entire cultural-political formation, and thus more akin to "Disney" or "Rockefeller"'.⁷⁰ The cultivation and expansion of Shakespeare's brand in the twentieth century is connected to Disney throughout *Long Lost* and most explicitly in the section that follows Teddy's list. The RSC take this correlation beyond individual points of comparison and use Walt Disney as a contemporary example of how Shakespeare could, and perhaps should, be considered as much a 'super savvy businessman'⁷¹ as he was an 'amazing genius'.⁷²

REED: He became ridiculously rich by rewriting history and

⁶⁹ Martin and Tichenor, p. 15.

⁷⁰ Graham Holderness, *Cultural Shakespeare: Essays in the Shakespeare Myth* (Hertfordshire: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001), p. x.

⁷¹ Martin and Tichenor, p. 17.

⁷² *Ibid*, p. 16.

stealing existing stories and making them his own.

AUSTIN: Who, Disney or Shakespeare?

REED / TEDDY: Yes!

REED: And have you been to Stratford-Upon-Avon recently? They should rename it Shakespeareland.⁷³

Reed's first remark is a return to the concept of Shakespeare as a thief, as evoked by Adam's use of the invented compound 'dis-stole'⁷⁴ in *Complete Works*. Both aim to debunk the notion of Shakespeare's originality as proof of his literary genius and instead reframe the playwright as a magpie who pilfered existing stories and reworked them for profit. This exchange also addresses another of the RSC's principal targets for satire: the Shakespeare heritage industry. Reed suggests that, with its abundance of tourists, meticulously planned heritage routes and multiple themed attractions, Stratford-upon-Avon might be viewed as a Shakespearean theme park, which thrives on the capital to be made from Shakespeare's name and legacy. He thus acknowledges the pragmatism of recognising the commercial opportunities to be nurtured in the creative reinvention of Shakespeare as being akin to those of the Disney empire.

Lanier notes that 'popular portrayals of Shakespeare (and scholarly ones as well) inevitably serve ideological ends. They make Shakespeare speak for or live out certain ideas or attitudes, particularly ideas and attitudes about authorship and art'⁷⁵ and the 'Shakespeare' of *Long Lost* is an apt example. The RSC build their particular image of the playwright as one who envisaged a franchise of characters, drawing frequent allusions to Disney and suggesting that 'Walt Disney was the modern-day Shakespeare'.⁷⁶ This scene delivers the basic joke concerning Teddy's obsession with Disney films and his quest to prove their similarity to Shakespeare's plays, by comparing the playwright with popular culture's dominant commercial behemoth. It implies that while

⁷³ Ibid, p. 16.

⁷⁴ Daniel Singer and Jess Winfield, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged) [revised]* (Reduced Shakespeare Company, 2007), p. 27.

⁷⁵ Lanier, p. 113.

⁷⁶ Martin and Tichenor, p. 16

Shakespeare can be regarded as a relatable, pop culture-friendly figure, rather than as the exalted Bard of Avon, nonetheless, he, like Disney and the entertainment empire to which he gave his name, also ruthlessly exploited the narratives and cultural material available to him.

This section of the scene ends with Austin remaining unconvinced by Teddy's argument, reasoning that, whether or not Shakespeare and Disney's work can legitimately be compared, 'Shakespeare's Ariel is not a mermaid'.⁷⁷ Teddy admits that he 'can't walk in this anyway'⁷⁸ and leaves the stage to change, re-entering as Ariel, but with his tail removed. What follows establishes the key element of *Long Lost*, namely the relationship between Puck and Ariel, and, by analysing which plays are quoted in this section, it is possible to construe how the RSC appropriate Shakespeare's texts to construct the conflict between these two magical creatures:

PUCK / REED:

How now, spirit, whither wander you?

ARIEL / TEDDY:

I fly, I swim, I dive under the sea,

Under the sea, darling it's better down

Where it's wetter, take it from me!

(AUSTIN steps out, shakes his head, and exits.)

ARIEL / TEDDY:

Either I mistake your shape and making quite

Or else you are that shrewd and knavish sprite

Robin Goodfellow, my sworn enemy.

PUCK / REED:

My dear Fairy Disdain. Are you yet living?

ARIEL / TEDDY:

(Aside)

There is a kind of merry war betwixt us.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 16.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 17.

PUCK / REED:*(Aside)*

We never meet but there's a skirmish of wit between us.⁷⁹

This extract merges Puck's first appearance in *Dream*, when he meets another fairy, with Ariel's opening lines to Prospero in *Tempest*, Leonato's remark about Benedick and Beatrice's shared past in *Much Ado's* first scene, and a song from *The Little Mermaid*. In doing so, it establishes the primary narrative and structural touchstones for *Long Lost*: the themes of magic and mischief prevalent within *Dream* and *Tempest*, the unexplained conflict that drives *Much Ado*, and frequent intertextual references to popular culture, with Disney uppermost amongst these. Martin has stated that the significance of these three particular plays may be because 'they're hardly in *Complete Works*'⁸⁰ and also because, by casting Puck and Ariel as the chief protagonists *and* plot devices of *Long Lost*, they were able to address the problem of 'how we would explain all these characters. A magical war seemed like the perfect solution'.⁸¹

Tichenor has also reflected that he and Martin were 'conscious to showcase the many Shakespearean characters not featured in the RSC's first show [...] especially the female ones. Our scripts are frequently licensed by high schools and colleges — the theatre departments of which traditionally have more women than men'.⁸² His comments reflect the RSC's awareness of their own legacy in performance, how professional and amateur companies alike have shaped this, and their conclusion that their work should enable inclusivity and access in adaptation. The in-built stage directions, which instruct companies to update or localise specific references, makes this clear; however, Martin and Tichenor's desire to produce a text more easily adaptable for female performers represents a shift of sorts for this all-male company.

The consequence of the RSC's choice to recast Ariel as a Disney princess

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 18.

⁸⁰ Martin, 24 April 2018.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Austin Tichenor, 'Discovering Shakespeare's Long Lost First Play' in *Shakespeare & Beyond* <<https://shakespeareandbeyond.folger.edu/2018/08/10/discovering-shakespeares-long-lost-first-play/>> [Accessed 13 August 2018].

provides an amusing cultural shorthand for the audience and also serves to align Teddy's character with Adam's in *Complete Works*. Arguably, however, this produces a heteronormative reading of these characters and their interactions, which is further emphasised by using Benedick and Beatrice's conflict as the template for their rivalry, given that it casts the play's central relationship between a male and female fairy, rather than exploring the history of cross-casting both characters in performance and the possibility of either character's gender fluidity, as seen in Ben Whishaw's performance as an androgynous Ariel in Julie Taymor's 2010 film. However, such a reading would fail to recognise the RSC's own history of both cross-casting and cross-dressing as key ingredients of their comedy. It would also disregard Martin and Tichenor's preface to the play's published edition, in which they encourage future performers to cast multiple men or women in their own productions:

Although within this published script we use the names of the original cast, your actors should use their own names. Also, to be clear: Although the original cast was three men, you are free to cast any number of males or females in any role.⁸³

This decision has enabled the company to market *Long Lost* as a play that could become a mixed-gender or all-female production, despite being performed by three men, both in the original staging and its subsequent UK transfer. This decision reinforces the RSC's brand as an all-male entity, but Martin and Tichenor's advocacy for flexible adaptation poses interesting questions as to how the play might evolve in future non-RSC iterations of *Long Lost*. Although the play ostensibly re-invents Ariel as a female protagonist, the character is male in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the pronoun 'his' being used twice in relation to Ariel.⁸⁴ Also, this new version is based on a Disney character who gives up her voice to become human so that she can woo a prince. Despite

⁸³ Martin and Tichenor, p. xi.

⁸⁴ In Ariel's opening speech, Shakespeare refers to 'Ariel and all his quality' (1.2.194); also, a stage direction in Act 3 Scene 3 reads 'Enter ARIEL [*descending*] like a harpy, claps his wings upon the table, and, with a quaint device, the banquet vanishes'.

Martin and Tichenor's aim to increase opportunities for female representation in RSC performances, their intentions are thus undermined by pitting Puck, a male, against Ariel, also played by a male actor. This is exacerbated by the inclusion of a princess who chooses to sacrifice her greatest gift solely in order to win the love of a man. Moreover, Martin and Tichenor chose not to cast a woman in this role, but retained instead the conceit of a man dressed as a woman; a common thread throughout their productions which can be traced back to the Adam character. *Long Lost's* script never specifies whether or not the RSC's Ariel is definitively female which, while allowing it to remain ambiguous and open to interpretation for future performers, further undermines Martin and Tichenor's desire to showcase Shakespeare's female voice in their play.

The company recently made the play available for licensing, following its 2018 publication and apart from the RSC's own productions, the play has so far been performed exclusively as a three-man show at Prague Shakespeare Festival in December 2016, directed by Jennifer King, and Utah Shakespeare Festival in August 2017, directed by Christopher Edwards. However, *Long Lost* is shortly due to be staged by Chickspeare, an all-female Shakespeare company from Charlotte, North Carolina, who have previously performed extracts from *Complete Works*, as well as 'Shakespeare "abridging/fast-forwarding/rewinding" [...] shows',⁸⁵ which Terri Power describes as 'a short combination of plays [...] "similar to Reduced Shakespeare Company's pieces" in style and anarchic ribaldry.'⁸⁶ It will therefore be fascinating to observe how an all-female company, who deliver 'a little vaudeville, a little Quickspeare, a little improv comedy'⁸⁷ will address, from a non-male perspective, Martin and Tichenor's approach to gender in *Long Lost* and the RSC's attempt at greater prioritisation of the female voice in Shakespeare.

Tichenor has remarked that he hopes that 'in seven years *Long Lost* will get more attention, because it will be the 400th anniversary of the Folio',⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Chickspeare, 'About the Chicks' <<http://chickspeare.com/>> [Accessed 25 August 2018].

⁸⁶ Terri Power, *Shakespeare and Gender in Practice* (London: Palgrave, 2015), p. 99.

⁸⁷ Chickspeare, 'It's Chickmas 2017!' <<http://chickspeare.com/chicksmas2017/>> [Accessed 25 August 2018].

⁸⁸ Tichenor, 17 April 2016.

suggesting that the RSC have a clear plan of how to cultivate *Long Lost*'s continued life in performance. Moreover, by positioning Puck and Ariel's conflict as the principal narrative focus of *Long Lost*, instead of the all-male trio's struggle to reduce their chosen topic, the RSC have created a play which will perhaps be more malleable for future performers than *Complete Works*. This is because of the inherent difference between a play which is anchored by a metatheatrical structure based on the founding members' personal experience of reducing Shakespeare for the 1987 Edinburgh Fringe, and one that abridges an entirely fictional work, pushing the company's onstage identities to the margins in favour of Shakespeare's characters.

Tichenor describes Puck and Ariel as 'rivals, and maybe lovers, that had something in their past, and are trying to "one-up" each other with magic'.⁸⁹ The premise for their magical duel is based on Benedick and Beatrice's ambiguous division and mutual dislike, which Shakespeare never fully explains, and, moreover, suggests to the audience that their affection will be rekindled by the end of the play, as in *Much Ado*. These two magical beings conjure a series of characters from diverse Shakespeare plays in various combinations, such as Dromio and Juliet and Lear and *Macbeth*'s Witches. As a means of demonstrating their own magical superiority over the other, both Puck and Ariel attempt to manipulate each character in turn. In the play, Martin and Tichenor imagine a young, unrefined version of Shakespeare, which justifies the use of magic as a facilitating tool for theatrical mischief and creative collision, as Tichenor explains, stating that

if Shakespeare wrote his first play when he was seventeen, he was fixated on the things that all seventeen-year olds are fixated on: magic and sex. So, the magic becomes a metaphor for the sex you want to be having, and they start matching up all these weird couples because that's what we're all trying to imagine at that age: where am I, who am I, what am I?⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Tichenor, 17 April 2016.

This adolescent fascination with dream scenarios of intertwined individuals is made evident throughout the series of character combinations which arise from the dramatic device of Puck and Ariel's conjoined mischief, a coupling which, the RSC hint, may have had a romantic past. Indeed, the focus of their own invented relationship, as well as certain other characters, relates either to sexual tension or to the superhero 'versus' scenario popularised by contemporary comic book film adaptations.⁹¹ This connection is made explicit in the play's programme notes where they explain that, within the context of *Long Lost*, 'every character in [Shakespeare's] entire canon was once part of a single universe, an idea that comic books and superhero movies are currently exploiting to massive success'.⁹² Furthermore, Tichenor posits that

if Hamlet and Othello switched plays they'd both be radically different. Desdemona would still be alive, and Claudius would be dead in five minutes. It's playing with things like what would happen if Superman landed in Russia and Kal-El was raised a Communist instead. It's about that fantasy of what would happen in these alternative, parallel scenarios.⁹³

This pertains to Hamlet's imagined interaction with Lady Macbeth, which represents the first example of Puck and Ariel's meddling. Ariel conjures her onstage to coerce Hamlet into action, after which she tells him that 'we'll be here all night'⁹⁴ if he fails to act, insists on 'no pausing, Hamlet',⁹⁵ and finally declares that 'you tend to be a "not to be" Hamlet; / I need you to be a "to be" Hamlet'.⁹⁶ Tichenor explains that he and Martin wanted to 'explore how adding and subtracting characters from different plays would speed up or slow down the drama'.⁹⁷ The RSC therefore posit that, if Lady Macbeth met Hamlet, this

⁹¹ Examples include *Captain America: Civil War* (2016) and *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016), both released in the same year as *Long Lost*.

⁹² Reed Martin and Austin Tichenor, *William Shakespeare's Long Lost First Play (abridged)* programme notes, unpaginated (Reduced Shakespeare Company, 2016).

⁹³ Tichenor, 17 April 2016.

⁹⁴ Martin and Tichenor, p. 23.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Tichenor, 17 April 2016.

'mean motivator',⁹⁸ as Ariel introduces her, would serve as his much-needed catalyst and would thus have the revenge plot tied up in a trice, given how effectively her charms and enterprise convince Macbeth to act, despite the fact that he is initially as uncertain as Hamlet about killing a king. This imagined meeting is the first of many to deliver what Tichenor refers to as 'alternative readings of the original source material, allowing audiences to speculate what might have been possible if these famous characters had been given different circumstances or created in different times'.⁹⁹ The RSC facilitate the frisson of witnessing these encounters, an impulse that is rooted in fan-fiction, by stitching together different lines from both plays to create a collage scene, which can be viewed as Hamlet standing in for Macbeth and Lady Macbeth for Ophelia, as suggested by their first exchange:

LADY MACBETH / REED:

Worthy Hamlet! Dane of Cawdor!

HAMLET / AUSTIN:

Good lady,

In thy orisons be all my sins remembered.¹⁰⁰

The first line paraphrases Lady Macbeth's greeting to her husband in *Macbeth* 1.5. and draws, for comedic capital, on the fact that 'Thane' and 'Dane' rhyme. The second directly quotes Hamlet's final lines of his 'To be or not to be' (3.1.58) soliloquy, only replacing the word 'Nymph' (3.1.91) used to describe Ophelia, with 'good lady'. However, as the scene progresses, it becomes increasingly clear that, although Lady Macbeth has been introduced by Ariel to combat Hamlet's state of inertia, this scene has more to do with Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's conflict in 1.7, when she spurs him into action by directly questioning his masculinity. In the RSC version, Hamlet's doubts replace those of his more decisive counterpart and his reaction to Lady Macbeth's image of

⁹⁸ Martin and Tichenor, p. 22.

⁹⁹ Austin Tichenor, 'Discovering Shakespeare's Long Lost First Play' in *Shakespeare & Beyond* <<https://shakespeareandbeyond.folger.edu/2018/08/10/discovering-shakespeares-long-lost-first-play/>> [Accessed 13 August 2018].

¹⁰⁰ Martin and Tichenor, p. 22.

infanticide reflects the audience's response to this memorably shocking moment in *Macbeth*, albeit with added comic stage directions:

LADY MACBETH / REED: [...]

I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums
And dashed his brains out.

HAMLET / AUSTIN:

Holy crap. If we fail—

LADY MACBETH / REED:

(Twisting his nipples)

Screw your courage to the sticking place
And we'll not fail.

HAMLET / AUSTIN:

(High-pitched voice)

All right. I am settled.¹⁰¹

These slapstick insertions are intended to reduce the brutal image conjured by Shakespeare's original language and undercut it with a moment of physical humour which renders the encounter simultaneously more family-friendly and suggestive, playing on the sexual innuendo of 'the sticking place'. In initial productions, this was made more obvious by Martin, as Lady Macbeth, grabbing Tichenor's Hamlet by the crotch, thus underlining the process of emasculation. However, during their Off-Broadway run at the New Victory Theater in March 2018, the company decided to change this to the less explicit action of a nipple tweak for the families and school groups who attended their matinee shows. Martin and Tichenor found that this drew a more positive reaction from audience members and decided to change their script accordingly.

By beginning with a mash-up that unites two well-known characters from Shakespeare's canon, the RSC ease the audience into the play's

¹⁰¹ Martin and Tichenor, pp. 23-4.

patchwork structure and the conceit of the playwright's unrefined first draft. Martin suggests that *Hamlet* has been especially 'ripe for parody'¹⁰² and remains a continued source of fascination for the company because 'it's a great target. *Hamlet* is so well known that you don't have to explain it [...] with *Hamlet* there's enough cultural familiarity that you don't have to do that very much'.¹⁰³ This is why certain characters in *Long Lost*, such as Hamlet and Lady Macbeth, are portrayed relatively faithfully, at least in terms of how their iconography has been cultivated in performance.



Figure 4.1 Reed Martin as Lady Macbeth and Austin Tichenor as Hamlet in *William Shakespeare's Long Lost First Play (abridged)* at the Folger Theatre [left]; John Singer Sargent's 1889 oil portrait *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth* [middle]; Derek Jacobi as Hamlet in the *BBC Shakespeare's 1980 version of Hamlet* [right].

Austin's Hamlet, for instance, is dressed in the idiosyncratic black mourning attire that has become the character's hallmark costume. The black velvet hat, black waistcoat and breeches, worn with a loose-fitting white shirt are reminiscent of Derek Jacobi's appearance as Hamlet in the *BBC Shakespeare* film (1980).¹⁰⁴ Reed's Lady Macbeth costume consists of a long, patterned, dark green dress with yellow trim across the midriff, evoking John Singer Sargent's 1889 oil portrait *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth*. Details such as these offer the audience a measure of humour in the recognition of these characters, costumed as iconographic figures, which contrasts with subsequent characters in the play, such as Ariel, who may be linked to a different type of cultural

¹⁰² Martin, 24 April 2018.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ The outfit also recalls other iterations of the character, including Laurence Olivier's 1948 version and Jonathan Pryce's in 1980.

shorthand within popular culture, which is often disconnected from Shakespearean representations.

▪ **Scene 6**

In Scene 6, the RSC provide a second interjection, in which they return to the metatheatrical conflict between Reed and Austin about how best to stage their discovery. Firstly, Austin disagrees with his colleague's decision to cut 'some of my favorite first-draft versions of Shakespeare's most famous lines',¹⁰⁵ which includes an elongated version of Polonius's remark that 'brevity is the soul of wit' (*Hamlet*, 2.2.90):

AUSTIN: Or what about Polonius's line, "The important thing about brevity is that the use of it can frequently take the appearance if not the substance of the soul of wit."

REED: There's a reason he rewrote that.¹⁰⁶

This exchange recalls 'A Small Rewrite', a 1989 sketch written by *Blackadder* co-writers Richard Curtis and Ben Elton for an AIDS benefit concert. It features Rowan Atkinson as Shakespeare's sardonic agent and Hugh Laurie as an arrogant, somewhat vacuous version of the playwright. This creates a dynamic which, as Stephen Purcell has argued, recalls their relationship as *Blackadder* and Prince George in *Blackadder The Third* (1987). He describes the sketch's 'first big punchline'¹⁰⁷ as a moment in which the agent, much to his client's displeasure, attempts to trim a particularly famous line from *Hamlet*:

SHAKESPEARE: 'To be a victim of all life's earthly woes, or not to be a coward and take death by his proffer'd hand.'

AGENT: There, now I'm sure we can cut that down.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Martin and Tichenor, p. 25.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Stephen Purcell, *Popular Shakespeare: Simulation and Subversion on the Modern Stage* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 104.

¹⁰⁸ 'A Small Rewrite', dir. Stephen Fry, (BBC, 18 September 1989).

Curtis and Elton, much like the RSC in *Long Lost*, dramatise Shakespeare's editing process, deriving comedy from the audience's knowledge of specific quotations, especially from *Hamlet*, alongside their expectations regarding the playwright's identity. For instance, when Atkinson's agent breaks the speech down to the version which the audience knows to be correct – 'to be or not to be' – Laurie's Shakespeare is aghast and responds by telling him that 'you can't say that! It's gibberish'.¹⁰⁹ Purcell suggests that, in this moment,

the audience's knowledge of Shakespeare is used precisely to subvert his cultural authority: the sketch's depiction of Shakespeare as pretentious and overly verbose and his money-minded agent as the true author of Hamlet's most famous line, undermines shared cultural assumptions in a mischievous and subversive fashion.¹¹⁰

In similar fashion, Reed fulfils the role of pragmatic editor throughout *Long Lost*, while Austin, who also plays Shakespeare later in the play, is cast as a textual purist, who would prefer an unabridged dramatisation of the manuscript. He advocates this without realising that it would be impractical to perform and impossible for the audience to watch, given that, as Reed has already warned him, 'uncut this thing is over a hundred hours long'.¹¹¹ Curtis and Elton's sketch also begins with the agent warning Shakespeare that 'generally, I think we've got a bit of a length problem [...] it's five hours, Bill. On wooden seats. And no toilets this side of the Thames'.¹¹² Both scenes evidently make 'use of the audience's familiarity with [a] line in order to undermine their expectations'¹¹³ and stage a debate between two ideologically opposed individuals with different concerns and priorities. Atkinson's agent later warns Laurie's Shakespeare that they must concern themselves with 'bums on

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Purcell, p. 104.

¹¹¹ Martin and Tichenor, p. 6.

¹¹² Curtis and Elton, 1989.

¹¹³ Purcell, p. 103.

seats'¹¹⁴ and Reed's persona as the RSC's showbiz-savvy member, who focuses on the needs of the many over the few, is cut from this same comedic cloth.

Reed and Austin's final parting shots at each other emphasise the pragmatist/academic divide more clearly than any other moment in *Long Lost*:

AUSTIN:

(As he exits)

Hey, this stuff is interesting to all the Shakespeare scholars here tonight!

REED: Yeah, both of them love it.¹¹⁵

Recalling their argument in Scene 2 over whether the manuscript should be treated as a 'literary responsibility'¹¹⁶ or a 'theatrical opportunity',¹¹⁷ Austin reacts angrily to Reed's decision to cut vast swathes of the text and attempts to persuade him otherwise by showing him 'this one speech'.¹¹⁸ At this point, the company satirise the contrasting approaches to 'reading' Shakespeare and how this can be misinterpreted in practice:

AUSTIN: [...] The best way to appreciate Shakespeare's language, his poetry, is to read it.

REED: Fine.

(AUSTIN opens the manuscript and very deliberately clears his throat. Then he begins to read—silently.)

REED:

(After a long beat)

Whenever you're ready.

AUSTIN: I'm done. Now you read it.

REED: No! This play was created to be performed, not read!¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ Curtis and Elton, 1989.

¹¹⁵ Martin and Tichenor, p. 26.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p. 6.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p. 25.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, pp. 25-6.

This presents a conflict between Reed and Austin about whether the definitive version of Shakespeare's plays is to be found in the text or in performance. The duo's constant verbal skirmishes about whether they should be faithful to Shakespeare's manuscript reinforces the question of authority throughout *Long Lost* and satirises the concept of the performer/academic divide by executing it in a comic fashion.

▪ **Scene 7**

In this scene, the RSC move away from the character mash-ups that have been driving the play's central narrative to expand on a relationship which already exists. Having established the magical game being played by Puck and Ariel, this conceit requires characters who are likely to misbehave and be conducive to the fairies' plans for chaos. Therefore, when Ariel enters to 'place Dromio's gold in Falstaff's hands',¹²⁰ the Fat Knight reacts by running away with this unexpected prize, rather than paying his hostess, Mistress Quickly. The interaction between Falstaff and Quickly appropriates quotations from both parts of *Henry IV*, focusing on the many elaborate insults used by both characters and transforming one of *1 Henry IV*'s most poignant moments into a crude comedic exchange:

QUICKLY / TEDDY: You hath eaten me out of house and home, and put all my substance into that fat belly of yours. But I will have some of it out again, or I will banish you from the Boar's Head!

FALSTAFF / AUSTIN: No, my good lady, banish Caesar, banish Prince Hal, but for sweet Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff—
(Struggling to his knees)

—true Jack Falstaff, banish not him thy lady's company. Banish plump Jack and banish all the world.

*(He belches.)*¹²¹

¹²⁰ Martin and Tichenor, p. 28.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, p. 27.

This recontextualises the culmination of Prince Hal and Falstaff's metatheatrical exchange in *1 Henry IV* 4.2, when the future king rehearses his eventual dismissal of Falstaff at the end of *2 Henry IV*. By replacing Hal's ominous reply 'I do, I will' (*1 Henry IV*, 2.4.174) with a belch, the RSC downplay Shakespeare's tragic foreshadowing and recast Falstaff's plea as a request to his hostess not to be ejected from the tavern, thus significantly reducing the stakes of his utterance.

Staging this conversation exclusively between Falstaff and Quickly, without the other Eastcheap characters, allows for greater focus on this relationship, which is secondary to Falstaff and Hal's interaction in Shakespeare's plays. Tichenor has suggested that this is driven by the same fan-fiction impulses as Shakespeare himself, according to the Garter Feast theory about the composition of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, which speculates that the playwright wrote it hastily at the bequest of Queen Elizabeth I, who wished to see another play featuring the popular Falstaff. Whether or not this theory is correct is immaterial as far as Tichenor and the RSC are concerned; its existence in scholarly and popular consciousness helps to legitimise the decision to augment Falstaff and Quickly's relationship and is itself a satirical comment on the possibility of a fan-driven decision by Shakespeare to expand a popular character.¹²²

▪ Scene 8

This scene delivers a form of fan service to Shakespeare-initiated audiences, moving on from the match-making fantasy of Hamlet and Lady Macbeth's meeting or the expansion of Falstaff and Quickly's interactions, to explore not only how individual characters might behave if the playwright had constructed them differently within the text, but also how performance history has shaped the understanding of their characteristics. What would a production of *R&J*

¹²² This is an idea that has been recently explored in performance during the prologue to Fiona Laird's 2018 production for the Royal Shakespeare Company. An audio clip which plays prior to the play's first scene depicts Elizabeth commissioning Shakespeare to write a Falstaff spin-off within a fortnight.

look like if Juliet were portrayed as less of an innocent? How might Richard III interact with others if Shakespeare had not created him as a Machiavellian-style villain? In this scene, the RSC explore those alternative scenarios.

Dromio re-enters and Puck decides to show him ‘a Verona home girl’,¹²³ conjuring Juliet onstage, then proceeds to infect her with the love juice of a purple flower. The RSC exploit the rhyming nature of Dromio and Romeo’s names for comic effect, and satirise the common misconception that, when Juliet asks, ‘wherefore art thou Romeo’ (2.1.75), she is not lamenting *why* he belongs to her enemy’s household but simply questioning *where* he is:

JULIET / AUSTIN:

[...]

O Dromio, Dromio, wherefore art thou, Dromio?

DROMIO / TEDDY:

[...]

I’m right here...

JULIET / AUSTIN:

No... I mean...

[...] *Why* art thou called Dromio?¹²⁴

One of this scene’s most intriguing revisions is to take Romeo’s desire for ‘satisfaction’ (2.1.168), which is often interpreted in contemporary productions as a sexual advance, and assign these lines and impulses instead to Juliet. The RSC therein reverse Romeo and Juliet’s roles, casting their Juliet as the lustful predator and Dromio as the wary innocent:

DROMIO / TEDDY:

[...]

This is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden—

¹²³ Martin and Tichenor, p. 29

¹²⁴ Martin and Tichenor, p. 30; author’s italics.

JULIET / AUSTIN:

[...]

O wilt thou leave me so unsatisfied?

DROMIO / TEDDY:

What satisfaction canst thou have tonight?

JULIET / AUSTIN:

[...]

Th'exchange of thy love's faithful vow for mine!¹²⁵

Thus, in *Long Lost*, when Juliet undergoes her transformation from a lovelorn ingenue into a headstrong and self-assured woman, manipulated by Puck into falling in love with the first person she sees, the RSC parody Shakespeare's *coup de foudre* construct of the lovers in *R&J* by conflating it with *Dream's* central dramatic device between Bottom and Titania.

Juliet pursues the terrified Dromio offstage and Puck gleefully addresses the audience, appropriating the Chorus's concluding couplet in *R&J*: 'Never was there a story of more woe / Than this of Juliet and her Dromio!'¹²⁶ He realises, however, that to remain competitive in the magical duel, he 'must up [his] game',¹²⁷ consequently resolving to pair the now-friendly Richard III with an irate 'Beatrice of Messina'.¹²⁸ The subsequent argument between these two characters conflates sexually-charged disputes between three eventual couples in Shakespeare's canon: Richard's coffin-side seduction of Lady Anne in *Richard III* 1.2, Benedick and Beatrice's climactic exchange from *Much Ado* 4.1, during which she tells him to 'kill Claudio' (4.1.269), and Petruchio and Katharina's first meeting in *The Taming of the Shrew* 2.1. The extract below features line references for the original speaker in bold italics to clarify and illustrate how the RSC combine three different scenes to produce a synthesis of the warring couple scenario, to which Shakespeare frequently returns:

¹²⁵ Ibid, p. 31.

¹²⁶ Martin and Tichenor, p. 32.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid, p. 33.

RICHARD / AUSTIN:

(Aside)

By this day, she's a fair lady.

I do spy some marks of love in her.

(Benedick, *Much Ado*, 2.3.97)

(To BEATRICE)

Your beauty, it will haunt me in my sleep.

Might I live one hour in your sweet bosom?

(Richard, *Richard III*, 1.2.126)

BEATRICE / TEDDY:

I will not desire that.

(Benedick, *Much Ado*, 4.1.248)

RICHARD / AUSTIN:

That hurts. If you prick me, do I not bleed?

(Shylock, *The Merchant of Venice*, 3.1.20)

BEATRICE / TEDDY:

You talk of pricks?!

RICHARD / AUSTIN:

Yes, but—

BEATRICE / TEDDY:

You wicked man!

RICHARD / AUSTIN:

Is there any way to show you friendship?

(Benedick, *Much Ado*, 4.1.252)

BEATRICE / TEDDY:

Begone, defused infection of a man.

(Lady Anne, *Richard III*, 1.2.78)

RICHARD / AUSTIN:

Come come, you wasp; i'faith, you are too angry.

(Petruccio, *Shrew*, 2.1.207)

BEATRICE / TEDDY:

If I be waspish best beware my sting.

(Katharina, *Shrew*, 2.1.208)

RICHARD / AUSTIN:

My remedy then is to pluck it out.

(Petruccio, *Shrew*, 2.1.209)

BEATRICE / TEDDY:

Ay, if the fool could find it where it lies.

(Katharina, *Shrew*, 2.1.210)

RICHARD / AUSTIN:

Who knows not where a wasp does wear his sting?

In his tail.

(Petruccio, *Shrew*, 2.1.212)

BEATRICE / TEDDY:

In his tongue.

(Katharina, *Shrew*, 2.1.212)

RICHARD / AUSTIN:

Whose tongue?

(Petruccio, *Shrew*, 2.1.212)

BEATRICE / TEDDY:

Yours, if you talk of tails: And so farewell.

(Katharina, *Shrew*, 2.1.213)

RICHARD / AUSTIN:

What, with my tongue in your tail?

(Petruccio, *Shrew*, 2.1.214)

(BEATRICE slaps him.)

RICHARD / AUSTIN:

By my sword, Beatrice, thou lovest me!¹²⁹

(Benedick, *Much Ado*, 4.1.258)

The only line in this extract not taken from *Richard III*, *Much Ado* or *Shrew* is an individualised version of Shylock's 'if you prick us do we not bleed' (*The Merchant of Venice*, 3.1.20), which is here interpreted by Beatrice as innuendo.

¹²⁹ Ibid, pp. 33-4.

The RSC thus recast Shylock's expression of racial subjugation as base comedy and, through the shared imagery of 'pricks', 'stings' and 'wasps', create an associative link from the hybrid exchange between Richard and Beatrice into a line-for-line delivery of Petruchio and Katharina's fiery first encounter. The pragmatism involved in pulling quotations from Shakespeare's canon and reassigning them across new work evokes American playwright Charles Marowitz's approach in his condensed, collage versions of *The Merchant of Venice*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Shrew*, and *Measure for Measure* and the reasons which he gives for this:

The question is not, as is so often put, what is wrong with Shakespeare that we have to meddle with his works, but what is wrong with us that we are content to endure the diminishing returns of conventional dramatic reiteration; that we are prepared to go to the theatre and pretend that what dulls our minds and comforts our world-view is, by dint of such reassurances, culturally uplifting; not to realise that there is nothing so insidious as art that perpetuates the illusion that some kind of eternal truth is enshrined in a time-space continuum called 'a classic'; not to challenge the notion that its theatrical performance is *automatically* an experience because our presumption of a play's established worth guarantees us that experience.¹³⁰

Martin and Tichenor share Marowitz's distaste for 'conventional dramatic reiteration', although in a less formal way and, in the case of *Long Lost*, retain Shakespeare's original text through excavation where possible, but without becoming slaves to the original. Tichenor acknowledges the appeal of integrating Shakespearean tropes and character archetypes when he notes that 'the thing most interesting for me was that Shakespeare uses the same *types* of characters over and over [...] from play to play [...] performing a different function and sometimes that character's in a tragedy and sometimes

¹³⁰ Charles Marowitz, *The Marowitz Shakespeare* (London: Marion Boyars, 1987), p. 25; author's italics.

in a comedy'.¹³¹ This can be applied to the pool of resources which the RSC drew on to create the imagined encounter between Richard and Beatrice, so the company's process of adaptation might best be described as one of bricolage, meaning a 'construction or [...] creation from a diverse range of materials or sources'.¹³² The patchwork concept thus provides a further link back to *Complete Works*, given that it comments on another example of Shakespeare's ability as 'a formula writer',¹³³ and compresses the many conversations between warring lovers into a single scene, much as the Comedies sketch achieved. This scene concludes with a tribute to the RSC's comedy influences and completes the reinvention of Richard, who, in order to woo Beatrice, reasons that 'since I cannot prove a lover / I'm determined to prove—a vaudevillian!'.¹³⁴ He does so by singing 'Sigh No More Ladies' from *Much Ado* 2.3, interspersed with jokes:

RICHARD / AUSTIN:

F

Converting all your sounds of woe

G7

Into—

(He stops singing to tell a joke.)

Hey, I was upset when Beatrice said she didn't love me but I slept like a baby. I puked and cried and wet the bed.¹³⁵

In performance, Austin (playing Richard) performs the song on a ukulele with full stage lighting. During the jokes, delivered in a fast-paced, deadpan style, he suddenly stops playing, the lights go to blackout, and a profile-spot illuminates his face. Tichenor explains that this was intended, not only to provide a comical solution to Richard's wooing difficulties, but also to evoke

¹³¹ Tichenor, 17 April 2016.

¹³² *OED* definition of 'Bricolage'.

¹³³ Borgeson, Long and Singer, p. 37.

¹³⁴ Martin and Tichenor, p. 35.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 35-6; F and G7 denote the chords to be played in performance.

‘an old vaudeville bit. The comic walks onstage in a burlesque house and starts telling jokes under a spotlight’.¹³⁶

▪ **Scenes 9-10**

Richard’s recontextualization as a vaudevillian is complete when Reed returns to the stage in Scene 9 to encourage the audience, compère-style, to applaud him, announcing ‘Richard Duke of Gloucester, everyone’,¹³⁷ the placement of which invitation, immediately following Richard’s musical act, is clearly intended to steer the audience towards this correlation between Shakespearean and vaudeville performance. Reed takes the opportunity, ‘while Austin is changing’,¹³⁸ to skip further ahead to a scene ‘in which Hamlet gives his famous advice to the players. But in this early work, the players are actually characters you may recognize’.¹³⁹ The subsequent scene follows the process of blending two extracts together, established earlier by the imagined encounter between Hamlet and Lady Macbeth, to conjure another conceptual ideological opponent for the Prince of Denmark, this time in the person of ‘Nick Bottom the weaver’.¹⁴⁰

The concept of rivalry is here extended beyond the play’s central relationship between Puck and Ariel to produce a mash-up of Hamlet’s address to the players at the beginning of *Hamlet* 3.2 and the Rude Mechanical’s first rehearsal in *Dream* 1.2. In addition, the role of Flute is reassigned to *Twelfth Night*’s Viola, here disguised as Cesario, which vindicates the joke that the actor wishes not to play the female role of Thisbe because they ‘have a beard coming’ (*Dream* 1.2.39-40). The scene begins by establishing these identities, continues with a parody of Polonius’s discourse on various theatrical genres (*Hamlet* 2.2.379-82), and culminates in an allusion to the RSC’s pass-the-hat origins:

BOTTOM / REED: [...]

¹³⁶ Tichenor, 19 May 2017.

¹³⁷ Martin and Tichenor, p. 37.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 38.

'Tis I, Nick Bottom the weaver, my lord.

VIOLA / TEDDY:

And Viola is—

(BOTTOM smacks him.)

VIOLA / TEDDY:

Cesario is your servant's name, fair prince.

HAMLET / AUSTIN:

Masters, you are all—

BOTTOM / REED:

(Interrupting)

The best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical—

VIOLA / TEDDY: Historical-pastoral, tragical-historical—

BOTTOM / REED: Half-hour sitcom, hour-long drama—

VIOLA / TEDDY: Melodramatical soap operatical—

BOTTOM / REED: Unscripted reality—

BOTH: Or *Athenian Idol*. Thank you.

*(HAMLET and VIOLA bow. BOTTOM holds out his hand for coins.)*¹⁴¹

Tichenor explains that the creative impulse that produced this encounter was 'who it would be interesting to see in a scene together'.¹⁴² He also expresses his belief that 'the advice to the players is a great monologue scene but Hamlet has no opponent. When we match these pairings up we suddenly care about both sides of the scene in a way that maybe we don't in the original'.¹⁴³ Although Hamlet's address in 3.2 is not strictly a monologue, the interruptions which he faces are limited to three lines delivered by a single character, who is listed in some editions of *Hamlet* as 'First Player', but named in the Second Quarto and First Folio as 'Player' and the First Quarto as 'players'. By inserting Bottom into this scenario, Hamlet faces a far more obstinate and vocal

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Austin Tichenor, Personal interview, London, 18 January 2017.

¹⁴³ Tichenor, 21 February 2017.

challenger. Equally, Hamlet represents a more confident and headstrong intellectual opponent for Bottom than Peter Quince in 1.2 and the Prince's naturalistic instructions thus are placed in direct opposition to the weaver's advocacy for melodrama, as shown in this extract, where lines from the two scenes overlap:

BOTTOM / REED: [...] Name what part I am for, and proceed.

HAMLET / AUSTIN: You are set down for Pyramus. A lover that kills himself most gallantly for love.

BOTTOM / REED: That will ask for some tears in the true performing of it.

HAMLET / AUSTIN: Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you—

(BOTTOM interrupts HAMLET, never letting him finish.)

BOTTOM / REED:

(Gesturing to indicate the size of the storms)

If I do it, let the audience look to their eyes. I will move storms!

HAMLET / AUSTIN: Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus—

BOTTOM / REED: Oh, let me play a lion, too! I will roar—

(He roars.)

HAMLET / AUSTIN: Suit the action to the word, the word to the action!¹⁴⁴

This disagreement culminates in Hamlet's conclusion that 'as much as I loathe to appear a jerk, / This play within a play's not gonna work'.¹⁴⁵ In order to understand how this scene functions as a metatheatrical mash-up, it is necessary to unravel the various layers constructed by the RSC, and how each character represents both another in Shakespeare's original scenes and, in this particular instance, the company members themselves:

¹⁴⁴ Martin and Tichenor, p. 39.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 40.

1. Austin as Hamlet, Reed as Bottom, and Teddy as Viola are highly appropriate casting decisions from the perspective of their identities as RSC members within *Long Lost*. Hamlet/Austin stands for the frustrated intellectual attempting to direct a performance and impose his academic opinions on the actors. In contrast, Reed/Bottom is representative of the less traditional, more practical, clownish performance enthusiast. Finally, Teddy/Viola is a cross-dressing innocent, oblivious to the ideological clash between his two colleagues. The disagreement between Reed and Austin over how best to stage the manuscript is thus optimised in this fusion of the two most well-known examples of performance discussion from Shakespeare's canon.
2. In the context of his instructions to the company, Bottom and Viola represent the players from Hamlet's perspective. The difference here is that Bottom speaks back, while the Prince does all the talking in *Hamlet*.
3. Bottom attempts to persuade his colleagues that he is capable of playing every part in their forthcoming performance. Hamlet here stands for Quince, attempting to push the rehearsal forward.
4. Viola is trying to conceal herself at court as a boy. This is the most difficult level to interpret. Bottom is aware of her disguise, preventing her from accidentally revealing her true character at the beginning of the scene and thus can be seen to represent the Sea Captain who appears in *Twelfth Night* 1.2 and offers to help conceal Viola and keep her women's clothes. By extension, Hamlet might be viewed as an Orsino surrogate, as the royal authority figure in the scene who is unaware that the young woman in his presence is attempting to conceal her gender.

This final layer of subtext is explored and resolved when Hamlet and Bottom leave the scene and Puck reintroduces the lovesick Richard III, who is still

pinning after Beatrice. When Richard reveals himself to be ‘Duke of Gloucester’,¹⁴⁶ Viola turns excitedly to the audience and reveals the next link in the RSC’s chain of character combinations:

VIOLA / TEDDY:

A Duke!

(Aside)

I love Dukes.

RICHARD / AUSTIN:

Dost thou know the lady Beatrice?

VIOLA / TEDDY:

I know her not, my lord, but will do my

Best to woo your lady.¹⁴⁷

Richard thus represents Duke Orsino, for Viola, while he instructs her to woo Beatrice in the mode of Olivia in *Twelfth Night*. This shift from Hamlet and Bottom’s interaction into the pairing of Richard and Viola demonstrates how, throughout *Long Lost*, each mash-up runs into the next in intriguing ways. In this scene alone, the audience is transported from Hamlet/Bottom to Bottom/Viola and, finally, to Viola/Richard, with a connecting thread between each combination. The scene ends with an intensification of the magical duel, when Puck and Ariel reappear and each claim that the power of their respective masters is superior:

ARIEL / TEDDY:

[...]

I can do whatever I want, for my

Master Prospero hath power and art

Greater than yours and all others combined.

PUCK / REED:

My master Oberon is the Fairy King:

Greater than anyone or anything.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 41.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

ARIEL / TEDDY:

We'll see who's the greatest magician of all,
 And who will rise up and who'll take the fall.¹⁴⁸

This exchange sets the scene for the first act's climax and the entrance of new magical beings in the next two scenes, also foreshadowing the conclusion of the play, when William Shakespeare is revealed to be 'the most powerful magician of all'.¹⁴⁹ Here, the RSC demonstrate the play's chain of command and how, despite their apparent freedom to engender chaos, Puck and Ariel are still bound by servitude and must ultimately call on their masters to secure magical supremacy. More importantly, this moment raises the stakes of the play, also serving as a further metaphor for the author/adaptor relationship, and suggesting to the audience that a more powerful being than Puck or Ariel will be revealed later in the narrative.

- **Scenes 11-12**

Scene 11 is another brief interjection, in which Austin enters carrying the manuscript and explains to the audience that

[...] another thing I love about Shakespeare's first play is that he gives some of his smaller more crowd-pleasing characters larger more prominent roles. So with that in mind, we take you now to Act Three, Scene Five Hundred and Eleven, which takes place in Scotland.¹⁵⁰

The emphasis here is less on delving into the Witches' deeper motivations for manipulating Macbeth, their backstory, or their relationships with each other than for 'crowd-pleasing' reasons: giving the Witches an expanded role allows the RSC to use them as direct instigators in Puck and Ariel's downfall, rather than as shadowy operators on the fringes of *Macbeth*. They are primarily

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, pp. 43-4.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 99.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 44.

introduced into the narrative to escalate the mischief beyond Puck and Ariel's control by infecting it with a more malevolent form of magic, the motivation of which is that they are displeased that Ariel manipulated Lady Macbeth:

1ST WITCH / TEDDY:

My weird sisters two, who both do appear,
You're prob'ly wond'ring why I called you here

2ND WITCH / REED:

From Scotland is stolen one of ours,

3RD WITCH / AUSTIN:

She was whisked away despite our powers.

1ST WITCH / TEDDY:

We cannot ignore this kind of attack,

ALL THREE:

So Lady Macbeth we have to bring back!¹⁵¹

As with the rivalry between Puck and Ariel, the Witches' determination to be revenged on Ariel for this act of sorcerous sabotage is a matter of personal pride. By introducing additional competitors into the play's magical war, Martin and Tichenor further intensify this strand of the narrative at a crucial moment prior to the first act's climax. Tichenor reveals that, when deciding how to structure *Long Lost*, it was the Witches, rather than the fairies, who were originally intended to be the play's lead characters but that, after discussion with Martin, they agreed that

it was better to start off innocently with Puck and then get a little less innocent when Ariel enters. Suddenly it becomes combative. Then, as things progress, and Lady Macbeth is drawn in, the Witches think they've got a stake in this war and that they're more powerful than Puck and Ariel. Then the two fairies realise that they've got Oberon and Prospero in their pockets and are more

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p. 46.

powerful than the Witches. So, it just kept escalating and felt more theatrically valuable to save the Witches.¹⁵²

Also, by making them more visible than in *Macbeth*, the RSC diminish the Witches' threatening presence, thus rendering them more effective as a vehicle for comedy rather than horror, and giving rise to such smutty word-play as 'I love to be on the Moors / Especially the Moor of Venice',¹⁵³ and other well-known witchcraft references in popular culture:

1ST WITCH / 3RD WITCH:

(Chanting)

Dogs that bark and cats that mew
We'll get Lady Macbeth and Hamlet too
Expecto Patronum and Allakazoo

3RD WITCH / AUSTIN:

We'll get her, my pretties—

1ST WITCH / TEDDY:

And her little dog too!

*(1ST and 3RD WITCH cackle and exit.)*¹⁵⁴

This example combines allusions to popular culture, in quoting both the *Harry Potter* anti-Dementor spell and the Wicked Witch of the West's warning to Dorothy at the conclusion of the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*. In so doing, the RSC endow the Witches with comic appeal, rendering them less mysterious than in *Macbeth*, while simultaneously reminding the audience of the importance of magic in the play. Tichenor further emphasises the significance of magic at *Long Lost's* thematic core, suggesting that it could 'also explain the Authorship Question. Anything we can't explain – such as how an uneducated

¹⁵² Tichenor, 26 April 2018.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 52.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 77.

glover's apprentice and politician's son can create the greatest dramatic poetry – we dismiss as magic or genius'.¹⁵⁵

The use of *Macbeth's* Witches as a malignant force and the notion of magic as a fictional explanation for the playwright's genius reveal a point of connection in contemporary Shakespeare fictions between *Long Lost* and 'The Shakespeare Code' (2007), an episode of the British science fiction television series *Doctor Who*. Emily Saidel explains that the episode's 'title intertextually cites Dan Brown's blockbuster novel *The Da Vinci Code* (2003) suggesting that Shakespeare is going to be recontextualised within a "popular" discourse'.¹⁵⁶ In the episode, the Doctor meets Shakespeare in Elizabethan London when he travels back in time to 1599. In setting and contextualising his life and artistic process in a fictional world where literal magic exists, both the RSC and *Doctor Who* writer, Gareth Edwards, liken Shakespeare's abilities to a form of sorcery. The villains, known as Carrionites, are three aliens from another realm, who resemble the crones of *Long Lost*. Both these representations of *Macbeth's* Witches strongly evoke the Evil Queen in Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (1937), who appears disguised as a hooded old woman with bulging eyes, providing another iconographic connection between Shakespeare and Disney.

¹⁵⁵ This information is quoted from an e-mail sent by Tichenor to Martin on 7 December 2014 with the subject heading 'LOST SHAKESPEARE outline thought'. Tichenor provided me with a copy of the e-mail on 26 April 2018.

¹⁵⁶ Emily Saidel, 'The Fictional Shakespeare in the Twenty-First Century' in *Locating Shakespeare in the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Gabrielle Malcolm and Kelli Marshall (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), p. 119

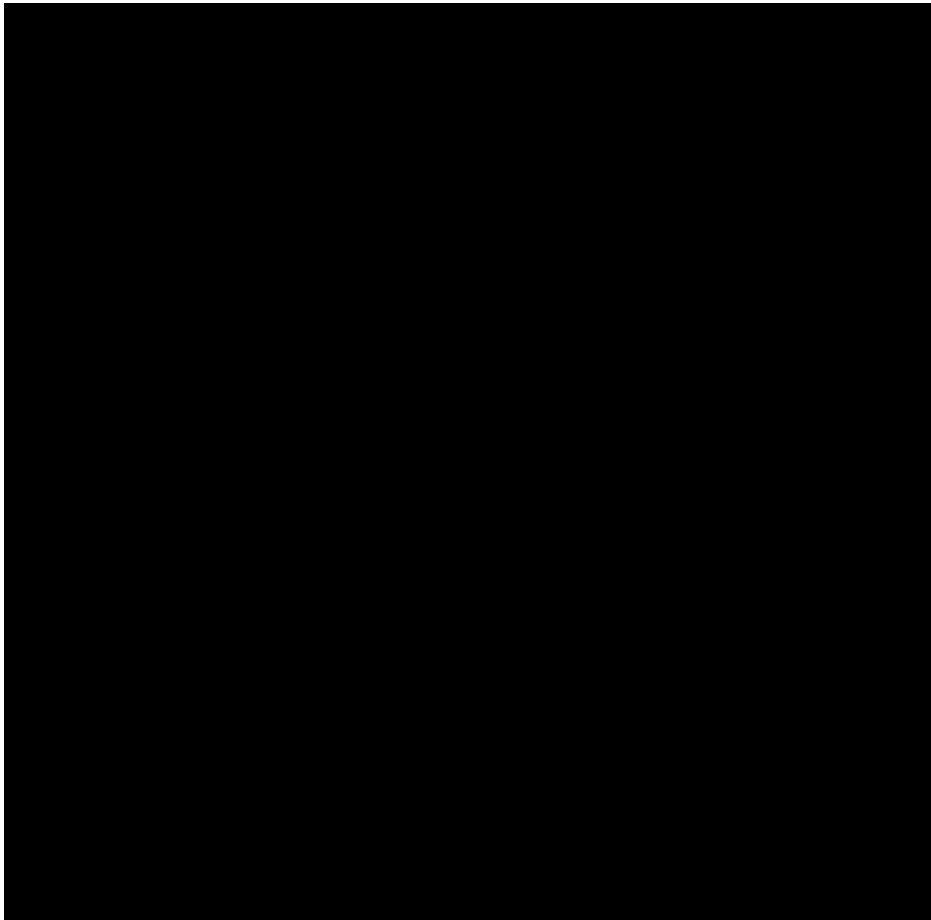


Figure 4.2 [top]: *Snow White's* Evil Queen disguised as a witch. Copyright Walt Disney Corporation; Amanda Lawrence as Doomfinger in 'The Shakespeare Code'. [bottom]: Austin Tichenor, Teddy Spencer and Reed Martin as the Three Witches.

During 'The Shakespeare Code', the Doctor defeats one of the Carrionites by naming her, a process which he describes as 'old magic'.¹⁵⁷ In response to his companion's protestations that 'there's no such thing as magic',¹⁵⁸ the Doctor explains that 'it's a different sort of science. [...] The right numbers, the right equation, can split the atom. Carrionites use words'.¹⁵⁹ At the episode's conclusion, Shakespeare confesses that he does not remember writing the final words of *Love's Labour's Won*, whereupon the Doctor realises that, in order to open a portal from their world into 1599, and thereby wreak havoc upon the human race, the Carrionites have been manipulating Shakespeare as a linguistic puppet:

¹⁵⁷ *Doctor Who*, 'The Shakespeare Code', dir. Charles Palmer (BBC One, 7 April 2007).

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

That's it. They used you. They gave you the final words like a spell, like a code. *Love's Labour's Won*: it's a weapon. The right combination of words, spoken in the right place, with the shape of the Globe as an energy converter. The play's the thing.¹⁶⁰

The Doctor's use of the word 'code' reinforces the episode's central plotline, since the code in question is the lost play, *Love's Labour's Won*, which is here revealed as the key to the villains' potential success. At the beginning of the episode, the playwright announces onstage to an audience who have just watched *Love's Labour's Lost* that he will present them with a sequel the following evening. This is engineered by a disguised Carrionite's use of a voodoo doll modelled on the playwright, which the Doctor later describes as a 'DNA replication module',¹⁶¹ thus combining references to science and magic. The Doctor's companion confesses that she has never heard of the play and he responds by telling her that it is 'the lost play. It doesn't exist. Only in rumours. It's mentioned in lists of his plays but never, ever turns up and no one knows why'.¹⁶²

The premise of a missing work by Shakespeare is clearly central to *Long Lost*, although their focus is on a handwritten manuscript rather than the speculative existence of a specific text. However, the creative impulse towards filling in the blanks of their audiences' understanding of who Shakespeare was, and what the plays convey about their author, bears comparison. Lanier suggests that '[f]ictionalized biography of Shakespeare supplies what the historical record does not or cannot offer (or even actively contradicts), the inner workings of Shakespeare's emotional psychology or intellect'.¹⁶³ 'The Shakespeare Code' and *Long Lost* can, therefore, both be defined as examples of works that use absent information about Shakespeare as a creative opportunity to discuss the playwright's identity as well as his cultural legacy.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Lanier, p. 116.

At the end of this scene, Puck appears and makes a pact with the Witches, delivered in an example of the RSC's melange of Shakespearean language and contemporary US colloquialisms:

PUCK / REED:

Secret, black, and midnight hags, wassup witches?

(The WITCHES scream, startled.)

PUCK / REED:

Have no fear in your hovel so squalid

Relax, I am here to do you a solid.¹⁶⁴

Puck's first line connects Macbeth's greeting to the Witches in *Macbeth* 4.1 to modern slang, replacing the word 'bitches' with 'witches'. The rhyming couplet that follows similarly combines a line which sounds reasonably archaic with a more contemporary sounding phrase, employing the informal American expression 'do you a solid', a phrase denoting a favour or act of kindness. Structurally, this suggests that, by aligning himself with these more menacing allies, Puck reveals himself as the more devious of the two fairies and shifts the balance of power onto himself and away from Ariel.

▪ **Scenes 13-19**

The final seven scenes of Act 1 follow 'a mighty tempest'¹⁶⁵ conjured by Oberon and Prospero, after Ariel tells them about Puck's misdeeds. This is represented as a conflated version of Shakespeare's shipwreck and storm scenes, delivering on the Chorus's promise at the beginning of the play. The company use vaudevillian techniques to take the audience on a tour of these different moments, presenting a melange of Shakespeare and pop culture reference, such as Teddy singing Miranda's line 'Oh brave new world'¹⁶⁶ to the tune of the *Aladdin* (1992) song 'A Whole New World'. Each character from Act 1 is glimpsed aboard this fantasy vessel with their most well-known lines

¹⁶⁴ Martin and Tichenor, p. 48.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 49.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 60.

transformed within this maritime context: Hamlet cries ‘To drown or not drown, that is the question’¹⁶⁷ and Richard splutters ‘A boat! A boat! My kingdom for a boat!’.¹⁶⁸ The sequence also features an example of the RSC’s recontextualisation of a water-related line, used metaphorically by Shakespeare, when Pompey cries at the end of Scene 16 that ‘[t]here is a tide in the affairs of men’,¹⁶⁹ quoting Brutus in *Julius Caesar* 4.3. The RSC’s onstage execution of their tempest culminates in an audience participation sequence, where two volunteers are brought onstage to hold and wave a long, blue cloth to create the impression of a raging storm, from which several characters from Act 1 surface to deliver their lines. The actors then arm the front row of the audience with water pistols, instructing them to fire at the stage, before revealing ‘*larger squirt canons*’¹⁷⁰ and turning these on the audience. Thus, Act 1 ends by involving the audience directly in the creation of a frantic, pantomime tempest.

Act 2

▪ Scene 20

The second act begins by reintroducing Austin as the Chorus, who again appears as a ‘*cloaked hooded figure*’,¹⁷¹ and speaks directly to the audience. He updates them on the fate of the play’s characters after the climactic tempest prior to the interval and explains that ‘[b]oth the evils and the goods / Are thrown together in these self-same woods’.¹⁷² In contrast to the prologue, this speech comprises twelve rhyming couplets, includes fewer quotations and, instead of mimicking a Shakespearean Chorus through references to well-known opening speeches, takes its cue from the poetic structure and metaphorical language of Time, who appears at the beginning of *The Winter’s Tale*’s fourth act. It contains only two lines taken directly from Shakespeare’s

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 56.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 61.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, p. 63.

¹⁷² Ibid, p. 64.

play: 'in the name of Time'¹⁷³ and 'I turn my glass',¹⁷⁴ signalling to audience members familiar with *The Winter's Tale* that Austin's mysterious speaker represents the figure of Time, in addition to his choric role, which has wider significance later in the play, when the character is finally revealed to be Shakespeare.

The reference here to Time's 'glass' also indicates that 'the first half of the play is over and the second can begin'.¹⁷⁵ John Pitcher explains that '[t]he gesture, conventional enough to modern eyes, alerted early audiences to something unusual. In the second "hour" of the play, they would see the social order turned upside down [...] and human reason itself overthrown'.¹⁷⁶ In *The Winter's Tale*, Time's speech foregrounds the tonal and geographical switch from the intense psychological drama of the Sicilian court to the humorous, bawdy and pastoral setting of Bohemia. Directors of the play commonly choose to place the interval between 3.3 and 4.1 for precisely this reason. Austin's Chorus reverses this convention by telling the audience that '[w]hat was silly and slightly mysterious / Now is mortal and mighty serious'.¹⁷⁷ He also warns the audience that, as in *The Winter's Tale*, the established hierarchy of characters is about to be undermined within the shared setting of 'these self-same woods',¹⁷⁸ which describes the transformative forest space used by Shakespeare in *Dream* and *As You Like It*.

CHORUS / AUSTIN:

[...]

Though in the past you once did see them great,
And with such power and direction of late
They were much blessed; now, in a moment, see
How soon this mightiness meets misery.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ John Pitcher, 'Introduction' in *The Winter's Tale*, 3rd edn, ed. John Pitcher (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2010), p. 77.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Martin and Tichenor, p. 64.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

Pitcher lists some of the reversals that take place in the second half of *The Winter's Tale*, including how 'a prince would become a shepherd, a rogue a courtier, a clown a gentleman'.¹⁸⁰ Those that follow in *Long Lost's* second act follow a similar pattern, offering a number of alternative endings for characters, which Shakespeare either denied them, or left unwritten. By framing this Chorus, both linguistically and structurally, as the figure of Time, the RSC indicate that this act will build on the transformations of the first.¹⁸¹

▪ Scene 21

The RSC mirror the structure of the first act by following this introductory soliloquy with a scene in which the company members are reintroduced. In addition to reminders to the audience about the continuing activities of various characters, including Richard III, Falstaff and Dromio, the RSC also introduce a hybrid villain into the mix when Austin informs the audience that '[s]kulking and scheming in the woods is the evil bitter Puritan lieutenant Malvoliago'.¹⁸² a synthesis of *Twelfth Night's* steward and *Othello's* antagonist. Austin repeats this linguistic technique at the end of the scene in a hybrid of the woods from *As You Like It* and *Macbeth*, when he invites them 'deep into the mysterious Forest of Ardenbirnam'.¹⁸³ This scene is noteworthy for the way in which it builds the RSC's marketing campaign directly into their performance in a manner that recalls their Renaissance fair origins, and is a common technique used at festivals such as the Edinburgh Fringe. It is significant that Reed, who is most often portrayed as the business-savvy member of the company, delivers these lines:

¹⁸⁰ Pitcher, pp. 77-8.

¹⁸¹ In their anthology, *The Bard Debunked: An Annotated Bibliography of 19th Century Parodies of Shakespeare* (North Charleston, South Carolina: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015), Claudia Durst Johnson and Henry E. Jacobs describe that, in William Brough's 1856 musical travesty *Perdita; Or, The Royal Milkmaid. Being The Legend Upon Which Shakespeare is Supposed to Have Founded His Winter's Tale*, 'the role of Time is expanded considerably. He is present at Leontes' court, the sheep-shearing, the recognition scene, and the return of Hermione' (p. 62).

¹⁸² *Ibid*, p. 65.

¹⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 66.

REED: [...] We're performing here through (*Closing date*) so if you enjoy the show, please tell all your friends on Facebook. If you don't enjoy the show, please tell all your friends on MySpace.¹⁸⁴

Here, Reed not only capitalises on the opportunity to plug the company's product in traditional salesman style, but also turns the request into a parodic comment on the ever-changing tides of social media, by recommending those who do not appreciate their performance to air their views on a now antiquated networking site.

▪ **Scenes 22-23**

In Scene 22, the RSC explore Puck and Ariel's backstory in more detail, revealing to the audience that room for reconciliation may exist. The scene begins with the fairies blaming each other for the chaos wrought by the tempest and resolving to work together to restore order. This is undercut by the characters' asides to the audience, which demonstrate that they remain determined to triumph in the magical war, while the stage directions note that the scene should end on a '*note of uncertainty*'.¹⁸⁵

PUCK / REED:

(Aside)

I'll out-fairy Ariel.

ARIEL / TEDDY:

(Aside)

I'll out-Puck Puck!

PUCK / REED:

(Aside)

And all will be fixed—

ARIEL / TEDDY:

(Aside)

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 65.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 68.

And all will now heal—

BOTH:

(Aside)

And he/she'll never know how truly I feel.¹⁸⁶

In the following scene, the audience bear witness to this magical competition as the fairies manipulate two pairs of characters. Firstly, Ariel conjures Cleopatra and Bottom onstage, in an interaction where 'the Egypt Queen'¹⁸⁷ stands for *Dream's* fairy queen, Titania. Puck, meanwhile, undermines Ariel by transforming Bottom into 'gentle Eeyore',¹⁸⁸ another Disney allusion which evokes the donkey character from both the *Winnie the Pooh* franchise (1966-present) and the A.A. Milne book series upon which the films are based. He then magically removes Richard III's hump and orders him to '[s]tand tall and be finished! / With one small part gone; thus, have I reckoned, / Richard the Third is now Richard the Second'.¹⁸⁹ Falstaff then reappears onstage and, during a brief conversation, the characters confess their love for each other:

RICHARD / AUSTIN:

For God's sake let us stand upon the stage

And tell glad stories of the love of kings!

For I have been mistaken all this while.

It's men I love—

(ARIEL gestures and FALSTAFF enters, now played by REED.)

RICHARD / AUSTIN:

—like you, Sir John.

FALSTAFF / REED:

Do I love men?

RICHARD / AUSTIN:

You do now! Let us make the beast with two backs—!¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, pp. 67-8.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 69.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 70.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 74.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

Explaining why this exchange was cut during shorter versions of *Long Lost*, Tichenor confesses that it ‘turns on an understanding of *Richard II* which I’m not sure all audiences share. I’m not even sure if it’s an understanding of *Richard II* or an understanding of how he is frequently played’.¹⁹¹ Consequently, the depiction of Richard II as repressed or explicitly homosexual, while to some extent a generalisation, responds to depictions of the character by actors in recent high-profile productions.¹⁹² This is a less prominent example than the hunchback king, the image widely associated with Richard III, despite his remains proving that he suffered from scoliosis, a condition that causes curvature of the spine, but which does not result in a hunchback. Tichenor’s account of the imagined union between Richard and Falstaff demonstrates that the RSC are more interested in exploiting a character’s reception and performance history than in an accurate historical depiction.

▪ **Scenes 24-25**

Scene 24 reintroduces the character of Lear and presents a travestied version of *King Lear* 1.1 when he attempts to divide his kingdom between Goneril, Regan and Cordelia, who are represented here as *Macbeth*’s Three Witches, in keeping with Tichenor’s consideration ‘of all of Shakespeare’s plays being one expanded universe’.¹⁹³ The scene builds on the Witches’ arrival in Scene 12 of *Long Lost*, developing further the play’s exploration of magic throughout Shakespeare’s canon. In a comic moment of recognition that could be considered a form of visual ‘bisociation’,¹⁹⁴ the audience is required simultaneously to recognise the female trios present in *Lear* and *Macbeth*.

¹⁹¹ Tichenor, 30 August 2017.

¹⁹² Examples of this include Ben Whishaw’s performance in Rupert Goold’s 2012 film adaptation for *The Hollow Crown* series and David Tennant’s portrayal in Gregory Doran’s Royal Shakespeare Company production in 2013. Both actors portrayed Richard as effeminate and featured a kiss between the king and Aumerle suggesting, at the very least, that Richard’s sexuality might be considered fluid.

¹⁹³ Tichenor, 18 April 2016.

¹⁹⁴ Arthur Koestler, qtd. In Stephen Purcell, *Popular Shakespeare: Simulation and Subversion on the Modern Stage* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 111.

LEAR: [...] I can still salvage my situation by giving my three daughters another chance to declare their love for me!

(The THREE WITCHES enter, TEDDY again playing both the 1ST and 2ND WITCHES.)

ALL THREE:

Daddy!!¹⁹⁵

In contrast to other sections in *Long Lost*, where passages from different plays are combined, Scene 24 follows the precise structure of Lear's address to his daughters in 1.1. The only significant changes to the Shakespeare's text are to replace Goneril and Cordelia with 'Gonorrhrea'¹⁹⁶ and 'Chlamydia',¹⁹⁷ the names of sexually transmitted diseases, and add 'Ronald'¹⁹⁸ to Regan's name, in reference to the former US President. These lowbrow gags, which play on phonic elements of the sisters' names and evoke a well-known American, are counteracted by an intertextual joke when the Third Witch reveals that her name is 'Sycorax',¹⁹⁹ the name of Caliban's unseen witch mother in *Tempest*. Tichenor explains that the Witches' ambiguity and interchangeability in *Macbeth* allowed the company to explore them as 'the same *types* of character over and over. To make them similar, with one of them doubling as Sycorax, seems very cool. [...] She's performing a different function and sometimes the character is in a tragedy and sometimes a comedy'.²⁰⁰ This demonstrates not only the RSC's approach to reassigning Shakespeare in order to expand or reduce characters and scenes, but also points to the playwright's own ability to repurpose his work, a prime example of which is the melancholic use of the refrain 'the rain it raineth everyday' (*Lear* 3.2.76 / *Twelfth Night* 5.1.379) in both *Lear*, as a hollow act of comedy by the Fool in the tragic court, and *Twelfth Night*, where Feste sings it as a bittersweet coda to the comedy's questionably happy resolution.

¹⁹⁵ Martin and Tichenor, p. 75.

¹⁹⁶ Martin and Tichenor, p. 76.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Tichenor, 17 April 2016.

▪ **Scene 26**

In Scene 26, the company build on their development of Juliet's character, introducing an element into the play derived from slash fiction, a subgenre of fan fiction 'involving usually same-sex romantic relationships between fictional characters or famous people, whether or not the romances actually exist'.²⁰¹ Martin and Tichenor create a scene where *Much Ado's* Beatrice and *Shrew's* Katherine fall in love with each other after giving advice to Juliet on how to stand up to men and be more discerning in her choice of partner:

BEATRICE / TEDDY:

(To KATE)

What Juliet knows about men isn't much.

Methinks the girl could use a woman's touch.

JULIET / AUSTIN:

I see gentlemen are not in your books.

BEATRICE / TEDDY:

No, and if they were I'd burn my study.

KATE / REED:

I am ashamed that women are so simple

To offer peace when they should stand for war.

Or seek submission and throw power away

When they should be bound to make men obey.

BEATRICE / TEDDY:

Don't give thy hand unto a mad-brain ruffian

Who woos in haste and means to wed at leisure.²⁰²

On the page, the central subversion of this scene appears to be in reducing the traditional image of Juliet as Shakespeare's beautiful young heroine, to her satirical reality as a hormonal, sexually immature teenager, waywardly falling in love with any man she meets. In this context, Kate and Beatrice can be

²⁰¹ Definition of 'slash fiction' in *Dictionary.com* <<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/slash-fiction>> [Accessed 24 July 2018].

²⁰² Martin and Tichenor, p. 81.

construed as confidantes or instructors, akin to *R&J*'s Nurse character. However, in performance, Reed and Teddy play it as a love scene between the two older women, which Tichenor explains developed in rehearsal when Spencer (playing Beatrice) delivered the 'burn' line with a sultry glance towards Kate, cutting across Juliet. This is also an instance, he suggests, of *Long Lost*'s greater use of subtext in comparison to previous shows:

I think when we publish the script we're going to have to make that immediate attraction clear in the stage directions, because it's not clear in the text. This is another thing that's different from our previous shows because so much of those made it clear in the text. There was less subtext and more actual text. In *Long Lost*, there's a lot of subtext and sometimes we have to draw it out especially, so the audience sees it.²⁰³

In the 2015 development version of their script for *Long Lost*, the scene contains no such indication of this additional layer beneath the dialogue. However, Spencer's reading of the scene's potential subtext was so significant that, in the 2018 published version, Martin and Tichenor added the following stage directions:

JULIET / AUSTIN:

I am Juliet from Verona—

(BEATRICE shoves JULIET out of the way. She is instantly smitten with KATE.)

BEATRICE / TEDDY:

And I—am Beatrice from Messina.

KATE / REED:

(Also smitten)

They call me Katherine that do talk of me

In Padua [...].²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Tichenor, 17 April 2016.

²⁰⁴ Martin and Tichenor, p. 80.

These instructive additions to the RSC's text help to illustrate the character's motivations for subsequent performers. By making the mutual attraction between Beatrice and Kate explicit on the page, Martin and Tichenor have removed the subtextual quality of this interaction and woven it directly into the fabric of their play, thus determining how future iterations of this scene will be portrayed. The development process behind this scene also involved Tichenor's personal experience of watching amateur companies and schools perform *Complete Works*, noticing a disparity in gender roles within the play. He became 'conscious of the fact that our scripts get done by high schools and other companies that are not just three guys. So, I'm aware of the fact that, when high schools do it, they shouldn't always have to be girls playing guys. Guys can play as girls, girls can play as *girls*'.²⁰⁵ This indicates the significance of *Complete Works* in *Long Lost*'s departure from their traditional formula, and further suggests that, by witnessing the process of adaptation by others using the RSC's first play, despite being 'just three guys', with no female members, Martin and Tichenor were able to create in *Long Lost* a play with greater balance as well as increased capacity for subsequent interpretation.

While the importance of these amateur productions in relation to *Long Lost*'s development is noteworthy, creative collisions, such as Kate and Beatrice's romance, are also founded in the RSC's core principles: the creation of Shakespeare-based doggerel, the debunking of myths about his work, and their fascination with its adaptation, a creative impulse rooted in the Latin derivation of the word: 'to make fit'. For instance, Tichenor, discussing Scene 26, rationalises that 'of course they're going to be attracted to each other and why wouldn't they? They're so specific in their own plays about how much they hate men'.²⁰⁶ Across Shakespeare's comedies, many strong-willed women, such as *As You Like It*'s Rosalind, *Twelfth Night*'s Viola and the two Helenas of *Dream* and *All's Well That Ends Well*, fall in love with men who are either their intellectual inferiors or who reciprocate the affection partially or not at all. Shakespeare himself explores these imbalanced relationships and

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Tichenor, 17 April 2016.

the RSC, through the process of adaptation, adjust this to find balance and equality between two women. Moreover, the scene imagines an alternative scenario in which Shakespeare's heroines woo their female companion, as Rosalind might with Cecilia or Beatrice with Hero, suggesting that this could provide a happier resolution to Shakespeare's comedies, where dysfunctional couples are often brought together in apparent happiness, as illustrated by the love juice-infused union between Helena and Demetrius at the conclusion of *Dream*, the latter of whom remains under Puck's spell. The scene ends with a parody of a Shakespearean insult generator.²⁰⁷

JULIET / AUSTIN:

O thou well-skill'd in curses, stay awhile, And teach me how to
curse all gentlemen!

BEATRICE / TEDDY:

Ah, 'tis most easy. First choose an adjective—

KATE / REED:

Followed by a compound-worded descriptor—

BEATRICE / TEDDY:

And end it with a nasty noun.

(For each insult, they point to members of the audience.)

KATE / REED:

For instance: Thou jarring ill-tempered hypocrite!

BEATRICE / TEDDY:

Or: Thou inexecrable bald-pated fleshmonger!²⁰⁸

This continues until the two women are satisfied that Juliet is able to insult men successfully, after which Beatrice declares that 'I come to marry Kate, not to seize her',²⁰⁹ an inversion of Mark Anthony's speech in *Caesar* 3.2 which puns on the shared phonic elements of 'Caesar' and 'seize her'. The concept of

²⁰⁷ An example of this is insult.dream40.org, which is available online as part of *Midsummer Night's Dreaming* (2013), a collaborative project between the Royal Shakespeare Company and Google+, enabling users to interact with Shakespeare's play online.

²⁰⁸ Martin and Tichenor, p. 82.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 83.

a scene in which Shakespeare's women deliver advice to Juliet is another with a nineteenth-century burlesque precedent: the anonymous play *Place Aux Dames; or, The Ladies Speak At Last*. Johnson and Jacobs describe how Juliet 'spends her time daydreaming of a certain moonlit night several years before. Later in the play, she is visited by Portia, Ophelia, and Lady MacBeth [*sic*], all of whom complain about their marriages. Their common complaint is that Shakespeare is in the neighbourhood again, questioning their friends and preparing to malign them a second time'.²¹⁰ Although the RSC's parody does not permit the women to speak directly to Shakespeare, it similarly features Juliet as the focal point of an alternative narrative for the playwright's female characters, placed together to strengthen their shared complaint of unfair treatment by the male writer.

▪ **Scenes 27-28**

Austin returns to the stage as himself, carrying the manuscripts, and immediately subverts Shakespeare's best-known stage direction by telling the audience that he wishes they 'could see Shakespeare's stage direction here. It actually says "Exit Bear, pursued by Juliet"'.²¹¹ Reed interjects, warning that they do not have time for Austin to deliver details such as first draft stage directions. Both remain dressed in their costumes as Juliet and the Bear throughout this exchange, suggesting that the divide between actor and character is beginning to break down, as the RSC delve deeper into the lost play. The rivalry between Reed and Austin, which drives the metanarrative at the top layer of *Long Lost*, thus reflects and runs parallel to Puck and Ariel's increasing animosity within the narrative of the play.

This section ends with Austin inviting the audience to boo 'that evil bitter Puritan lieutenant—Malvoliago',²¹² an instruction that establishes this composite character as a pantomime villain. As his name and description suggest, he represents *Twelfth Night's* puritan steward, Malvolio, and *Othello's* scheming lieutenant, Iago, to create an intriguing combination. Scene 28

²¹⁰ Johnson and Jacobs, p. 63.

²¹¹ Martin and Tichenor, p. 84.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p. 85.

introduces Malvolio, the script describing him as ‘wearing a long black puritanical robe with a long black wig’.²¹³ Rather than representing any specific iterations of Malvolio or Iago, the character’s appearance is intended to evoke a recognisable depiction of modern villainy: Professor Severus Snape, one of the main antagonists in J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* novels. This is emphasised when the Witches re-enter and, after noticing Malvolio, comment that ‘something Slytherin this way comes’,²¹⁴ replacing the word ‘wicked’ (4.1.62) with the name of Snape’s House at Hogwarts, the fictional school that provides the stories’ main setting.

In a further reversal of Iago’s role in *Othello*, this scene depicts Malvolio as the subject of the Witches’ manipulation, coercing him into killing Ariel and, in return, promising to help him to ‘achieve ultimate power’.²¹⁵ After handing him an ‘ancient pistol’,²¹⁶ in reference to the *Henry V* character, they tell Malvolio that he will be able to identify Ariel because ‘[s]he’ll carry a white handkerchief’.²¹⁷ Thus, the RSC subvert the actions of Shakespeare’s Iago by assigning his evil role to the Witches, with Malvolio representing the duped Othello.

▪ Scene 29-30

These two scenes focus on tying up loose ends for characters from Act 1, prior to the play’s climax. Firstly, Richard II is transformed back into Richard III by Ariel. Viola, still disguised as Cesario, returns to the stage. After revealing herself to be a woman, the two declare their love for each other. As they exit, Puck enters and express his regret ‘for Falstaff and all that’s occurred: / Toyed with, rejected by Richard the Third / It’s my fault he’s in this kind of a scrape’.²¹⁸ He conjures the Fat Knight onstage and concludes that he should be united with *Antony and Cleopatra’s* Pompey, who can provide him with means of escape. However, before he can conjure Pompey, Ariel enters, freezes

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid, p. 86.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid, p. 87.

²¹⁷ Ibid, p. 88.

²¹⁸ Ibid

Falstaff, and tells the audience that '[i]t's not that easy; in fact, it's a curse. / Puck tries to fix things? I'll make it worse'.²¹⁹ He proceeds to torment Falstaff with a series of three royal ghosts named Henry. Tichenor explains that 'there's a consciously Dickensian quality to this section'²²⁰ and, indeed, Falstaff is visited by Henries IV, V and VIII, in a parody of the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future, who appear to Ebenezer Scrooge during *A Christmas Carol* (1843). Thus, the RSC take another canonical author's work and map it onto a Shakespearean scene, giving the audience further layers of intertextuality to unravel.

The scene concludes with Pompey entering to rescue Falstaff, who pays him 'for passage and new wardrobe besides'²²¹ with the gold he obtained during Scene 7. The hat and wig which Pompey gives him transforms his appearance and, after being asked his name, Falstaff replies that '[o]nce I was Sir John now—I'm Captain Jack'.²²² This alludes to Shakespeare's naming of Falstaff as both 'John' and 'Jack' throughout both parts of *Henry IV*, and also creates a further Disney reference, this time to Captain Jack Sparrow, the main character of another prominent franchise: *Pirates of the Caribbean* (2003-17). Although the joke is primarily intended as another audience-pleasing ingredient in the play's referential soup, actor Johnny Depp's popular depiction of Sparrow as a self-serving and treasure-seeking 'loveable rogue' frame him as a modern counterpart to Falstaff, revealing a deeper connection between the character types to which audiences are consistently drawn in both Shakespeare and popular culture.

▪ **Scene 31**

The final scene begins with a brief sequence in which Lady Macbeth is barked at by a dog named Spot, Hamlet asks the Witches whether he will become king, they tell him that '[n]o man of woman born shall harm'²²³ him, whereupon Julius Caesar enters and kills Hamlet, announcing that 'I was from my mother's

²¹⁹ Ibid, p. 91.

²²⁰ Tichenor, 21 February 2017.

²²¹ Martin and Tichenor, p. 93.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid, p. 95.

womb untimely ripp'd. / That's why Caesarean birth is named for me'.²²⁴ The ensuing flirtation between Caesar and Lady Macbeth delivers an example of the RSC's use of burlesque puns on well-known quotations from *Caesar* and *Macbeth*, reducing the scene to a series of sexual innuendos:

CAESAR / TEDDY:

You are my empress and a great beauty.

LADY MACBETH / REED: (*Admiring his backside*)

You've quite a backside—

CAESAR / TEDDY:

Et tu your booty.

(*CAESAR slaps LADY MACBETH on the bottom. As they turn upstage to exit...*)

LADY MACBETH / REED:

Ooh, is this your dagger I see before me?

CAESAR / TEDDY: Hey-o!²²⁵

Caesar's response to Lady Macbeth's 'booty' is a travestied adaptation of his final words to Brutus in in 3.1, transforming the line from a moment of shocked betrayal into a comment on someone's curvaceous appearance. Similarly, the word 'dagger', is here used to suggest not Macbeth's weapon 'of the mind' (2.1.38) but Caesar's erection. The rapid-fire nature of this exchange, blending modern colloquialisms with Shakespeare's language, is representative of how nineteenth-century burlesque 'puns were typically arranged in sequences'.²²⁶ Schoch explains that

extended punning carried a cumulative effect in performance whereby each successive pun was more excruciating than the last. The audience experienced an ecstatic agony as the performance repeatedly carried itself into – and then retreated from – the brink

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid, p. 96.

²²⁶ Schoch, p. 43.

of semantic collapse. The virtuosity of burlesque performers lay in their ability first to intercept a word before it landed on its accustomed meaning and then to redirect it toward an entirely different meaning.²²⁷

This example, and the exchange between Richard III and Beatrice in Scene 8, places *Long Lost* firmly within this performance tradition. The writers move so frequently and fluidly between Shakespearean quotations and contemporary language that the performers must be similarly adept at steering the audience between these dual registers in order to prevent the play from become overwhelming and difficult to follow. Equally, in delivering the groan-inducing ‘ecstatic agony’ outlined by Schoch, the above exchange between Caesar and Lady Macbeth affords the audience a moment of respite from the constant intertextual juggling of deducing whether Shakespearean characters represent themselves, others from the canon, a mash-up, or a modern, pop culture equivalent.

Scene 31 intensifies when the Third Witch reveals to Ariel, in the presence of Puck, that they have been plotting against her. Enraged, she calls on Prospero to ‘[t]each Puck a lesson’,²²⁸ to which Puck responds by calling on Oberon and the Witches to ‘put an end to thee’.²²⁹ In a bid to settle their debate over magical superiority, the fairies cry: ‘Spirits! End this! Once and for all— / Show us the most powerful magician of all’.²³⁰ The cloaked Chorus reappears on stage, removes his hood and reveals himself to be William Shakespeare, dressed in ‘*the familiar ruff, hairpiece, and facial hair we associate with the known portraits of the Man from Stratford*’.²³¹ Amidst the chaos wrought by the two fairies, Shakespeare saves the play ‘as a living / Post-modern and metatheatrical / *Coup d’theatre [sic] deus ex machina*’,²³² rules that his long lost first play ‘must not be staged, or worst of all, read’²³³ and, therefore, ‘[b]ecause

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Martin and Tichenor, p. 99.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Martin and Tichenor, p. 100; author’s italics.

²³³ Ibid, p. 102.

such greatness lies in every scene, / Divide we our play in three times thirteen'.²³⁴ The meaning of this couplet is threefold. Firstly, it references Lear's first speech in *Lear's* opening scene, framing Shakespeare's plays as the 'kingdom' (1.1.36) over which he holds dominion and underscoring the degree of authorial control that his cultural reputation continues to exert on those who practise Shakespearean adaptation. Secondly, the equation 'three times thirteen' multiplies to make thirty-nine plays, a number that includes all thirty-six included in the First Folio of 1623, plus *Pericles*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and *Edward III*. Finally, the construct of Shakespeare as a playwright who recognises his own 'greatness' and therefore splits his works to spread them more widely, reflects the RSC's earlier depiction of the playwright as 'a Super Savvy businessman',²³⁵ who recycled ideas for maximum success.

Long Lost never explicitly identifies the Chorus and Shakespeare as the same character, despite their similar costumes, preferring to retain this ambiguity for their audiences. However, the notion that they are a single being is strengthened through the description of playwright as a *deus ex machina*. By applying this term to their Shakespeare manifestation, the RSC implicitly suggest that he is the omnipresent narrator/God, who has been waiting, metaphysically, both inside and outside of the action to intervene at the crucial point when the plot is in danger of collapsing. This idea of Shakespeare 'saving the day' is reinforced by the description of the moment as a '*coup d'theatre (sic)*', which also serves parodically to underplay his arrival onstage simply as a sudden or unexpected event. The structure of the Chorus appearing at the beginning of both acts to update the audience on past events and foreground the future support this theory. Furthermore, by bestowing on Shakespeare the ability to change the story and split the characters into new, multiple texts, they imbue him with an omnipotence similar to the comic book series *Kill Shakespeare's* representation of the playwright, who wields a magical quill

²³⁴ Ibid, p. 101.

²³⁵ Martin and Tichenor, p. 17.

with the power to alter reality, and is identified by Michelle Ephraim in her article on the series as ‘a God-Bard-Father-Wizard’.²³⁶

A useful repository of recurrent tropes in fan fiction and popular culture is the pop culture wiki site, TV Tropes, which catalogues and continually expands its library of terms, providing numerous instances of plot devices and archetypes across all forms of media. Shakespeare’s role in *Long Lost* is ably summarised by one particular expression, known as ‘Author Powers’, which defines ‘[w]hen a character is an author, or the author is a character, and [...] is shown interacting with the characters in his works [...] he is often shown to have god-like control over the world of his characters’.²³⁷ Listed examples include Luigi Pirandello’s absurdist play *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921), the satirical *Looney Tunes* cartoon ‘Duck Amuck’ (1953) and the film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975), which feature characters who break the fourth wall to interact with the narrator. The two latter examples are prominent influences for Martin and Tichenor, which places their use of Shakespeare within this postmodern tradition. The playwright’s miraculous appearance and convenient ability to tie up loose ends can also be framed as a reference to Tichenor’s fondness for *Fractured Fairy Tales* and their construction of a metatheatrical narrator.

However, this Shakespeare is not an ‘Interactive Narrator’, in the sense that ‘[w]hile this type of narrator exists “off-camera”, the characters of the story are fully aware of his narration and are able to interact with him’.²³⁸ Indeed, the other characters in *Long Lost* are unaware of their creator until he appears in this scene and consequently are unable to reply, or criticise him. His power, therefore, remains unquestioned and undiminished. The play’s construction of Shakespeare as a God-like Bard is underlined by the fact that, in addition to his omnipotence, he is also omniscient, as shown by his declared

²³⁶ Michelle Ephraim, ‘Screwing the Bardbody: *Kill Shakespeare* and North American Popular Culture’ in *The Upstart Crow: A Journal of English Renaissance Studies* (Clemson University, 2016), Journal issue number and page numbers unavailable.

²³⁷ tvtropes.org, ‘Author Powers’
<<https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/AuthorPowers>> [Accessed 25 August 2018].

²³⁸ tvtropes.org, ‘Interactive Narrator’
<<https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/InteractiveNarrator>> [Accessed 25 August 2018].

intention to ‘people not one play but thirty-nine! / Or forty, or forty-one, forty-two: *Loves’s (sic) Labors Won* and *The Lion King*, too’.²³⁹ This not only brings the Disneyshakes correlation to a satisfactory conclusion, by having the playwright himself acknowledge their connection, but also implies that the RSC’s Shakespeare construct has the ability to see into the future and anticipate the breadth of his legacy. Tichenor occupies a unique position as the play’s co-writer and the actor who plays Shakespeare, and reflects that

I’m not sure if the Chorus is playing Shakespeare or if Shakespeare is playing the Chorus. I think it’s more likely the latter, because the Chorus is always the playwright explaining to the audience what they’ve done. For me, writing it was about two things. Firstly, let’s acknowledge that Shakespeare really *is* the Chorus without stating it explicitly. Secondly, what was interesting to me was the idea that Prospero is seen to represent Shakespeare’s farewell to the theatre. When Shakespeare buries his long lost manuscript, that is a very distinct and conscious parallel.²⁴⁰

This connection between Shakespeare and Prospero developed from Tichenor’s e-mail to Martin in December 2014, in which he suggested that, within their conceit of Shakespeare appearing in his own lost play, the playwright decides ‘not to make himself a character but rather just let people assume he’s Prospero’.²⁴¹ The idea was realised in the final part of Shakespeare’s speech, which adapts lines delivered in *Tempest* 5.1:

So this rough magic I here abjure. I’ll
 Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
 And deeper than did ever plummet sound

²³⁹ Martin and Tichenor, p. 101.

²⁴⁰ Tichenor, 30 August 2017.

²⁴¹ This is quoted from the previously mentioned e-mail correspondence between Tichenor and Martin. See footnote 154 for further information.

I'll drown my book in a hole in the ground.²⁴²

The critical idea that Prospero represents Shakespeare's farewell to the stage was born out of *Tempest's* frequent metatheatrical allusions, the play's status as the playwright's final sole-authored work and the parallels which it draws between magic and theatre. In his discussion of 'The Tempest', part of Neil Gaiman's comic book series *The Sandman*, Lanier articulates that '*The Tempest* has long had autobiographical associations, with Shakespeare as the bookish, godlike magus Prospero, and Gaiman fastens on this fact to locate Shakespeare's genius as a fantasy writer in his ability to transform details of ordinary life into mythic form'.²⁴³ Tichenor's explanation and the execution of this concept in the final scene of *Long Lost* thus continues the creative and critical tradition of Shakespeare and Prospero's affinity. His e-mail to Martin concludes by suggesting that their play could be 'about the magic of Shakespeare specifically, and maybe the magic of theatre generally'.²⁴⁴ By framing Shakespeare as Prospero, the company provide a satisfying conclusion to the magic-themed narrative of the play, and the central conflict between Puck and Ariel, settling their war by revealing that 'the greatest magician of all'²⁴⁵ is the playwright himself.

Shakespeare's metatheatrical presence as the Chorus in *Long Lost* has further significant precedents, such as Arthur Murphy's *Life of Hamlet, with Alterations; A Tragedy in Three Acts* (1772). In this 'theatrical satire parodying the ghost scenes of *Hamlet* [...] Shakespeare's Ghost appears to David Garrick complaining of the alterations made to his plays, especially *Hamlet*, in which Garrick had recently performed in a particularly mutilated text'.²⁴⁶ Stanley Wells notes that

²⁴² Martin and Tichenor, p. 102.

²⁴³ Lanier, p. 122.

²⁴⁴ This is quoted from the previously mentioned e-mail correspondence between Tichenor and Martin. See footnote 157 for further information.

²⁴⁵ Martin and Tichenor, p. 44.

²⁴⁶ Stanley Wells, 'Introduction' in *Shakespearean Burlesques, Volume 1* (London: Dolma Press Limited, 1977), p. xii.

Murphy's play is interesting partly because, like many of the later burlesques, it abounds in allusions to the contemporary theatrical scene, and also in its fairly extensive direct parody of lines written by Shakespeare himself. The use of the figure of Shakespeare to comment on the manner in which his plays are presented recurs in a number of nineteenth-century burlesques.²⁴⁷

If measured against these three criteria, *Long Lost* undoubtedly qualifies as a Shakespearean burlesque: throughout their history, the RSC have consistently made topical references to notable Shakespearean actors, productions and colloquialisms, and this most recent play, although more directly narrative in its focus, continues that tradition. Tichenor's explanation of his use of the Shakespeare Pro App to create a collage of direct Shakespearean quotations fulfils the second point referred to by Wells and, finally, the climactic emergence of 'the figure of Shakespeare' roots *Long Lost* in the tradition of the company's nineteenth-century predecessors. Murphy's play is an example of the burlesque reaction to the 'unremittingly bardolatrous'²⁴⁸ examples of the genre in which Shakespeare meets his own creations, outlined by Lanier as 'featuring a parade of characters who praise their creator's insight, morality, or enduring popularity'.²⁴⁹ He cites Naomi Clark William's play *Madman William* (2001) as a twentieth first-century example of this 'postmodern self-reflexivity',²⁵⁰ explaining that it

moves between Shakespeare in 1600 struggling with writer's block and a contemporary pub where various Shakespearian characters have gathered [...] The pub, we learn, is Shakespeare's dreamworld from which he gets the idea from his creations. When Shakespeare temporarily enters his own dream, the characters, in an effort to be released from eternal repetition, plot their author's death.²⁵¹

²⁴⁷ Ibid, p. xiii.

²⁴⁸ Lanier, p. 129.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 130.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

Lanier's example resonates with *Kill Shakespeare's* concept of a shared Shakespearean universe in which Richard III and Lady Macbeth conspire to free themselves from 'the tyranny of William Shakespeare'.²⁵² Mark Fortier defines *Kill Shakespeare* as 'an intermedial mash-up – piling characters from a number of plays into one new work',²⁵³ stating that its authors 'claim inspiration from such things as *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*',²⁵⁴ a graphic novel series that combines characters from well-known works of Victorian fiction. His definition might equally be applied to *Long Lost*, which further bears resemblance to the graphic novel's first two volumes, since both narratives culminate in Shakespeare's appearance within a world of his own creation. Clearly, Martin and Tichenor's concept is more comedic and ends with his characters exalting their creator rather than being on a quest either to save or to kill him, which is the key point of differentiation between the two opposing sides in *Kill Shakespeare*. Nonetheless, Martin recognises the connection, admitting that 'I definitely read *Kill Shakespeare* and you could say that *Long Lost* is the comic equivalent',²⁵⁵ here using the word 'comic' to describe the tone of their production, rather than as a genre categorisation.

Does Puck and Ariel's exaltation of the 'Immortal Bard'²⁵⁶ therefore cast *Long Lost* as a reverent tribute rather than an irreverent satire, more akin to the 'bardolatrous' acts of celebration mentioned by Lanier than to the backlash of burlesques that followed? The divide is complicated by the fact that, even when Puck and Ariel are openly deferential towards their creator, Martin and Tichenor represent this through pop culture references. For instance, after Shakespeare reveals himself, Puck and Ariel, quoting from the slacker comedy film *Wayne's World* (1992), drop to their knees and cry '[w]e're not worthy, we're not worthy'.²⁵⁷ Consequently, by using a well-known quotation from

²⁵² Conor McCreery, Anthony Del Col and Andy Belanger, *Kill Shakespeare, Vol. 1: A Sea of Troubles* (IDW Publishing, July 2014).

²⁵³ Mark Fortier, 'Beyond Shakespeare' in *OuterSpeares: Shakespeare, Intermedia, and the Limits of Adaptation*, ed. Daniel Fischlin (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2014) p. 381.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 381-2.

²⁵⁵ Martin, 24 May 2018.

²⁵⁶ Martin and Tichenor, p. 102.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

popular culture with which some of their audiences are likely to be familiar, Martin and Tichenor inject postmodern irony into Puck and Ariel's declaration of Shakespeare's greatness, and their corresponding inferiority, while retaining their deference to Shakespeare and his craft. The scene can be interpreted as a variation on a creative impulse that is unlikely to dissipate while artists remain interested in Shakespeare as a symbol of authorship, and seek to question how the playwright might respond to, or be inspired by, his own characters.²⁵⁸

An example of fictional inspiration is the BBC sitcom *Upstart Crow* (2016-), in which writer and creator Ben Elton imagines that Shakespeare was stimulated by specific experiences and encounters with people in his everyday life. Each episode follows the structure of a single Shakespeare text, with the episode's title usually referencing which particular plot is being followed. For instance, in the episode 'What Bloody Man Is That?', Shakespeare and his companions encounter three women on a heath during their journey back from London, who prophecies that he will be 'Owner of New Place hereafter',²⁵⁹ alluding to the second largest house in Stratford-upon-Avon. He and his wife then become involved in a plot to murder Duncan MacBuff, the Scottish owner of New Place, representing the roles of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.

Although the episode performs a number of comic deviations away from *Macbeth*, the basic structure of Shakespeare's play remains intact. Lanier delineates how '[t]he author's relationship with his own creations is the focus of an entire sub-genre, tales in which Shakespeare meets his own characters'²⁶⁰ and the way in which Elton relocates Shakespeare's encounters onto specific plays, which he would later write, undoubtedly shares in this creative impulse towards the satirical demystification of Shakespeare's

²⁵⁸ A recent theatrical example is the Edinburgh Fringe production *Shakespeare Syndrome* (2016), performed by Mermaids Theatre from the University of St. Andrews, which imagines a scenario where Shakespeare (renamed Dr. Bard) meets and psychoanalyses several of his most complex characters. By recasting Shakespeare as a marriage councillor to the unhappy Macbeths and confidante to a homicidal Richard III, the company produced a Shakespearean parody of Professor Anthony Clare's Radio 4 Series *In The Psychiatrist's Chair* (1982-2000).

²⁵⁹ *Upstart Crow*, 'What Bloody Man Is That?', dir. Matt Lipsey (BBC Two, 6 June 2016).

²⁶⁰ Lanier, p. 129.

authorship.²⁶¹ These collisions between Shakespeare's life and his plays represent a form of figurative self-cannibalisation, where the playwright is shown to be influenced by plots of whose existence the audience are already aware, which, paradoxically, advances the biographical myth that Shakespeare's personal experiences actively inspired his plays.

Andrew Halliday's *Romeo and Juliet Travestie; or the Cup of Cold Poison* (1856) is another burlesque which delivers a specific precedent for Shakespeare's metatheatrical appearance in *Long Lost*. Schoch describes how 'the poet's sudden appearance in the guise of an animated version of the statue in Westminster Abbey sculpted by Louis-François Roubilliac – allows the burlesque to speak directly to the Bard himself'.²⁶² Shakespeare's admission that 'I wrote myself into a corner, so / I wrote myself into the play to get / Myself out of it'²⁶³ recalls how Halliday's 'Nurse astutely notes that the burlesque which has angered the playwright is itself of Shakespearean provenance. "You wrote burlesques yourself, and well you know it", she remonstrates with considerable justification'.²⁶⁴ Schoch is here referring to the reality, missed by those scholars who are quick to dismiss the topicality or suitability of burlesques for rigorous academic study, that 'in surveying the early modern uses of dramatic satire, we might first cite Shakespeare's own plays which feature varying degrees of parody',²⁶⁵ ranging from Hamlet's advice to the Players to *Dream's* Pyramus and Thisbe, in which 'Shakespeare ridicules traditions not of literature, but of performance'.²⁶⁶

Johnson and Jacobs explain that, prior to Shakespeare's appearance in the final scene of Halliday's burlesque, 'Queen Mab appears as a *deus ex machina* and revives all the dead characters, who immediately form the typical half-circle of the minstrel stage and begin to sing the finale'.²⁶⁷ In *Long Lost*,

²⁶¹ Elton extends this concept to an imagined encounter between Shakespeare and one of his characters in the 2018 episode 'Lord, What Fools These Mortals Be!', which is the first episode of *Upstart Crow's* third season. The episode, which takes *Dream* as its source material, depicts Shakespeare (David Mitchell) meeting a confidence trickster named Puck (Ken Nwosu) in a forest who proceeds to sell him a love potion.

²⁶² Schoch, p. 58.

²⁶³ Martin, p. 111.

²⁶⁴ Schoch, pp. 58-9.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ Johnson and Jacobs, p. 57.

Martin and Tichenor alter this sequence of events, introducing a sudden reversal of death directly after Shakespeare leaves the stage.

(With a regal wave, SHAKESPEARE exits.)

ARIEL / TEDDY:

Immortal Bard! He has set things aright,
All seems a dream on this midsummer night!

PUCK / REED:

'Tis true, he's saved both Puck and Ariel!

(Taking out the handkerchief and waving it)

So let's finally say, all's well that ends well!

(BANG! A shot rings out. MALVOLIAGO has entered and shot PUCK, who falls to the floor—dead. MALVOLIAGO exits as ARIEL rushes to PUCK.)

ARIEL / TEDDY:

Malvoliago!

(Cradling the dead PUCK—played very seriously).²⁶⁸

This abrupt change in mood is designed to disrupt the audience's sense of calm and Ariel's monologue, which follows Puck's death, presents a moment of unexpected gravitas parallel to the one produced by Adam's delivery of Hamlet's 'piece of work' speech in *Complete Works*, whose final stage direction suggests that the speech is intended to represent a significant shift in tone. Schoch identifies this as an instance where the RSC 'convulse us with laughter and [...] hush us with drama. They keep us suspended midway between the ludicrous and the poignant'.²⁶⁹

The following passage is the only monologue to be delivered by a sole character, other than Chorus/Shakespeare, in *Long Lost*. It begins by contrasting two tonally disparate death speeches: Flute's address as Thisbe to

²⁶⁸ Martin and Tichenor, pp. 102-3.

²⁶⁹ Richard Schoch, 'Reduced Shakespeare Company and the golden age of Shakespeare parodies' in *Shakespeare and Beyond* <<http://shakespeareandbeyond.folger.edu/2016/04/19/reduced-shakespeare-company-golden-age-shakespeare-parodies/>> [Accessed 7 May 2016].

Bottom's Pyramus in *Dream's* play-within-a-play and Lear's lament for Cordelia:

ARIEL / TEDDY:

[...] Sleep, my love? Dead, my dove?
 I know when one is dead, and when one lives;
 He is dead as earth. He's gone forever!
 The breaking of so great a thing should
 Make a greater crack. O, I would not wish
 Any companion in the world but you.
 Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life
 And thou no breath at all? No, not in death,
 The undiscovered country [...].²⁷⁰

The speech quotes five different Shakespeare characters, moving from Flute and Lear to Octavius Caesar and Miranda and, finally, Hamlet. Martin and Tichenor choose to conflate two very different lines at the beginning of the speech, which suggests that the theme of grief in Shakespeare's canon remains consistent, regardless of whether it appears in *Dream's* fictional play-acting or during *Lear's* unforgiving conclusion. Pyramus and Cordelia's deaths operate at opposite ends of the Shakespeare tonal spectrum, the one designed to elicit laughter due to Bottom's ludicrously inauthentic performance, while the other depicts the tragedy of an old man cradling his dead daughter, which precipitates his own demise shortly afterwards. By conflating these two images into a single speech, the RSC not only deliver an apt summary of *Long Lost's* fictional status as a uncategorisable first draft to a series of plays that would be split into various genres, but also promote their belief, as a comic troupe, that comedy should be able to deliver moving depictions of grief. The importance of the actor's delivery of Ariel's monologue is such that it is the only extract from *Long Lost* for which Martin and Tichenor give specific direction in their foreword to the published edition.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 103.

[...] Ariel should absolutely believe Puck is dead at the end. You want your audience to believe that the play might actually end this way so don't disrespect them and cheapen their experience. [...] You'll be surprised at how genuinely moved the audience is if you play it with the sincerity and focus you'd play an actual Shakespearean tragedy – we certainly were. Remember that each of the three main characters has wildly different feelings about how this long lost script should be performed, and that if left alone they'd create three wildly different productions. Enjoy that tension and revel in the comedy that conflict can create.²⁷¹

These notes suggest that the actor should play the death scene straight and without a trace of irony, in order to convince the audience that a play which is openly farcical throughout, might be capable of pulling off such an audacious final twist. It also underlines the continued importance of the RSC's trio format to *Long Lost*, and that any company planning to stage the play should take into account these different identities and motivations. This contradicts Martin and Tichenor's suggestion that *Long Lost* could be performed by other amateur and professional companies with any number of performers, given that the concept of a warring trio is clearly central to achieving the 'tension' outlined in the above instructions.

The writers' belief that to play the speech for laughs would be to disrespect the audience is especially significant given the metatheatrical method used to revive Puck. The heartbroken Ariel enlists their assistance, asking them, to 'help me release him from his bands / With the help of your good hands! / [...] Clap, don't let Puck die! Clap'.²⁷² These lines blends Shakespeare and Disney for a final time. Ariel begins by quoting Prospero's epilogue, which can be doubly interpreted as a metatheatrical plea by the character, Prospero, for the audience's forgiveness, and by the actor playing Prospero, for their applause:

²⁷¹ Martin and Tichenor, p. xii.

²⁷² Ibid, pp 103-4.

PROSPERO

Now my charms are all o'erthrown,
 And what strength I have's mine own,
 Which is most faint. Now 'tis true,
 I must be here confin'd by you,
 Or sent to Naples. Let me not,
 Since I have my dukedom got,
 And pardon'd the deceiver, dwell
 In this bare island by your spell,
 But release me from my bands
 With the help of your good hands. (*Tempest*, Epilogue, 1-10).

In *Long Lost*, the RSC use the audience's claps as a dramatic device designed to resurrect one of the play's protagonists. This is the point at which Ariel finally puts her Disney credentials to practical use: the process of applause as an act of revival references J.M. Barrie's 1904 play *Peter Pan* and, by extension, the 1953 Disney film adaptation of the same name. Consequently, the RSC integrate audience participation into the play as a plot device and, by doing so, promote their idea that Shakespeare may have been doing the same with Prospero's epilogue. Puck is subsequently resurrected, the two fairies kiss, and he ends the play with a version of *Dream's* epilogue, which also serves as an ode to the RSC's professed belief that 'Shakespeare's plays are ever young'.²⁷³ Martin reveals that the decision to include the notes on Ariel's speech were partially motivated by the fact that

there can be a tendency for non-RSC productions to try to make every moment into a laugh – to try and gild the lily, so to speak. By adding in lesser laughs in the build-up to what is designed to be a big laugh, you can hurt the ultimate payoff laugh at the end. We try to be careful not to make jokes on the set up to big punch lines.

²⁷³ Ibid, p. 105.

When we perform the shows, we try to perform serious moments seriously – such as the “What a piece of work” speech in *Complete Works* and the Puck/Ariel death scene in *Long Lost*. The audience is surprisingly moved by these sincere moments in the midst of the comedy.²⁷⁴

The joke in discussion here is Ariel’s allusion to *Peter Pan* and the point at which, as in a traditional pantomime, the audience will be enlisted as participants in the narrative. Their involvement contains an enhanced level of significance due to its status as an act of theatrical resurrection and, according to Martin, this will be reduced if the actor playing Ariel chooses to focus chiefly on the comedic potential of the Disneyfied *Peter Pan* reference, thus risking failure in convincing the audience that their act of applause contains magical powers. By connecting this event to the ‘piece of work’ speech, Martin demonstrates both his and Tichenor’s impulse, like the RSC’s founders, to undercut their comedy with jolts of solemnity that not only strengthen the humour when they reappear, but also to give the actors the opportunity to exhibit their full range. This is a key point of connection between *Complete Works* and *Long Lost* and demonstrates how the RSC’s work represents a continuation of the nineteenth-century burlesque tradition in which performers were required to display their virtuosity.

Conclusion: ‘Shall we their fond pageant see?’

Long Lost might be described as fan-fiction Fakespeare: an invented bricolage of diverse Shakespearean characters united to present the idea that the playwright created every single role in an enormous first draft, before realising that these characters would be more effective if split and spread across a number of plays. The company announce it as ‘fake’ in the play’s first scene but it is also important to understand that *Long Lost* is a pretend forgery; the audience are invited to acknowledge the FSL’s rejection of it and its status as a

²⁷⁴ Reed Martin, Personal interview, E-mail, 24 August 2018.

'fantasy'.²⁷⁵ The theatrical experience, therefore, lies not in believing that what the RSC present could be plausible, but, rather, in the pleasure to be derived from the cavalcade of characters who pour forth onto the stage: Hamlet, Lady Macbeth, Richard III, Juliet, Falstaff, Puck, Ariel et al, together at last. This makes it, Tichenor has suggested, 'a show written for the fans, by the fans'²⁷⁶ and *Long Lost's* character and plot variants undoubtedly provide a type of Shakespearean fan service for its audiences.

Lanier considers that '[o]ne of the more curious Shakespop phenomena of recent years has been the appearance of Shakespeare fan fiction'²⁷⁷ and, since the 2002 publication of *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture*, the genre has further expanded due to the relative affordability, accessibility and audience reach provided by editing software and online platforms such as YouTube and Facebook. He suggests that, '[I]ike all fan fiction, Shakespeare fan fiction reveals tensions between iconoclasm and fidelity to Shakespeare. It recognizes certain formal and ideological limits of its Shakespearian source [...] and seeks to push against those limits, in the spirit of critique, anarchy, pleasure, recuperation, participation'.²⁷⁸ In *Complete Works*, the RSC satirised their source material by directly questioning Shakespeare's reputation as a literary genius, bringing the playwright closer to themselves and their audiences by acknowledging his own processes of literary recycling. Whilst that work originated in the recreation of Elizabethan culture and performance at Renaissance faires, the celebratory spirit and context of *Long Lost* is more explicit and positions it closer to a direct Shakespearean homage.

Long Lost premiered during the '400th deathiversary'²⁷⁹ year and can be placed on a continuum of Shakespeare celebrations dating back to the Shakespeare Jubilee of 1769, organised by the actor and playwright David Garrick. That event was due to feature a *Shakespeare Pageant* on the event's third day, which would involve characters from various Shakespeare plays

²⁷⁵ Tichenor, 30 August 2017.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Lanier, p. 82.

²⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 85.

²⁷⁹ Tichenor, 30 August 2017.

processing through the streets of Stratford-upon-Avon. However, due to heavy rain and flooding, this was abandoned, and Garrick later staged the pageant as *The Jubilee* at the Drury Lane Theatre on 14th October 1769, where it ran successfully for ninety performances. In his biography, *The Life of David Garrick, Esq.* (1801), Arthur Murphy describes the pageant's theatrical transfer and some of its content, depicting an event which not only helped inaugurate Bardolatry and Shakespearean celebrations but also prefigures the RSC's twenty-first century style of fan-fiction polymorphism:

The Stratford Jubilee was, in October, transferred to Drury-Lane. In order to give it a dramatic form, Garrick invented a comic fable, in which the inferior people of Stratford and the visitors were exhibited with great pleasantry. As it was never published, an exact account is not to be expected. [...] The dialogue throughout was carried on in a vein of humour. The songs that had been heard at Stratford were, occasionally, intermixed; and the whole concluded with a grand procession, in which Shakespeare's plays were exhibited in succession, with a banner displayed before each of them, and a scene painted on the canvas to mark the play intended. A train of performers, dressed in character, followed the colours, all in dumb show acting their respective parts. [...] During the run of the piece, Garrick, on several intermediate nights, ascended a pulpit raised on the stage, and there spoke his Ode to the Memory of Shakespeare in a style of graceful eloquence.²⁸⁰

²⁸⁰ Arthur Murphy, *The Life of David Garrick, Esq.* (Dublin: Brett Smith, 1801), pp. 298-9.

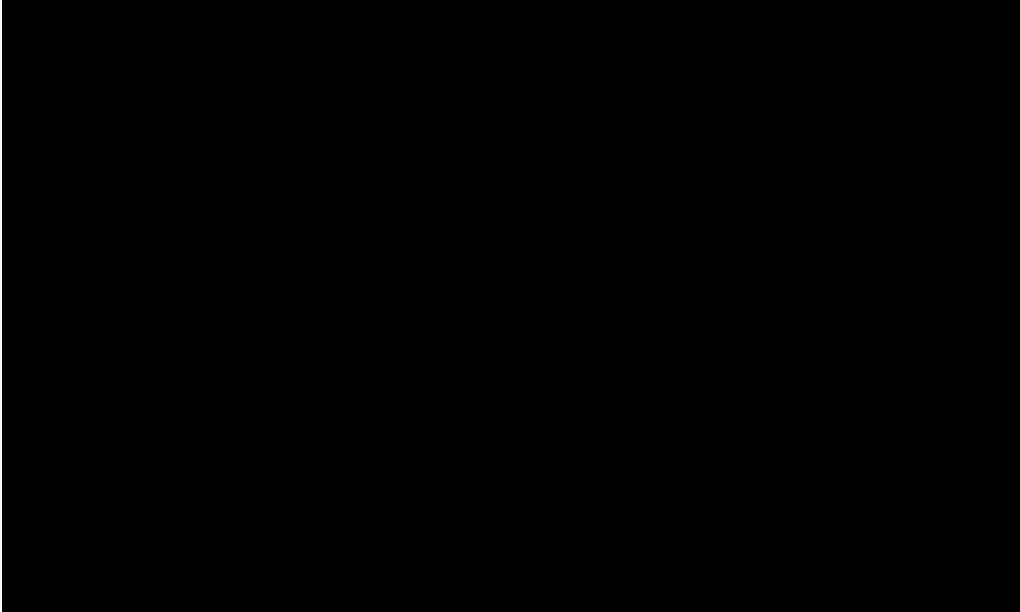


Figure 4.3 *The Procession at the Jubilee at Stratford upon Avon* (London, 1796). The illustrations on this engraving, which are described by Library of Congress records as ‘a satirical representation of the procession’.

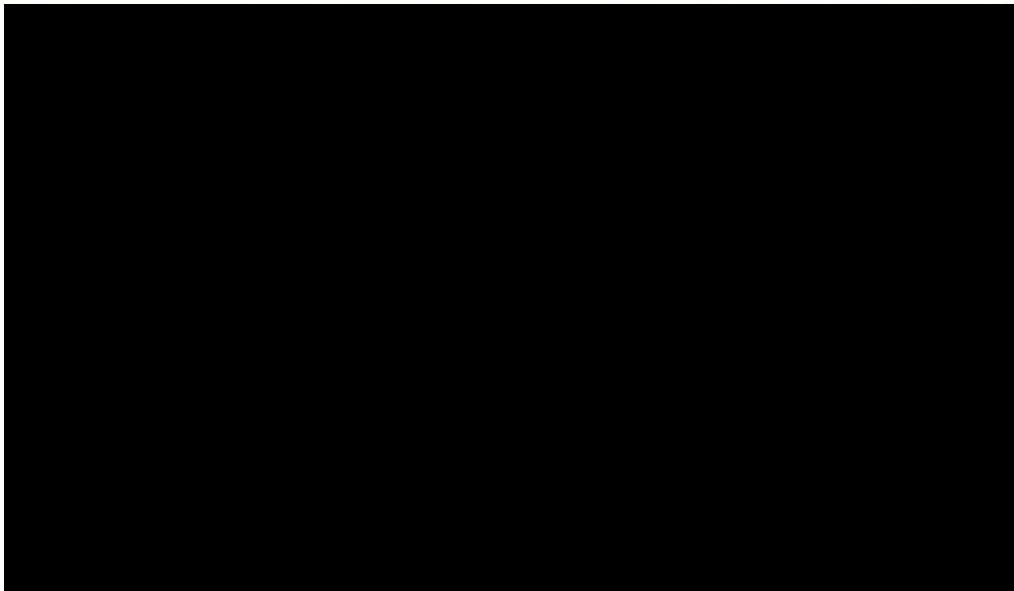


Figure 4.4 *Continuation of the Procession of Shakespeare’s Characters* (London, 1796). The illustrations on this engraving also feature Shakespeare characters accompanied by a quotation.

Murphy's description of the event describes an equivalence of the mix of humour and song which the RSC display throughout *Long Lost* and, significantly, of the 'train of performers, dressed in character [...] in dumb show' which the company's three actors encapsulate in their reduced format by playing forty-seven characters and making rapid costume changes between each scene. These are often audible and sometimes visible, such as when Austin appears onstage, out of character, to discuss alternative stage directions with the audience, but remains in costume, still wearing the dress and wig of his previous scene as Juliet. Notably, too, Garrick appears to have invented his fable to embrace all strata of society without the highbrow and lowbrow divisions that later emerged in relation to the playwright.

Furthermore, in *Long Lost* the RSC's staging of a series of character collisions can be viewed as analogous to a number of similar, reduced parades. Equally, the play might also be regarded as a 'comic fable' due to its thematic focus on magic and, notably, fairies who use their powers to animate and manipulate people, as Puck and Ariel achieve in *Dream* and *Tempest*, respectively. Moreover, the RSC spend a significant amount of time in *Long Lost* connecting Shakespeare's narratives and characters to their Disney equivalents, which are, themselves, drawn from myths and fables. The final point of comparison lies between Garrick's ascension, notably, to a pulpit, to recite his celebratory Ode, and the metatheatrical appearance of Shakespeare himself at the conclusion of *Long Lost*. In each of their final passages, the reverential tone and unalloyed commitment to Shakespeare's timeless qualities are especially explicit, the first spoken by the Chorus in Garrick's Ode and the second by Shakespeare to Puck and Ariel:

CHORUS

We will, — his brows with laurel bind,
 Who charms to virtue human kind:
 Raise the pile, the statue raise,
 Sing immortal *Shakespeare's* praise!
 The song will cease, the stone decay,

But his Name,
 And undiminish'd fame,
 Shall never, never pass away.²⁸¹

SHAKESPEARE / AUSTIN

As no magic's mightier than my pen,
 Your tales will be told again and again
 And thy legacy live, outlasting death.
 You'll survive longer than all who draw breath.
 The greatest gift I can bestow on thee:
 You—in fact we *all*—shall immortal be.²⁸²

Despite their historical, geographical and cultural disparity, the former written in the eighteenth-century by an Englishman and the latter in the twenty-first century by two Americans, the passages have striking similarities. Each delivers a meditation on mortality, emphasising the ephemeral nature of physical life with images of 'death' and 'decay' and, by contrast, Shakespeare's ability to transcend it, through his 'pen' and 'fame'. Both celebrate Shakespeare's work and legacy, while simultaneously focusing on the importance of the man himself and affirming the speakers' belief in his timelessness, and feature repetition, on 'never, never' and 'again and again', to emphasise Shakespeare's immortality.

Garrick addresses Shakespeare from a pulpit, inherently drawing attention to his own status and kinship with the playwright, whereas the RSC take this a stage further, by having Shakespeare address his own characters, acknowledging that he has ensured both their, and his own, immortality. Although *The Jubilee* and *Long Lost* are evidently not precise equivalents, Martin and Tichenor's desire to produce a show that would commemorate both the playwright's anniversary and their own, and which would make

²⁸¹ David Garrick, *An ode upon dedicating a building, and erecting a statue, to Shakespeare, at Stratford upon Avon*. By D.G (London, 1769).

²⁸² Martin and Tichenor, p. 102.

reference to every Shakespeare text, either through the appearance of a character or textual citation, is rooted in the same celebratory impulses described in Murphy's account of Garrick's play. Furthermore, *Long Lost* shares some of the Ode's specific components. Garrick appropriates the Prologue's opening lines from *Henry V* within the context of celebration when he repurposes it in order to lament his own inability to capture Shakespeare's peerlessness:

O from his muse of fire
 Could but one spark be caught,
 Then might these humble strains aspire,
 To tell the wonders he has wrought.²⁸³

At the start of *Long Lost*, Austin, performing as the Chorus, quotes these same lines, followed by a potpourri of relatively well-known citations to introduce the audience to the play's celebration of Shakespeare. Garrick also refers to Shakespeare as 'our *Magician*, more inspir'd, / By charms, and spells'.²⁸⁴ During the conclusion of *Long Lost*, Puck and Ariel's desire to see 'the most powerful magician of all'²⁸⁵ results in Shakespeare's appearance onstage. This, coupled with his references to Prospero's promise at the end of *Tempest* to 'drown my book in a hole in the ground',²⁸⁶ actualises the idea that Shakespeare is the magician to whom they refer.

Michael Dobson has suggested that 'Garrick's festival carries with it the pre-history of the national cult it initiates',²⁸⁷ describing how

[t]he Grand Procession of Shakespeare's Characters [...] is visibly indebted to at least one of the adaptors [...] the tableau

²⁸³ Garrick, An ode upon dedicating a building, and erecting a statue, to Shakespeare, at Stratford upon Avon. By D.G.

²⁸⁴ Garrick, An ode upon dedicating a building, and erecting a statue, to Shakespeare, at Stratford upon Avon. By D.G.; author's italics.

²⁸⁵ Martin and Tichenor, p. 112.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

²⁸⁷ Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation and Authorship, 1660-1769* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 223.

representing *King Lear* depicts 'Edgar in the mad dress with a staff, King Lear, Kent, Cordelia', all together amidst 'Thunder and Lightning' (Garrick, *Plays*, ii. 120), a grouping only possible in the terms of Nahum Tate's version of the play, which was still in use.²⁸⁸

Dobson here refers to Tate's 1681 adaptation *The History of King Lear*, which was more often performed than Shakespeare's version until 1838. The most well-known and significant change made by Tate to a tragedy, in which the majority of Shakespeare's characters die, is to give it a happy ending: Lear gets his throne back, Edgar and Cordelia wed, and they all live happily ever after. By including a revision which is unfaithful to its Shakespearean source, Garrick's procession, therefore, references the only version of the play with which his audiences would have been familiar.

Perhaps unsurprisingly for a company who refer to adaptations alongside the original plays throughout *Complete Works* and *Radio Show*, the RSC use a number of images drawn from different versions of Shakespeare's plays in order to inform their imagery in *Long Lost*. Tichenor explains that these reflect 'the image of these characters in the popular imagination, so those are the images we rely on'.²⁸⁹ For instance, in the scene depicting Richard III's attempts to woo Beatrice, the actors are dressed in the style of the outfit of Laurence Olivier's 1955 onscreen incarnation of the hunchback king and also that of Emma Thompson in Kenneth Branagh's 1993 film version of *Much Ado*. Moreover, Teddy first appears dressed as Ariel from *The Little Mermaid* (1989) rather than *Tempest's* Ariel, marking the beginning of his ongoing confusion about the difference between Disney and Shakespeare. Thus, through their procession of Shakespeare's characters in myriad combinations, the RSC nurture their audience's awareness of these figures within adaptation and popular culture, just as Garrick sought to achieve by depicting a scene from Tate's *Lear* rather than Shakespeare's.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Austin Tichenor, Personal interview, Stratford-upon-Avon, 22 September 2017.

This visual medley is also showcased in Lar De Souza's poster for *Long Lost*, to bring together many of the characters who appear throughout the play, depicting them gathered around their creator: a giant, cartoonish Shakespeare, complete with quill and stacks of drafts taken, presumably, from his long lost first play. The poster is a visual representation of the RSC's central selling point for their audiences: the anticipation of seeing three actors attempt to cover a large number and wide range of Shakespearean characters. This links to the idea that Shakespeare's genius resides in the creation of eclectic human characters and connects De Souza's image to John Gilbert's 1849 oil on canvas, *The Plays of William Shakespeare* (1849).

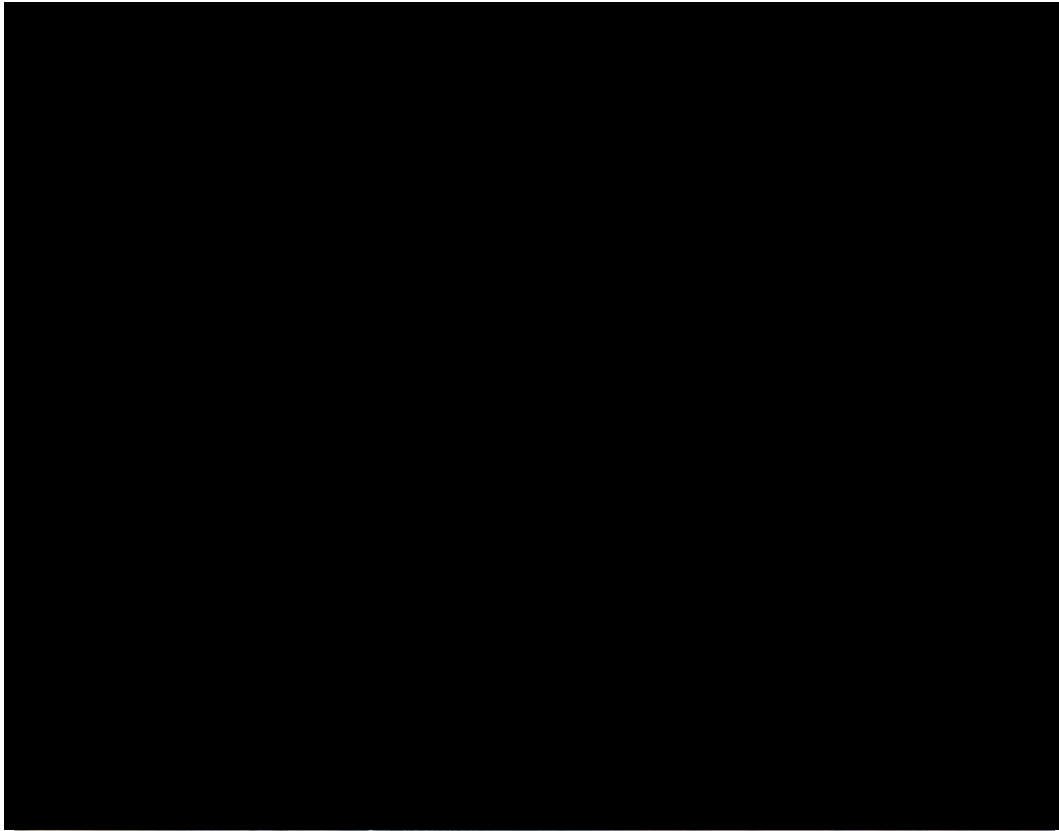


Figure 4.5 *The Plays of William Shakespeare* (1849) by Sir John Gilbert. The tableau is arranged with characters from the tragedies in the foreground, such as Hamlet, Shylock and Othello, historical figures in the middle, like Falstaff and Henry VIII, and magical and supernatural beings above, which includes Prospero and Puck. Gilbert later created a vertical version called *The Apotheosis of Shakespeare's Characters* (1871).

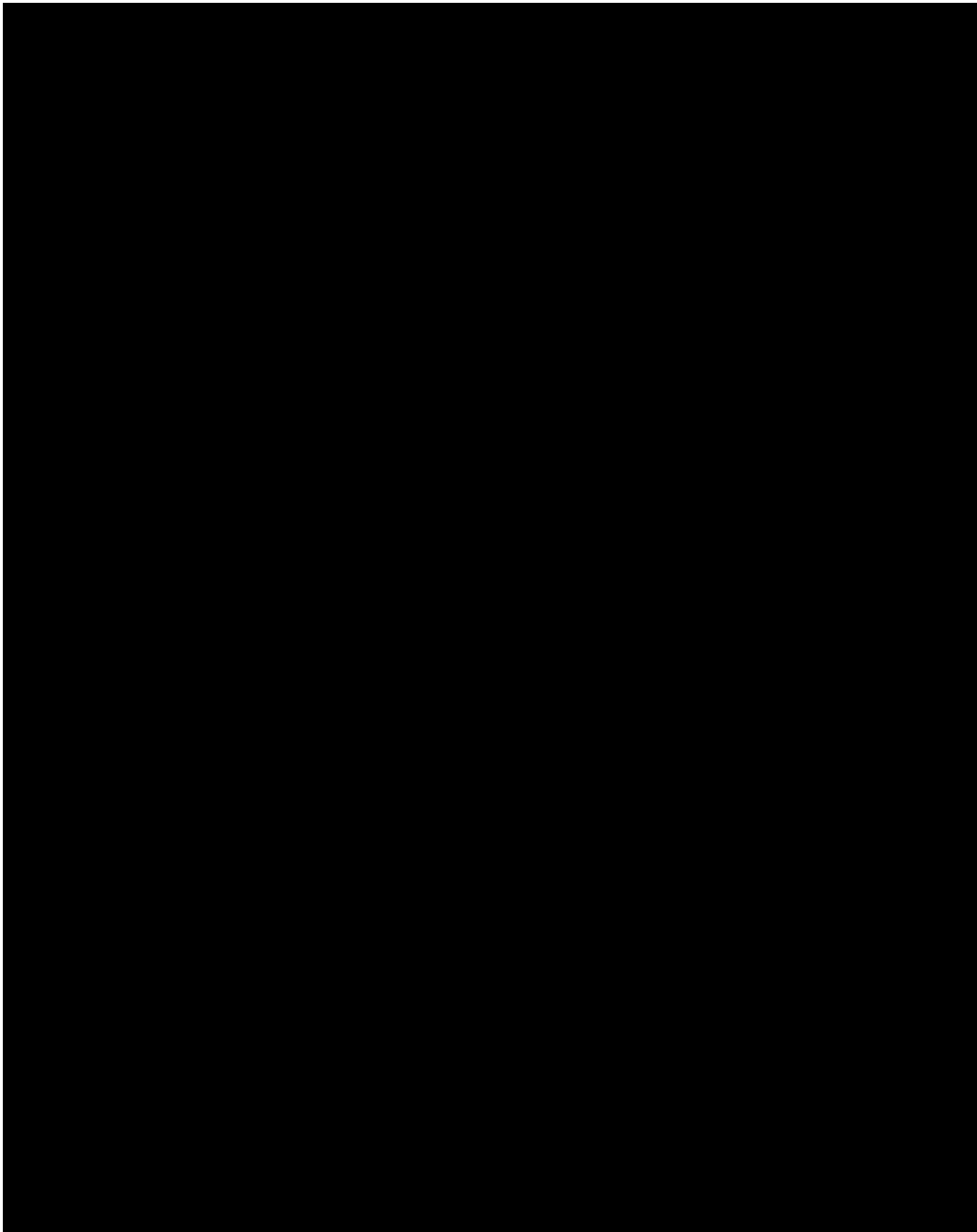


Figure 4.6 The poster for *William Shakespeare's Long Lost First Play (abridged)* by artist Lar De Souza. It features William Shakespeare surrounded by cartoon versions of his own characters: [clockwise from top left] Prospero; Hamlet; Puck; Lady Macbeth; Oberon; Ariel; Falstaff; Juliet; Dromio of Syracuse; The Bear; Richard III, Dromio of Ephesus; Lear; The Three Witches; Beatrice; Viola; Katherine; Bottom; Julius Caesar. It also includes a visual reference to the infinite monkey theorem, which postulates that a monkey hitting random keys on a typewriter for an infinite amount of time would be able to produce Shakespeare's complete works.

Gilbert's painting is every inch a nineteenth-century mash-up, assembling Shakespeare's characters and revelling in the playwright's fecundity of characters. Hamlet and Shylock huddle in the foreground, Falstaff is visually prominent in the centre of the painting, and magical creatures, including Puck and Ariel, hover above them. De Souza's poster echoes both the painting's theme and composition, where Shakespeare's characters are similarly grouped together in horizontal and vertical lines, although not strictly categorised according to the genre of play in which they appear. Puck and Ariel are also placed at the top of the image to reflect their magical, airborne qualities and, as a final point of stylistic comparison, Gilbert and De Souza each place the distant sky in the top left hand corner of their images. De Souza provides, moreover, a visual illustration of the key difference in the company's unfolding reduced Shakespearean output: whereas in *Complete Works*, the original company were reducing a body of work which was already in existence, in *Long Lost*, Reed, Teddy and Austin create the conceit of a vast first draft manuscript and then set about reducing this fictional document.

The poster also celebrates Shakespeare and his characters, through its Disneyesque depiction of the playwright wielding his quill as a conductor's baton, surrounded by the characters featured in *Long Lost*, to represent the various sections of his orchestra, which are brought together in one coherent composition. De Souza's work is a fitting encapsulation of Martin and Tichenor's commitment in *Long Lost* to produce a Shakespearean homage as part of a continuum of commemoration in an anniversary year. The play presents myriad combinations of scenes and characters, with densely-packed quotations and pop references to create a reimagined, expanded Shakespeare universe in the guise of a lost first play. Although the metatheatrical conflicts of ideology remain from the RSC's early years, *Long Lost* can be better described as an exercise in creative collision, whereby two professional fans have created a sequence of fantastical mash-ups, revelling in the ensuing conflict and the pleasure which this produces for their audience of Shakespeare initiates.

5

‘After All This Fooling’: The RSC’s Legacy in Contemporary Shakespearean Performance

Introduction: The Theatre of Abridgement

Thus far, this thesis has examined the Reduced Shakespeare Company (RSC)’s Shakespeare productions both as individual and interconnected case studies, first analysing them in isolation and then revealing areas of influence and consistency which help to build a coherent sense of the company’s artistic development and their ongoing relationship with the playwright’s cultural identity and work. However, a full chronicle of the RSC as a Shakespearean theatre company nearing its fortieth anniversary would be incomplete without an appraisal of their impact on the ecosystem of Shakespearean performance and the work of other contemporary practitioners. In this final chapter, I therefore address the question of how their output connects to recent examples of Shakespeare parody and abridgement, with a focus on companies that create live theatre. In reflecting on the semantics of ‘legacy’ in the context and title of both this chapter and my thesis as a whole, the OED defines the word ‘legacy’ as a noun and adjective in ‘senses relating to bequeathing something’ thus:

4. The action or an act of bequeathing.
5. a. A sum of money, or a specified article, given to another by will.
- b. In extended use. A tangible or intangible thing handed down by a predecessor; a long-lasting effect of an event or process.¹

According to the above definitions, the RSC are assumed to own property (of the intellectual kind) and therefore have something to pass on. What the

¹ *OED* definition of ‘legacy’.

company bequeath to more recent Shakespeare parodists and practitioners is their specific approach to Shakespeare's material and, in the same sense that the RSC have inherited various performance techniques from, among others, their vaudeville and Renaissance faire predecessors, so the companies which follow them have adopted a similar attitude to their various antecedents. The companies discussed in this chapter often profess that their comic, physical and metatheatrical approaches to Shakespeare's work are truer to the original performances of the playwright's work at the Globe Theatre than those of contemporary, higher-profile theatre institutions such as the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre. This might be either for marketing purposes which imply that the work is, simultaneously, accessibly modern and authentically Shakespearean, or because it is the company's true belief, or a combination of the two. In this sense, the legacy at work is Shakespeare's, with the RSC simply an important and prominent link in a wider chain of 'Rough'² Shakespearean performance, the historical context of which I also explore in this chapter.

In my introduction, I discussed the critical portrayal in *Shakespearean Echoes* of Shakespeare as a vampiric, spectral shadow, both haunting and being haunted by the texts that refashion him, which is realised in *Long Lost* through the playwright's otherworldly appearance into a realm of his own creation, where he directly addresses his characters. However, contrary to these metaphors for adaptation, Tichenor suggests that, 'rather than being haunted by Shakespeare, we're channelling him. We've called him up at a séance and we're letting him speak through us'.³ His metaphorical description of the RSC as a ghostly conduit for Shakespearean performance supports my argument that the company are part of a consistent continuum of Shakespearean reduction and parody dating back to the illegal plays known as 'drolls', which were performed when theatres were closed, from 1649 till 1660, during the interregnum period.

Published by Francis Kirkman in 1662, in the anthology *The Wits, or Sport upon Sport*, Peter Holland explains that *The Merry Conceited Humours of*

² Peter Brook, *The Empty Stage* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2008), p. 74.

³ Austin Tichenor, Personal interview, Skype, 21 February 2017.

Bottom The Weaver, for instance, ‘reduces the multiple plots of Shakespeare’s play simply by choosing to ignore everything irrelevant to the workers and their experiences’.⁴ This suggests that the writers of these drolls, which ‘were created, Kirkman claimed, by Robert Cox’,⁵ were attempting to provide for audiences starved of ‘public theatre performance by the state but still wanting to see parts of at least the stock plays that had become familiar staples of London’s repertory theatre’.⁶ For instance, they met popular demand by condensing *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* down to its most crowd-pleasing and relatable ingredients: the Rude Mechanicals.

Holland describes how the drolls made Shakespeare available to a wider audience and conducive to performance by a small company of actors: ‘what is left is a comic farce lasting less than an hour, simplified carefully and purposively to make a drama for performance by a cast of at least eleven’.⁷ The RSC and other companies discussed in this chapter follow these same instincts towards the popularisation of Shakespeare through methods of reduction and parody. The drolls have themselves been subject to a contemporary revival by the theatre company, The Owle Schreame, at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2017 and 2018, with performances constructed as the midway point between an academic lecture and raucous recreation of the text, involving audience participation, contemporary references and improvisation.⁸

The suggestion that the RSC have a ‘legacy’ which is extensive enough to be worth critical attention implies that they have created and popularised a mode of Shakespearean performance passed down to successive companies

⁴ Peter Holland, ‘Shakespeare abbreviated’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Popular Culture*, ed. Robert Shaughnessy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 34

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 33-4.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 34.

⁸ In a 2017 performance at Edinburgh, Owle Schreame founder Brice Stratford began their performance with a detailed lecture about the historical background to these illegitimate plays and ended it by pouring an entire pint of milk over his fellow actor’s head, who was playing the part of a baby waiting to be fed. Stratford explains that, ‘even before the nineteenth-century, parodic reductions of Shakespeare existed: there are three Shakespearean drolls in the collection. One is *The Bouncing Knight*, which is a collection of Falstaff scenes shoved together. There’s *Bottom the Weaver*, which is a collection of the Bottom scenes from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and also the gravedigger scene from *Hamlet*. So, from the seventeenth-century, there have been reduced versions, highlights of selected scenes shoved together and performed as rough comedy, raucous, fast and high-paced’ (Personal interview, Edinburgh, 22 August 2017).

and individuals engaged in delivering comic, irreverent and accessible Shakespeare that operates within a number of different cultural registers. I have already examined what the RSC have created and the idiosyncratic features of the company's work. My analysis of their legacy will comprise six case studies, each of which has been selected because it features one or more consistent and recognisable aspects of the RSC's artistic blueprint, which the companies in question have both consciously and unconsciously adopted and/or adapted:

- A 'completist' concept designed to appeal to Shakespeare aficionados.
- A stated attempt to perform an unfeasible task in a short space of time.
- A metatheatrical narrative which acknowledges a difficult or impossible task.
- A fast-paced, physical performance style which regularly breaks the fourth wall.
- Extended audience participation sections which usually have some bearing on the performance, either by forcing the actors to improvise or by the audience member(s) performing a role.
- Costumes which combine elements of the contemporary and early modern periods, such as converse trainers and breeches.
- Use of unstructured theatrical space or alternative venues for performance.
- Incorporation of pop culture references into performance and free textual adaptation of Shakespeare's words.
- A combination of reverence and irreverence towards the playwright's work.

The order in which these companies will be examined has been determined, not by their indebtedness to the RSC, but by how often they incorporate extratextual references into their work, and the extent to which their productions constitute faithful versions of Shakespeare's plays. Undoubtedly, by engaging in extended deviations from their source texts, all the companies

examined are deliberately *unfaithful* to Shakespeare, but in order to gain a sense of how they each reflect and utilise the above-listed components in their process and product of Shakespearean adaptation, it is necessary to make this distinction to facilitate an understanding of how the RSC have impacted on contemporary Shakespearean performance in a range of different ways.

I will begin with Spymonkey, the comedy and physical theatre company who, in collaboration with playwright Tim Crouch, produced *The Complete Deaths* (2016). This represents the least deliberately faithful of the productions considered in this chapter and is the only example which is not a performance or version of a discrete Shakespearean text. Spymonkey focus on an individual aspect and consistent theme of the playwright's work – death – and parody Shakespeare's plays alongside modern conceptual theatre. I next examine hip-hop theatre company Q Brothers, whose four-man *Othello: The Remix* (2012) is, to use their own description, an 'add-RAP-tation'⁹ of Shakespeare's play. The company translate *Othello* into the modern vernacular of rap, featuring more Shakespearean quotations than Spymonkey: nevertheless, *Remix* is not a directly faithful production of the original text. Both productions represent extended deviations from their source material and will therefore be considered as examples of the RSC's influence on different forms of conceptual reduction.

My analysis will then turn to the Back Room Shakespeare Project (BRSP) and Magnificent Bastard Productions (MBP), two companies who remain closer to the original text but perform Shakespeare's plays in the contemporary environment of bars, pubs and comedy venues, inserting current references and occasional anachronisms. The BRSP will be considered in relation to company founder Samuel Taylor's reasons for the choice of environment for their performances, and how this impacted on the RSC's own artistic practice during the writing of *Long Lost*. MBP's irreverent production, *Shitfaced Shakespeare*, which first found success at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2010, provides an example of how the escalation of alcohol-related live Shakespearean performance has mutated into new, more corporate

⁹ Q Brothers, 'The Q Brothers Collective' <<https://qbrothersofficial.com/>> [Accessed 16 September 2018].

formats, and also how the RSC's diversification of their reduction brand served as an example for this company.

Finally, I will analyse *The Pantaloons* and *The Handlebards*, both of which perform open-air Shakespeare productions which, although they incorporate visual and textual anachronisms, perform Shakespeare's plays as advertised, albeit reduced in length. These two companies, and others, such as *Illyria* and *Oddssocks*, deliver fast-paced, family-friendly, vaudevillian Shakespeare that owes a debt of a different kind to the RSC than that of *Spymonkey* or *Q Brothers*; these are companies which have directly harnessed and traded on performance techniques popularised by the RSC, but which keep the text and structure of their source material consistently in view. I will conclude the chapter by determining to what extent the RSC have influenced the contemporary appetite for abridgement and created an unofficial repertory of specialists in the theatre of reduction.

Spymonkey

Spymonkey comprises Aitor Basauri, Petra Massey, Toby Park and Stephan Kreiss, all of whom trained under French master clown Phillipe Gaulier.¹⁰ The ensemble often collaborate with a different theatre practitioner on each of their productions, which have included parodic reductions of large-scale topics, including *Moby Dick* (2009) and *Oedipussy* (2012).¹¹ For *Complete Deaths*, *Spymonkey* worked jointly with Crouch, who co-wrote and directed the play, in which the four members performed all seventy-four of Shakespeare's onstage deaths in two and a half hours.¹²

¹⁰ Like the RSC, *Spymonkey* use their own names in performance and play heightened, clown-versions of themselves. I will therefore refer to the fictional characters in *Complete Deaths* by their forenames and the real-life *Spymonkey* company members by their surnames.

¹¹ *Oedipussy*, for instance, was directed by then-Kneehigh artistic director Emma Rice and combined Greek tragedy with James Bond and science-fiction films. This melange is indicated by the production's title: a comic portmanteau of the Sophocles play *Oedipus Rex* and Bond movie *Octopussy* (1983).

¹² A particular aspect of *Complete Deaths*, focused on by several reviews, was the choice to ignore all offstage deaths. *Spymonkey* acknowledge this at the beginning of the play, when Toby refuses to allow Petra to play Ophelia, insisting that there will be '[n]o Ophelia. No Antigonus, pursued by a bear in *The Winter's Tale*, no Edmund in *King Lear*, no Mercutio in

The parallels which can be drawn between *Complete Deaths* and *Complete Works* are fairly obvious: a group of three to four actors performing a large number of different roles, Shakespeare's entire canon compressed into a single text, and the play given a subversive title that riffs on the playwright's collection of work. Indeed, when the idea was first broached to Spymonkey by Crouch, Park, who is the company's managing artistic director, reveals that 'it struck me that the danger of it would be everybody would just say we're trying to do Reduced Shakespeare – it's been done, really'.¹³ Park's statement suggests that the RSC have also provided a template against which some react or resist, producing reduced Shakespeare which both complicates and enriches this particular subgenre of Shakespearean performance. His wariness of comparison with the RSC is not a dismissal of their artistic credentials or comic prowess but instead acknowledges that audiences buying tickets to see a production containing the word 'complete' in its title, which is also based on the premise of a compressed Shakespearean narrative might associate this with the RSC. This suggests that, for some artists, the RSC have become synonymous with a particular approach to Shakespearean performance and adaptation and that Spymonkey, while prioritising their own artistic originality, have also considered the need to manage audience expectations.

Complete Deaths opens on an old woman knitting with an LED counter next to her which begins with the number seventy-six.¹⁴ She remains onstage throughout, pressing a button each time a death occurs, at which time it emits a loud, buzzing sound and the number decreases, thereby structuring the show

Romeo and Juliet, no Lady Macbeth'. (Crouch and Spymonkey, p. 6). Crouch explains that he 'made the call quite quickly that there would be the onstage deaths only' (Personal interview, Skype, 18 May 2017). The exclusion of these more famous deaths, heard but not seen, in favour of less notable characters who are '[k]illed in the space between scenes' (p. 5), is consistent with Crouch's *I, Shakespeare* series of one-man shows, a body of work which played a significant role in Spymonkey approaching him to direct their project. In these solo productions, which represent a further form of reduced Shakespeare, Crouch expands marginalised or smaller characters, such as Malvolio, Banquo, Caliban, Peaseblossom and Cinna the Poet, to explore the world of a single play from an alternative or unexpected perspective.

¹³ Toby Park, Personal interview, Skype, 24 October 2016.

¹⁴ Spymonkey add an extra number for the death of 'every one of us' (Crouch/Spymonkey, p. 3), or as Tim Crouch described it in our interview, 'the death of the audience's complacency' (Personal interview, Skype, 18 May 2017), represented by Park in the production's opening scene.

as a countdown to zero.¹⁵ Spymonkey then present a succession of onstage deaths, culminating in a condensed version of *Hamlet* 5.2, which is played straight and without irony. The company focus primarily on their own artistic identity within the context of the production, rather than on the process of reduction itself and, like the three-man troupe of *Complete Works*, the primary narrative point of interest is how a troupe of four performers can achieve the impossible task they have set themselves in the limited time available. This expectation is heightened by the visible and ever-ticking counter and performs the additional function of stimulating the production's cross-section of audience members from Shakespeare initiates to those with less in-depth knowledge of the plays.

Spymonkey and Crouch were keen to give *Complete Deaths* an identity and purpose distinct from the RSC's work. Despite this, Peter Kirwan recognises the potential for comparison, recalling that

[i]t's almost thirty years since the Reduced Shakespeare Company launched its mission of comprehensive compression, culminating in a repeated, increasingly speedy depiction of all of the deaths in *Hamlet*. Spymonkey, in their first Shakespeare-themed show, have now taken up their mantle.¹⁶

Complete Deaths features a number of less obvious similarities to the RSC's first play, including structural elements in the play which are particular to Spymonkey, just as those of *Complete Works* are to the traditions of the RSC.

¹⁵ The representation of an omniscient figure such as Death in the guise of an old man, woman or incidental figure within society, such as a janitor, is not uncommon in theatre, and can be traced back to representations of Death in the Morality Plays. A significant recent example is Kate Duchêne's *God/Good Deeds* and Dermot Crowley's *Death in Rufus Norris's production of Everyman* (2015) at the National Theatre, adapted by Carol Ann Duffy. The production opened with *God/Good Deeds* sweeping the stage clean, while *Everyman* later gives her £10 for cleaning up his vomit. Similarly, the use of a countdown and metatheatrical acknowledgment of onstage deaths has theatrical precedence, having frequently been used in recent productions directed by Ivo van Hove, notably his *Roman Tragedies* (2006-7) sequence of Shakespeare's Roman Plays and Robert Icke's adaptation of *Oresteia* (2015).

¹⁶ Peter Kirwan, 'The Complete Deaths (Spymonkey) @ Hull Truck' in *The Bardathon* <<http://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/bardathon/2016/09/10/complete-deaths-spymonkey-hull-truck/>> [Accessed 20 September 2017].

Rather than supporting or confirming Park's initial concerns about the concept's potential pitfalls, acknowledging this relationship between Spymonkey and the RSC is useful in revealing how each company operates onstage, and how the metatheatrical discussions of group hierarchy as part of performance allow both companies to critique issues relating to Shakespeare's cultural status and authority. In an explanation which recalls both Jess in *Complete Works* and Austin in *Long Lost*, as the RSC's pompous academic authority figures, Park observes that 'all of our shows are basically an argument between me and the rest of the clowns. That comes out of our clown background which looks at status – it's generating material out of having a high status – the most stupid person being the person in the most authority and vice versa'.¹⁷ This practice of comic inversion, where highbrow and lowbrow Shakespeare are brought into opposition with each other, aligns *Complete Deaths* with the ideological conflict between Daniel, Jess and Adam that drives *Complete Works*.

While Spymonkey's clowning background heightens the division between the traditional, textual approach and anarchic, practical engagement in *Complete Deaths*, they bear a definite resemblance to those of *Complete Works* through the way in which conflict assists the play's narrative progression. For instance, Toby begins the show by pompously drawing attention to how, with *Complete Deaths*, '[w]e're attempting something different tonight; something bigger and braver',¹⁸ declaring to the audience: '[w]elcome to the performance collective formerly known as Spymonkey'.¹⁹ As Toby grows increasingly infuriated by his colleagues' practical interventions throughout the show, and they by him, this culminates in a confrontation in which Toby is kicked out of Spymonkey, which is represented by Caesar's assassination in *Julius Caesar* 3.1. Park explains that this is a common theme throughout the company's work:

¹⁷ Park, 24 October 2016.

¹⁸ Tim Crouch and Spymonkey, Unpublished performance script for *The Complete Deaths* (Tim Crouch/Spymonkey, 2016), p. 5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

When the four of us are onstage together, I always tend to be in charge and try to drive things forward and understand when things have gone wrong. The others try to undermine my authority and take huge pleasure in upsetting me. Aitor and Stephan always have a massive fight. Petra always tries to upstage everybody and have the best costume.²⁰

Park positions his character in the same role as Jess and Austin: the intellectual, authority figure who attempts to keep things significant and highbrow. Furthermore, like Aitor and Stephan's fight, the RSC always stage a metatheatrical conflict at the centre of their productions, whether this is Jess and Adam or Reed and Austin. Petra's fixation with the limelight, costumes and less sophisticated aspects of the production, which culminates in an elaborate bubble show in which she finally 'gives her Ophelia', coupled with her distaste for Toby's highfalutin approach, might also be compared with Adam's attitude towards Jess and his tendency to upstage his colleagues, performing the death of each Shakespearean heroine by pretending to vomit on the audience.

Crouch explains that the play's first physical set-piece was initially inspired by the comical transformation of the name La Fura dels Baus, a Spanish physical theatre company who have influenced Spymonkey, into 'Führer del Bard',²¹ 'tied in with the thesis propounded by Toby in his character which is that to move beyond Shakespeare, we have to start by killing Shakespeare'.²² The speech is set to a short film, in which the Flower Portrait of Shakespeare flashes rapidly between the faces of Kim Jong-il, Vladimir Putin, Colonel Gaddafi, Laurence Olivier as Richard III and, finally, to a 'hybrid image of Shakespeare and Hitler',²³ with the Nazi leader's moustache superimposed on Shakespeare's upper-lip, which Toby dubs 'Shitler'.²⁴ The representation of Shakespeare as a tyrannical dictator whom the company

²⁰ Park, 24 October 2016.

²¹ Tim Crouch, Personal interview, Skype, 18 May 2017.

²² Ibid.

²³ Crouch and Spymonkey, p. 11.

²⁴ Although not directly indebted to the RSC, this joke recalls Adam's muddled notes in *Complete Works*, where he mixes Shakespeare and Hitler's biographies.

must kill in order to ensure theatrical progression and audience enlightenment is evocative (even in the satirical, self-aware sense which Toby presents throughout the narrative) of Roland Barthes's thesis that 'the audience can only be freed at the expense of the death of the author',²⁵ an idea which Crouch previously explored in his play *The Author* (2009).

Toby declares at the beginning of their performance that '[t]onight we celebrate death, ladies and gentlemen [...] Death of the old. Death of the grand narrative; of certainty and simplicity; of the old forms. Death of tradition. Death of the antiquated image'.²⁶ By saying this, Toby urges the audience to enact their own private and collective resistance towards traditions of the past, represented by Shakespeare's authorial pre-eminence and cultural dominance. Spymonkey's resistance extends to the conversation produced by Crouch's collaboration with the company, which is represented metatheatrically onstage by Park's conflict with the other company members. Crouch, using himself and Spymonkey in the abstract, explains that

'Tim Crouch' is supposedly a conceptual, postmodern theatre-maker and 'Spymonkey' are a bunch of idiots. So, we liked the idea of making that dynamic explicit. Basically, 'Toby Park' became me, in a way, in the dynamic of this production. 'Toby Park' would speak as me, or would speak for postmodernist art. I liked the idea of undermining contemporary postmodern performance art and, also, slightly undermining Shakespeare and the clowns as well, which they do anyway. That's part of their stock-in-trade.²⁷

Although the friction to which Crouch alludes between his and Spymonkey's respective artistic backgrounds and methods is purely fictional, Toby speaking as a cipher for Crouch in the context of a clown show makes dramatic and narrative sense, particularly when the play is constantly focused on a push and pull between audience perceptions of what constitutes highbrow (postmodern

²⁵ Crouch, 18 May 2017.

²⁶ Crouch and Spymonkey, p. 3.

²⁷ Crouch, 18 May 2017.

art) and lowbrow (clowning) Shakespeare. Crouch therefore comes to represent Shakespeare himself, depicted as a disapproving God-like figure in the production and equated immediately with dictators. The dictator, in turn, becomes emblematic of a controlling author-figure, stunting the growth of artistic originality and quashing rebellion towards his canonical status, which Toby states explicitly at the beginning of *Complete Deaths*: 'Shakespeare's legacy has strangled the generations that have come after him'.²⁸

The plot of *Complete Deaths* deliberately seeks to disentangle the playwright and his cultural reputation, which is best represented by Aitor's private hallucinations when he meets Shakespeare, represented as a cartoonish, bearded deity. The character is projected on a screen behind the actor, drawn in the style of Terry Gilliam's cartoons for *Monty Python*, and thus strongly evokes the encounters between King Arthur and God in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975). In these meetings, which recur throughout the play, Shakespeare warns Aitor that '[y]ou will never be a great Shakespeare actor if you stay with these idiots'²⁹ and urges him to '[a]lways stand with your legs apart, Aitor. Point at things. Roll your r's and your l's. Rrrrrr. Shout and always spit when you speak'.³⁰ Clearly, this hyperbolic version of the playwright, who refers to himself as 'Sir William Shakespeare'³¹ and incongruously recommends that '[p]eople want to see traditional me: Kenneth Branagh, hey nonny nonny',³² is a construct of Aitor's imagined version of a highbrow, traditionalist Shakespeare, rather than any realistic, factual portrayal of the playwright himself. This is made explicit by Aitor providing the voice of Shakespeare, just as Graham Chapman, who plays King Arthur in *Holy Grail*, also voices God, suggesting these to be interior conversations taking place within the characters' minds, rather than real, external encounters. Shakespeare's metatheatrical appearance within a parodic work based on his own work provides a final connection between Spymonkey and the RSC: both companies are engaged in related discussions about how the playwright's

²⁸ Crouch and Spymonkey, p. 4.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 16.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 32.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 15.

³² *Ibid*, p. 16.

authority is dealt with by modern theatre-makers and engage in this conversation about cultural hierarchy through the medium of exuberant farce.

Q Brothers

The RSC's 'Rap Othello' is an example of the company's legacy within a specific subgenre of Shakespearean adaptation. Since the rap was written in 1988, Shakespeare's plays have been reduced through hip-hop by a wide range of artist and companies, often with varying intentions towards parody, education and commercial opportunity. For the purpose of exploring the specific influence of 'Rap Othello', this section will focus on an adaptation which contains elements of satire towards both the genre, African-American culture, and Shakespeare's work, and which are less directly motivated by a commitment to pedagogy.³³ Q Brothers specialise in the comedic 'add-RAP-tation' of Shakespeare's plays, including *Funk It Up About Nothin'* (2008), *I <3 Juliet* (2012), *Remix* (2012) and *Q Gents* (2016). Their productions are all abridged versions, cut to around seventy-five to ninety minutes, and feature correspondingly small ensemble casts akin to the RSC's three-man troupes; in *Remix*, there are only four performers. In a 2016 episode of the *Reduced Shakespeare Company Podcast*, Tichenor interviewed Gregory Javid Qaiyum (GQ) and Jefferey Ameen Qaiyum (JAQ), the company's co-founders and creative directors, who are known professionally by their initials, about *Remix*, suggesting that the Q Brothers had taken what the RSC parodied 'Rap Othello' and enacted it 'for real',³⁴ to which the duo responded favourably.³⁵

³³ Rapper and activist Akala's foundation of the Hip-Hop Shakespeare Company or pedagogic hip-hop artist Devon Glover's work as the Sonnet Man provide two examples of artists who have used the language and culture of hip-hop in their workshops as an educative tool to help young audiences better understand and relate to Shakespeare; it empowers them, in Akala's words, as 'custodians of knowledge' (2011). Glover has described what he achieves in classrooms as "hip-hop *Cliff Notes*" (Personal interview, University of Warwick, 25 August 2015) for students, alluding to the popular online study guide.

³⁴ Austin Tichenor, Episode 516: 'The Q Brothers', *Reduced Shakespeare Company Podcast* (Reduced Shakespeare Company, 2016).

³⁵ GQ was also an original performer and writer of hip-hop musical *The Bomb-itty of Errors* (2000), while JAQ served as its composer and DJ. *Bomb-itty of Errors* is a hip-hop musical adaptation of *The Comedy of Errors* which features a four-man cast and a DJ. It was initially developed by five NYU students in a five-week period for their university project. With around

A significant connection between the companies is the shared influence of juggling and comedy troupe The Flying Karamazov Brothers (FKB). Discussing the RSC's legacy, Adam Long acknowledges that, regarding their key comic principles and direct connection with audiences, 'The National Theatre of Brent and The Flying Karamazov Brothers were there before us, and they inspired us a great deal',³⁶ whilst Tichenor, who also interviewed FKB member Sam Williams in 2016 for the *RSC Podcast*, describes them as a key inspiration for himself and Reed Martin.³⁷ GQ cites this adaptation as a key reason why he and his university colleagues originally conceived their own reduced version of *Comedy* with the same number of actors. Stephen Purcell further describes how, in FKB's version, '[o]ccasional interpolations and topical references were added to the Shakespearean text, but most striking were its visual and musical quotations from pop culture',³⁸ including jazz, punk rock and musical theatre. Such diverse intertextual references are also employed by Q Brothers, particularly in the interpolation of quotations from both Shakespeare and hip-hop. GQ suggests that Shakespeare 'was heightening language. That's what rap is, it's a heightened version of language'³⁹ and emphasises their kinship with Shakespeare as a writer who borrowed from the prominent storytellers of his time, equating Shakespeare's inheritance of the Greek tradition with their own debt of influence to hip-hop collective A Tribe Called Quest.⁴⁰

three weeks until their deadline, the students decided to adapt a pre-existing narrative. At this point, they discovered *Comedy* and found that the play's two sets of twins and comic confusion were a suitable fit for their four-man ensemble. *Bomb-itty* subsequently became a successful off-Broadway production and gave birth to Q Brothers.

³⁶ Adam Long, Personal interview, E-mail, 18 October 2017.

³⁷ Austin Tichenor, Episode 517: 'Flying Karamazov Brothers', *Reduced Shakespeare Company Podcast* (Reduced Shakespeare Company, 2016).

³⁸ Stephen Purcell, *Popular Shakespeare: Simulation and Subversion on the Modern Stage* (*Palgrave Shakespeare Studies*) (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 134.

³⁹ Austin Tichenor, Episode 516: 'The Q Brothers', *Reduced Shakespeare Company Podcast* (Reduced Shakespeare Company, 2016).

⁴⁰ JAQ also defines their performances as not being 'like a musical or a play, but more like an opera because the music never stops. Even the scenes in between happen over some music and are in rhyme. So, while there are certain numbers that feel more like a hip-hop musical, the music gets stripped down between those numbers and much more skeletal' (Tichenor, 2016). This suggests that their work qualifies as rap opera or hip hopera, terms sometimes used to describe musical theatre that makes extensive use of hip-hop, such as *Hamilton* (2015), Lin-Manuel Miranda's rap musical about America's founding fathers, or conceptual rap albums like Logic's non-linear, science-fiction concept album *The Incredible True Story* (2015).

In 2012, as part of their Globe-to-Globe Festival, Shakespeare's Globe commissioned *Remix*. The show involved four performers translating Shakespeare's narrative into the medium of rap, delivering a modern verse play set to hip-hop beats, which were programmed and played live by a DJ, positioned in the Globe's balcony.⁴¹ In the show's opening, the four performers outline their rationale for using hip-hop as a tool to reduce Shakespeare and justify its use through the contextualisation of Shakespeare as a literary thief. In doing so, they situate themselves along a continuum of adaptation, rather than being stylistically or ideologically opposed to the playwright:

Words move fast, so we hope you're listening,
 We're about to tell a story that's been told throughout history.
 Willie Shakes was a master, no one can ignore that,
 But he borrowed his stories from the Greeks before that.
 So, what we're doing's keeping the tradition alive,
 Here's the latest version, this edition's in rhyme.
 We're on a mission to find the essence of the story,
 To put a new twist on an old allegory.
 Hip-hop: that's the way we gonna take you,
 Straight to the place that we can relate to.
 Good storytellers borrow, but great ones steal,
 So, believe me, the thievery's how we keep it real.⁴²

Summarised in the double meaning of how '[w]ords move fast', the actors immediately draw their audience's attention to the fast-paced, symbolic

⁴¹ One of the festival's central purposes was to emphasise Shakespeare's status as an international playwright. Dominic Dromgoole's decision, as Artistic Director at the time, to invite Q Brothers to be part of the event after seeing *Funk It Up About Nothin'* in London, involved American artists in this cultural conversation and therefore drew attention, in the festival, to the different versions of English which have evolved, just as Shakespeare's meaning has changed and mutated over time. Given how responsible the United States is for the modern view of Shakespeare's plays within popular culture, it makes sense that Dromgoole would have wished to include their voice in this festival, particularly by using a company who operate within a specific dialect that has developed within American English.

⁴² Q Brothers, *Othello: The Remix*, dir. GQ and JAQ (Shakespeare's Globe, 2012).

language of rap and language as something which, rather than remaining fixed, evolves over time. They are also quick to reassure audiences, unfamiliar with hip-hop's potential linguistic connections to Shakespeare, that they regard him as a masterful writer, and further undermine ideas of false originality applied to Shakespeare's texts through their emphasis that, like themselves and other rappers, he borrowed from literary forebears. They take Shakespeare's role as borrower a stage further by reducing it to the level of theft. This achieves the purpose of casting Shakespeare as a renegade figure and one who would not hesitate to rework the material of his forebears and contemporaries into new shapes and sounds. The passage concludes with a paradoxical statement, as the four actors profess authenticity by admitting to their own act of theft.

In 'OTT Rap', the RSC create similar associations between Shakespeare, rap and appropriation, claiming how '[t]hat Shakespeare dude was a wicked plagiarist / He stole everything he did, like rappers he would sample / And we ain't stupid so we follow his example'.⁴³ The central difference between the RSC and Q Brothers' contextualisation of Shakespeare's malleability within hip-hop through the shared act of sampling is that the RSC, as comedy performers, parody the conventions of rap in their use of it, while GQ and JAQ are actively harnessing this musical form to take themselves and the audience 'to the place that we can relate to' and draw attention to the 'implicit stylistic analogy between rap and Shakespearian language'.⁴⁴ Douglas Lanier lists their similarities as being:

- Poetry designed for performance, not the page;
- Language delivered against a strong metrical beat and mastery of rhythmic effects;
- What is for mainstream speakers of English a largely non-standard vocabulary, dense in allusion;

⁴³ Adam, Long, Reed Martin and Austin Tichenor, 'The Tragedies' in *The Reduced Shakespeare Company Radio Show* (BBC World Service, 1992).

⁴⁴ Douglas Lanier, *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). p. 74.

- Self-consciously virtuosic in their wordplay.⁴⁵

I do not suggest that the RSC are remotely ignorant of these comparisons. Indeed, their use of rap as the main artistic medium used in *Complete Works* to comment on their own identity as performers is significant, given that hip-hop is a form which is often viewed as having marginalised the female voice and performer. Not only does 'Rap Othello' self-consciously acknowledge the company's lack of racial diversity onstage but also, as a male-dominated company, they utilise a medium which is similarly driven by the voices of men. P. A. Skantze highlights related problems with *Remix*; after watching the production, she suggested that the production reinforced the order of patriarchy sometimes associated with both *Othello* and hip-hop:

Keep your women still – faithful, domestic, subordinate in speech – the world is in order; but if a woman moves out of any of those categories, even in the imagination of her lover, inevitably she will have to die so as to restore order to the world by being removed from circulation, by not being in motion without permission.⁴⁶

These concerns surround the all-male company playing Emilia and Bianca in partial drag and excluding Desdemona entirely, reducing her to a haunted voice in the chorus of Othello's songs. In a DVD recording of their Globe performance, the actors look upwards towards the theatre's balcony whenever they hear Desdemona's disembodied vocals, positioning her as Othello's muse. This initiates a theme which runs throughout *Remix*: Othello's relationship with Desdemona being made synonymous with his connection to music, culminating in the production's version of 5.2. As he prepares to kill her, Othello's words make the correlation between his love for Desdemona and music explicit through his use of metaphorical language to compare

⁴⁵ Ibid, pp. 74-5.

⁴⁶ P.A. Skantze, 'O-thell-O: styling syllables, donning wigs, late capitalist, national 'scariotypes'', in *Shakespeare beyond English: A Global Experiment*, eds. Susan Bennet and Christie Carson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 136.

Desdemona's heartbeat with the rhythm of hip-hop:

A DJ can replay a song when it ends,
 But if I cut the beat out it'll never play again.
 Once I pull the needle that's layin' in the groove,
 You'll do nothin' but lay here and never even move.⁴⁷

In this version, due to the physical absence of Desdemona, Othello is shown taking a pillow and smothering thin air, at which point the background beat is muted and replayed in time to his lifting and releasing of the pillow, representing his act of murder as one that destroys both his music and his wife. Shakespeare's play positions Othello as a successful warrior whose love for Desdemona humbles him. *Remix* recasts him as 'MC Othello', a young rapper who realises that, despite success, talent and fame, he 'won't be satisfied hearin' my name / 'Til I got the flyest dame in the game wearin' my chain'.⁴⁸ This expresses the rapper Othello's discontentment with not being able to share his success with a lover. It suggests that the physically absent Desdemona predominantly serves as a cipher to reflect Othello's thoughts and language and elevate his rough braggadocio-driven verses into works with wider appeal to a crossover audience.

Remix makes a number of specific allusions to lines from Shakespeare's plays and contemporary hip-hop artists, sometimes conflating the two. While some of these references are reflections of GQ and JAQ's desire to pay homage to their hip-hop storyteller influences, others draw suggestive parallels between the playwright's characters and prominent rappers. Iago's costume of a black hood pulled low and his faster, more unpredictable delivery than Othello's slower, rhythmic verses, immediately evokes Eminem's appearance and style as his fictional alter ego 'Slim Shady'. This comparison is further alluded to in the line: 'all the while Iago was gettin' kinda shady / A slim chance

⁴⁷ GQ and JAQ, 2012.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

that he wouldn't meddle'.⁴⁹

The combination of visual and textual reference to signify an Eminem-based Iago is one instance showing how the company use costumes metatheatrically to acknowledge their various onstage identities and draw the audience's attention to the feat of four actors performing a large number of roles. Like the RSC, Q Brothers use a base costume – theirs being of denim overalls and trainers – on top of which they use various hats, glasses and other items to build different visibly characters in front of their audience. A direct example of this can be seen when Cassio tells Iago, who has just warned him against flirting with Desdemona, to 'not be mad at how I be/ Your girl's hot too, in fact she kinda look like me',⁵⁰ which acknowledges that Cassio and Emilia are both played by Jackson Doran.

Not only does this evoke the RSC's similar approach to these performance conventions but it also reflects the changeable, shifting nature of fictional guises in hip-hop itself. In his discussion of *Bomb-itty*, Wetmore, Jr. uses Eminem's 'Slim Shady' alias as an example of this practice and suggests that '[i]dentities, and names, are fluid in the hip-hop world, as they are in Shakespeare. Characters are dropped instantly in order to become one's own character'.⁵¹ In addition to this multifaceted approach to character, Q Brothers draw attention to their characters' awareness of inhabiting a theatrical space, often using this technique to undercut moments of tragedy or seriousness with comic doggerel. After Desdemona's death, for example, Emilia walks in and tells Othello, 'I think it was the sound of my sister hurtin' / But I won't know until I pull back this invisible curtain',⁵² drawing direct attention to the play's illusory effects.

It is impossible for a contemporary production or adaptation of *Othello* to ignore the issue of race, particularly when it is contextualised in hip-hop, a genre which already carries with it a complex set of racial tensions. A performer's background is often the most significant area where these

⁴⁹ GQ and JAQ, 2012.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Wetmore, Jr., p. 159.

⁵² GQ and JAQ, 2012.

complications can arise and provoke controversy, which the RSC self-consciously acknowledge in 'Rap Othello'. Wetmore, Jr. suggests that '[t]he use of rap music by whites to reconfigure Shakespeare is further problematized by the history of actors of African descent performing Shakespeare',⁵³ noting that 'casting may be color-blind but the audience is not, and race is always coded in the meaning of the play and the performance'.⁵⁴ 'Rap Othello' attempts to alleviate these tensions through comedy and *Remix* similarly seeks to eschew racial tensions by acknowledging the racist values held by particular characters. For instance, the main discussion of prejudice is condensed into a verse delivered by Brabantio, Desdemona's father:

It's really nice to believe that we could all just get along,
 But bunnies don't befriend big bears, it's just wrong.
 You're so small, he's so much bigger,
 I just don't see you with that... that... *[audible laughter]*
 I was gonna say rapper, you didn't let me finish,
 What does he bring to society? He's a menace [...]⁵⁵

The audience laughter heard on the Globe production recording is in reaction to Brabantio stopping short of rhyming 'bigger' with the racist epithet 'nigger', which he self-consciously acknowledges in the next line. This moment courts the predominantly white viewership's own set of racial attitudes and, by drawing humour from the abusive term's absence, leaves it caught in a problematic limbo between utterance and denial. This tension is heightened by the performers' own racial backgrounds: Jackson Doran is white, Postell Pringle is African-American and GQ and JAQ are of mixed Pakistani-American descent. It is notable that the RSC employ similar tactics in their version of 'Rap Othello' from the 2007 revised script for *Complete Works*:

⁵³ Wetmore, Jr., p. 161.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ GQ and JAQ, 2012.

GREEN: Now Othello loved Desi like Adonis loved VENUS!

BLACK: And Desi loved Othello cuz he had a big –

RED: SWORD!⁵⁶

In the recorded performance of *Complete Works*, Tichenor raps the final line slightly off-beat and appears visibly shocked as he holds his hands apart to measure the length of Othello's 'sword'. Precisely like those watching *Remix*, the RSC's audience laugh at his recovery from the potential risk of rhyming 'Venus' with 'penis', and thereby eschewing both the racial stereotype that black men are better endowed than their white counterparts, and any suggestion that Desdemona's love for Othello might be for precisely this reason. A similar reference is made in the *Othello* episode of Second City's YouTube parody series 'Sassy Gay Friend', during which the eponymous friend indicates to his crotch, before asking Desdemona if 'Moor means more?'.⁵⁷ Following her embarrassed reaction, he self-consciously recognises he's 'being racist'.⁵⁸ Despite the comic intent behind these forms of doggerel, the attention which the RSC and Second City draw towards this racist taboo evokes sexual connotations which are explored in less subtle ways by Q Brothers, and are visible in the fears of exoticism which some characters, especially Brabantio, express towards Othello in Shakespeare's play.

The hip-hop conflicts outlined by Iago suggest a further connection between the RSC and Q Brothers. In *Remix*, as in each of the RSC's various reductions on stage and radio, the company's principal interest lies in satirising and exploring the medium within which they operate, even more so than the text itself. This results in the production, rather than being a direct contemplation of *Othello*, becoming a meditation on hip-hop culture and trends within the genre. The production uses its three central male characters, Othello, Iago and Cassio, to represent different aspects of hip-hop artistry across the genre's full spectrum: Cassio is a marketable pop star, with limited

⁵⁶ Singer and Winfield, p. 24.

⁵⁷ The Second City, 'Sassy Gay Friend – Othello', 28 March 2010 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LKttq6EUqbE>> [Accessed 13 December 2017].

⁵⁸ Ibid.

talent, but commercial appeal; Othello becomes the ‘hood’ warrior-poet turned successful label CEO; Iago signifies a hardcore rapper with street credibility. Their international tour, which represents the journey to Cyprus in Shakespeare’s play, therefore, offers the company the opportunity to explore how these various individuals, of conflicting styles and views, clash when forced together.

This interest in form, eschewing the primacy of their reduced content, is reflected in the Q Brothers’ diversification of their ‘add-RAP-tation’ formula beyond Shakespeare. In 2017, they revived *Q Brothers Christmas Carol*, a hip-hop adaptation of Charles Dickens’s 1843 novella. This reflects the RSC’s similar growth into an artistic ‘brand’,⁵⁹ a word used by Tichenor to describe them in his podcast interview. Further comparisons are demonstrated by GQ and JAQ’s explanation that the primary inspiration for their version was the Disney cartoon version *Mickey’s Christmas Carol* (1983), which features the anthropomorphic duck character, Scrooge McDuck, as Dickens’s protagonist Ebenezer Scrooge. This connection to animation as a key influence on the construction and performance of their shows as live-action cartoons in which character is heightened, plot simplified and stereotypes acknowledged, demonstrates that the duo have inherited a similar set of inspirations and metatheatrical onstage techniques as the RSC. They have continued the tradition of updating Shakespeare through reduction, within a rough performance environment that directly engages the viewer.

Q Brothers’ brand of reduced Shakespeare, which like the popular culture it harnesses and parodies, has expanded to encompass shows that can be marketed for audiences at specific times of the year, just as their *Christmas Carol* has become a December tradition for the company. Their construction as a two to four-person ensemble company, which burlesques Shakespeare by focusing on the chosen form and references to both Shakespeare and pop culture, rather than to the texts themselves, makes them more direct descendants of the RSC’s form of Shakespearean adaptation than the British companies also explored in this chapter. Although it is useful to consider ‘Rap

⁵⁹ Austin Tichenor, Episode 516: ‘The Q Brothers’, *Reduced Shakespeare Company Podcast* (Reduced Shakespeare Company, 2016).

Othello' as a parodic predecessor to this full-length consideration of *Othello* in the hip-hop medium, it is the RSC's brand status, ensemble performance techniques and Shakespop mash-up methodology which are the most visible components of their legacy in the work of Q Brothers.

Rather than satirising specific conventions of hip-hop itself, the RSC's central object of parody in 'Rap Othello' is themselves, made explicit in its closing section when they paraphrase Wild Cherry's 1976 song 'Play That Funky Music' by singing '[d]o that funky Moor thing, white boy'.⁶⁰ In contrast, Q Brothers are engaged in the cultural hierarchy of hip-hop and its linguistic analogies with Shakespeare's plays. A significant reason why 'Rap Othello' is more concerned with performer identities is that, when it was conceived in 1988, the RSC had much less cultural material from which to draw. Daniel Singer acknowledges that, at that time, 'rap music was relatively new in the mainstream, and for all we knew, was a trend that might fall out of popularity, rendering our little ditty into a quaint 80s period piece'.⁶¹ Tichenor agrees, suggesting that 'it was primarily a satire of three white guys trying to or being forced to appropriate the music of a different culture and doing it badly'.⁶² Indeed, in the newest version of *Complete Works*, which was co-edited by the three founding members in 2018, the rap is replaced with a five-line vaudeville number played on the ukulele and sung by Adam, suggesting the original writers' anxiety about performing a rap parody in an era in which Q Brothers have delivered a legitimate reworking of *Othello* in this medium, and in which the 'Black Lives Matter' movement has led to a greater awareness of violence and systematic discrimination towards black people.

The Back Room Shakespeare Project

In the past decade, the United States has been home to the growth of a

⁶⁰ Daniel Singer and Jess Winfield, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged) [revised]* (Reduced Shakespeare Company, 2007), p. 26.

⁶¹ Daniel Singer, Personal interview, E-mail, 25 August 2015.

⁶² Austin Tichenor, Personal interview, Skype, 19 August 2015.

theatrical movement whose members have developed in ‘rough conditions’⁶³ that may be different from those of their British contemporaries but which also attempt to reclaim the conditions and spaces of early modern performance. The object of this section’s focus is one of these, the BRSP, who state on their website that a number of ‘outfits all over this country are exploring different ways of performing Shakespeare in bars’.⁶⁴ These various companies and projects share a common focus on rough Shakespeare performance which features, in varying degrees of extremity, spaces not usually designated for theatre, where audience and actors are able to drink.⁶⁵ In the BRSP’s case, these tend to be pubs, bars or restaurants although, as co-founder Samuel Taylor explains in his book about the project entitled *My Life With The Shakespeare Cult*:

We have played in non-bar spaces, but we always make sure that they have beer, and that the environment a crowd walks into is social, includes direct human-to-human relation, and forces the audience to work out their own problems: where to sit, what to drink, where to put their coats.⁶⁶

The venues in which the project performs therefore function as the type of ‘new Elizabethan space’⁶⁷ which Purcell discusses, describing ‘the “Globe Theatre” at The Bedford, a large pub in Balham’⁶⁸ as such an example:

⁶³ Brook, p. 74.

⁶⁴ The Back Room Shakespeare Project, ‘Friends All Over This Country’ in *The Back Room Shakespeare Project* <<https://www.backroomshakespeare.com/friends/>> [Accessed 5 November 2017].

⁶⁵ These include: Chicago’s Unrehearsed Shakespeare; Texas’s Shakespeare in a Bar; Atlanta’s Shakespeare on Draught and Shakespeare Tavern; New York’s Drunk Shakespeare, Shakesbeerience and ShakesBEER; New Jersey’s Basement Shakes; Washington D.C.’s Bootleg Shakespeare and Shakespeare in the Pub; New Mexico’s Bard Crawl; Charlotte’s Chickspeare; and Los Angeles’s bsTheatre and Shotspeare, in addition to the BRSP’s three branches of performance in Chicago, New York and Los Angeles.

⁶⁶ Samuel McClure Taylor, *My Life with the Shakespeare Cult* (Samuel McClure Taylor, 2015), pp. 89-90.

⁶⁷ Stephen Purcell, *Popular Shakespeare: Simulation and Subversion on the Modern Stage (Palgrave Shakespeare Studies)* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 194.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

A dimly lit indoor space with the same circular, galleried structure and thrust stage as the more famous Globe, it feels somehow an even more ‘collectivist’ space (probably due to its location within a pub) than [...] other ‘new Elizabethan’ spaces [...] I cannot help but wonder how a ‘popular’ production of Shakespeare would work in the space.⁶⁹

The BRSP provide an accurate example of what Purcell imagines and are also indicative of John Russell Brown’s vision of what ‘a company of about a dozen actors could achieve, if they were “set upon a stage” and closely surrounded by their audience in the same light’.⁷⁰ They utilise their surroundings to establish an absence of the actor/audience divide before the play begins and empower the spectator to make conscious decisions, rather than settling themselves into the comfort and safety of a traditional theatre venue. For instance, Taylor believes strongly in engendering audience engagement towards the BRSP’s performances in the same way that Shakespeare’s audience enjoyed bear-baiting alongside theatre as their primary form of popular entertainment. Therefore, he explains that ‘we start all of our plays with a tongue-in-cheek imitation of Elizabethan bear-baiting’,⁷¹ playing games such as insult competitions and arm-wrestling ‘whose job is to teach the audience that what is happening wasn’t worked out in advance, it’s happening *now*’.⁷²

Tichenor appeared as an actor in a 2015 production of *The Merchant of Venice* but did not have a specific role. His ideas about theatrical truth in *Long Lost* were ‘solidified by talking to Sam Taylor’,⁷³ and by reading Taylor’s book, which offered him the realisation that

in Shakespeare’s day, there was no such thing as naturalism. There was no such thing as realism. The audience coming into the Globe

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ John Russell Brown, *Free Shakespeare* (New and Expanded Edition) (New York and London: Applause Books, 1997), p. 83.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 90.

⁷² Ibid; author’s italics.

⁷³ Austin Tichenor, Personal interview, Skype, 19 November 2015.

didn't have an expectation that they were going to see a recreation onstage of Julius Caesar's Rome or the royal throne of Elsinore. They knew that they were seeing actors pretend to say these things and I think we've lost that. We've lost the idea that Shakespeare was live and immediate.⁷⁴

This directly influenced the 'wooden 'O'⁷⁵ joke at the beginning of the play, in which the Chorus inserts a specific reference to that specific performance's venue, in order to make the audience conscious of their surroundings. Tichenor believes, therefore, that just as 'Shakespeare was talking to his audience, *we* have to talk to *our* audience in the same way'.⁷⁶ This connects to Taylor's justification that 'having only one rehearsal serves Shakespeare's metatheatrical, anti-Realist, Actualist aesthetic'⁷⁷ and, in a podcast interview with Tichenor, he explains that this rule is motivated by a desire to 'live up to the legend of how Shakespeare's actors rehearsed, which was almost not at all'.⁷⁸

Tichenor's involvement, the project's revolving cast of players and an irreverent attitude to the actor/audience divide create tangible points of connection between the RSC and the BRSP. Long's view that *Complete Works* 'probably shifted back and forth between parody and homage from night to night'⁷⁹ also suggests a link to Taylor's idea that an audience can be trusted to influence and shape the actors' mode of performance. This gives the RSC and the BRSP the shared connection of the principles that Brook discusses concerning rough theatre: '[t]here was no fourth wall between actors and audience – the actor's unique aim was to create a precise response in an audience for whom he had total respect'.⁸⁰ Long's explanation thus suggests that 'parody and homage' are fluid methods in performance, rather than fixed

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Reed Martin and Austin Tichenor, *William Shakespeare's Long Lost First Play (abridged)* (The Reduced Shakespeare Company, 2015), p. 1.

⁷⁶ Austin Tichenor, 19 November 2015.

⁷⁷ Taylor, p. 87.

⁷⁸ Austin Tichenor, 'Episode 437. Back Room Shakespeare', *Reduced Shakespeare Company Podcast*, (Reduced Shakespeare Company 20 April 2015).

⁷⁹ Long, 29 September 2017.

⁸⁰ Brook, p. 81.

textual categories that can only be applied to specific parts of the script at particular times. He describes how these ‘were almost like tools we could use a little bit more one night, a little bit less the other night’,⁸¹ which demonstrates how the founding RSC members were primarily influenced by comedians and vaudeville performers, who adjust their work according to each audience’s mood and response.

Central to the BRSP performers is this ability to adapt to the demands of an audience, which represents an integral part of their purpose and is one of the most direct aspects of the RSC’s legacy: through exposure to their form of reduction and the reaction it engenders in what Brook terms ‘a popular audience’,⁸² the RSC have, at the very least, helped to popularise abridged versions of Shakespeare that both acknowledge their own pithiness and challenge perceptions about for whom Shakespeare wrote his plays. The BRSP have thus been able to succeed and evolve in conditions for Shakespearean reduction and irreverence for which the RSC are directly responsible.

Magnificent Bastard Productions

The only non-American enterprise which the BRSP’s website mentions is the popular Edinburgh Fringe show *Shitfaced*, which has been performed by MBP since 2010. Alliteratively combining the playwright’s surname with the colloquial, vulgar term for being excessively drunk, the use of which was first recorded between 1935 and 1940, the production uses different components of ‘back room’⁸³ Shakespeare than that of their American contemporaries. Instead of performing in a bar, the shows take place in more traditional theatre spaces and use as their focal point the effects of alcohol, rather than the location in which they are served. The premise of *Shitfaced* is, according to the production’s website, ‘the deeply highbrow fusion of an entirely serious

⁸¹ Long, 29 September 2017.

⁸² Brook, p. 75.

⁸³ Brook, p. 73.

Shakespeare play with an entirely shit-faced cast member'.⁸⁴ This involves a company of six actors presenting an abridged version of the text, usually pruned to around ninety minutes, with one of them attempting to perform while under the influence of alcohol.⁸⁵

Once the performer's identity is exposed, the game is for the audience to anticipate how long it will be before the actor becomes sufficiently incapacitated that they are either unable to continue or else provide a sufficiently entertaining series of textual and physical disruptions to Shakespeare's play. These have ranged from Hermia using a mobile phone to call her mother during 2012's *Dream to Angelo* sitting on the knees of audience members in 2016's *Measure for Measure* and asking them if they had ever experienced deviant forms of sex. Such incongruous interruptions and stand-up comedy influenced vulgarisations are designed to disrupt the audience's normal perception of Shakespearean performance conventions, by crossing them with practices more common to other forms of live entertainment, particularly in the stand-up-comedy-dominated context of the Edinburgh Fringe, where *Shitfaced* first achieved its popularity.

Taylor notes in his justification of The BRSP's 'One Rehearsal' rule that 'watching someone failing while trying hard in front of 200 people is fascinating'⁸⁶ and, in a sense, both the BRSP and MBP share in the idea that a lack of success in an attempted Shakespeare performance, a supposed bastion of highbrow art, is an undoubted vehicle for lowbrow comic subversion and entertainment. This also connects each of these companies to the RSC's exploration of a somewhat similar incident in *Complete Works* when Jess is

⁸⁴ Magnificent Bastard Productions, 'Shit-Faced Shakespeare' <<http://www.shitfacedshakespeare.com/>> [Accessed 6 November 2017].

⁸⁵ Another tool in the arsenal of Rough Theatre is the subversion of time as well as place, which can disrupt what an audience believes to be the traditional experience of Shakespeare in a theatre. C Theatre's *Shakespeare for Breakfast* is another Shakespearean Edinburgh Fringe institution and, being performed at 10am, thus satirises theatre-going convention by reversing when audiences would customarily attend a performance of Shakespeare. The productions consist of an hour-long parody of a specific Shakespeare play, which follows the play's narrative structure but also combines lines from the original text with modern references and stylistic variations. It is performed by five actors and contains a number of metatheatrical references to the likelihood of failure in this attempt to play multiple characters, in an extended joke which is strongly redolent of the RSC's legacy.

⁸⁶ Taylor, p. 86.

unable to complete Hamlet's 'to be or not to be' speech. The premise of *Shitfaced* implies that the insertion of a debilitated performer into any of these canonical texts will undermine it, and thus enable the resulting spectacle to be sold as popular entertainment. This renders questionable the specific importance of Shakespeare's work to their shows, given that equal capital might be gained by placing alternative forms or genres of theatrical culture, often, but not exclusively, viewed as elitist or highbrow, in opposition to a drunken performance.

The company inadvertently proved this point themselves by expanding their 'shitfaced' format to the medium of musical theatre in *Shitfaced Showtime*, which was performed in repertory with *Shitfaced Shakespeare* at the Edinburgh Fringe in 2017. The most direct comparison between the RSC and MBP is that both have produced parodies of Shakespeare which received attention at the Edinburgh Fringe and have used this to expand their companies into brands that have applied the successful formula of their first show into subsequent productions. This is a point of influence which cannot be ignored when discussing the RSC's legacy: their evolution into a business which provides an engine for reduction has awoken countless others to the commercial possibilities of selling Shakespeare's plays by mocking them, just as much as they have proven that methods of narrative abridgement can be used and duplicated to parody a wide variety of topics and writers.

The Pantaloons

The following two companies discussed in this chapter work with Shakespearean texts in the types of performance environments and spaces listed by Brook:

[...] theatre that's not in a theatre, theatre on carts, on wagons, on trestles, audiences standing, drinking, sitting round tables, audiences joining in, answering back; theatre in back rooms, upstairs rooms, barns; the one-night stands, the torn sheet pinned

across the hall, the battered screen to conceal quick changes [...] ⁸⁷

Purcell argues that a '[t]heatre space can be "dominated" before its audience has even set foot inside it' ⁸⁸ and he uses the Royal Shakespeare Company's touring productions as an example of theatre which 'can ignore "localness" and temporarily appropriate a space in the name of elite culture, alienating it from its local audience rather than deferring to their own claims of ownership'. ⁸⁹ He describes this in relation to their capacity to deliver the Royal Shakespeare Company 'experience' by transforming non-traditional spaces like 'a sports hall or community centre into a state of the art theatre'. ⁹⁰ He also suggests that this is the type of venue where 'popular Shakespearean performance finds its most creative expression'. ⁹¹ He further describes its central 'idea that as a "text" inscribed upon by human activity, no human-built site can ever be politically neutral or meaningless' ⁹² and that 'it is the intertextuality between piece and space which produces the interesting tensions of performance'. ⁹³ Purcell's criticism is reflected in his creative work as Artistic Director of The Pantaloons, an outdoor, touring theatre company which he founded and which owes a clear stylistic, dramaturgical and visual debt to the RSC.

The Pantaloons are best described as a form of postmodern folk theatre. The company formed at the University of Kent and performed their first production, an eight-man version of *As You Like It*, in 2004. They have since toured twenty-three shows, including eleven Shakespeare plays, adaptations of works by other well-known writers such as Charles Dickens and Jane Austen, and productions that compile multiple tales or historical events, such as *Grimm Fairy Tales* (2012) and *The Pantaloons' History of Britain* (2014). Their productions, which tour nationally in both indoor and outdoor venues, incorporate mixed gender casts and take a liminal approach to the

⁸⁷ Brook, p. 73.

⁸⁸ Purcell, p. 175.

⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 201.

⁹⁰ Royal Shakespeare Company, *Julius Caesar* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* publicity material, 2005.

⁹¹ Purcell, p. 202.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid, p. 203.

actor/audience divide reminiscent of the Renaissance faire conditions for performance.⁹⁴

Purcell recalls having seen the RSC in his teens but confesses that, though they 'were there in the mix'⁹⁵ as an early influence and he 'was certainly influenced by the practices of the RSC',⁹⁶ he did not initially think about 'what The Pantaloons do as being exactly like the RSC, because I always thought of our work as semi-parodic in the sense that Shakespeare's own plays are semi-parodic'.⁹⁷ Ironically, the company's work became more directly influential on The Pantaloons during their first non-Shakespeare production, *The Canterbury Tales* (2011), which Purcell describes as 'a watershed moment'⁹⁸ for the company and 'the first time which we borrowed directly'⁹⁹ from the RSC. Purcell adapted and directed the company's version of Geoffrey Chaucer's collection of stories, compressing all twenty-three tales into a single show, thus creating an

RSC-style aesthetic. Just as they do, we used a running thread that spanned the parts between each tale in order to make the show cohere. Our overarching storyline was that this is the Squire's first pilgrimage and he's desperate to tell a tale, but every time he starts, he gets interrupted. Finally, he improvises a tale based on audience suggestions and the other actors perform it.¹⁰⁰

Purcell thus adopted a number of practices used by the RSC throughout their

⁹⁴ For instance, their 2018 revival of *As You Like It* incorporates extended deviations from Shakespeare's text, pop culture references, incongruous early modern/contemporary dress, live music, actors roaming through the audience and stealing food and direct interaction with the performers' surroundings. In one specific performance, the four-person ensemble were forced to deal with loud overhead aeroplanes, 'heckling' peacocks and a stage-invading dog. Each element was built seamlessly into their performance and became a running joke throughout the performance in order to heighten its comic effect. Performance elements such as these cast The Pantaloons as an example of Brook's 'Rough Theatre [...]': if the audience is restive, then it is obviously more important to holler at the trouble makers – or improvise a gag – than to try to preserve the unity of style in the scenes' (p. 74).

⁹⁵ Stephen Purcell, Personal interview, University of Warwick, 4 June 2018.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

productions, including a meta-narrative, extensive multi-roling, and an audience participation section that directly impacts on the actors' performance. Moreover, this show also featured a number of elements which The Pantaloons continued to use in future productions, such as 'the anachronistic footwear that the RSC use, so that the show was literally grounded in the here and now, even while it was in a mock medieval world'.¹⁰¹ This postmodern approach to open air performance extended to their dialogue, which included

references to Simon Cowell and Ant and Dec alongside sections lifted directly from Chaucer. [...] We played with official culture versus modern pop culture, but actually brought them into synergy just as much as we were having fun from the clash. That's the key that both the RSC and we share, along with various other companies. It starts off as being about the incongruity between Shakespeare and modern pop culture, or Chaucer in our case, but then you find that, because Chaucer or Shakespeare's work was pop culture in its own time, there are all kinds of overlaps which work really well. [...] After *Canterbury Tales*, we hit on something that then became a key aspect of what we do all the time, such as the idea that we costume our productions anachronistically with elements of modern and early modern and the structure of trying to get through everything. In a strange way, and probably because the overlap would be too substantial, we've borrowed from them more in our non-Shakespeares. [...] Our most direct homage to them was our *History of Britain*, which we didn't bill as a 'complete' history but one of the things we like about that 'completist' idea is that it adds a clownish pace to the whole thing.¹⁰²

The Pantaloons adopted the RSC's hubristic belief that encapsulating every

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

tale or event in British history is possible, thus positioning them as direct descendants of the company, particularly given that they have gradually diversified their artistic portfolio beyond Shakespearean reduction and thus cultivated a strong following and reputation based on a performance style which involves the audience as collaborators and includes moments of serious drama amidst the chaotic farce.

The Handlebards

The Handlebards, as their name might suggest, take a particularly eco-friendly approach to Shakespearean performance, consisting as they do of two four-strong repertory companies, one all-male and one all-female, who cycle to and from venues, performing outdoor productions of Shakespeare's original texts. Formed in 2012, the company were born out of a post-university desire to have, as co-founder Paul Moss describes it, 'an adventure of sorts'¹⁰³ coupled with their collective enthusiasm for alternative methods of touring a play 'and not just hiring a van and putting on a show'.¹⁰⁴ He further explains that, as the chosen mode of transport, 'bikes was a happy medium between hiking and driving',¹⁰⁵ although, from a marketing perspective, additional nationwide factors also played a part in this decision: 'the fact that, in 2012, the cyclists won all the golds at the Olympics and in 2014, the Tour de France was kicking off in Yorkshire, so there was already this real love for bikes, if not already established, but definitely brewing'.¹⁰⁶ Moss and his colleagues' recognition of this 'as a selling-point',¹⁰⁷ for their fledgling company not only shows an entrepreneurial spirit similar to the way in which Martin and Tichenor have developed the RSC into a theatrical brand, but is an important part of understanding their ethos, which combines sustainable methods of touring with outdoor performances aimed at local communities.

¹⁰³ Paul Moss, Personal interview, Skype, 17 April 2017.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

In performance, the Handlebards use a number of techniques common to a Shakespeare performance by a reduced cast: heightened physical differentiation between their various characters and self-conscious acknowledgement of the impossible feat of playing two or three onstage at once. They also engage in ‘breaking down that feeling that there’s an “onstage” actor and an “offstage” actor’,¹⁰⁸ by talking to and seating the audience before the play begins. Moss suggests that ‘one of the biggest things we do to aid that process of being able to talk to the audience is that there’s no backstage, no curtain that opens, no airs and graces’.¹⁰⁹ His description, particularly the final four words, strongly evokes Brook’s argument that ‘the absence of scenery in Elizabethan theatre was one of its greatest freedoms’.¹¹⁰ This absence of a backstage space, which ‘is usually hidden away from the audience, obscuring the process which creates the performance’¹¹¹ further enhances the company’s narrative beyond that of the play itself. This is made explicit by their use of the bicycles to construct the stage and also during performances, by various means ranging from using their bells to indicate a switch in character, to riding onstage and through the audience.

Moss rejects the labels of parody, homage or adaptation, preferring to describe their work as ‘abridged versions of the plays’¹¹² and explains that the challenge which these original texts present to the actors is part of their entertainment value for both the actor and audience. Describing the typical fifth act denouement of the Shakespeare comedies which they have performed, in which the majority of characters meet onstage, many for the first time, such as in *The Comedy of Errors* and *Twelfth Night*, Moss confirms that ‘in the plays where there’s sixteen people onstage in the final scene, we won’t cut any of those characters. That’s just a puzzle for us that we need to unlock with four people onstage’.¹¹³ The Handlebards use a number of dramatic devices to solve this conundrum, including having one actor perform three roles at once by

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Brook, p. 96.

¹¹¹ Purcell, p. 177.

¹¹² Moss, 17 April 2017.

¹¹³ Ibid.

holding two sock puppets to create a conversation. This echoes the RSC's onstage methodology, such as during Scenes 12 and 24 of *Long Lost*, in which a large witch puppet was used to allow two actors to play all three of *Macbeth's* Witches, in order to facilitate their interaction with another character onstage, played by the third member.

The Handlebards also use audience participation, which involves someone being asked to perform in the play's final scene and bow with the cast. This is something else which they share with the RSC and, in both instances, it encourages the audience to engage in understanding the various levels of performance, including one where they have moved beyond the traditional actor/audience structure to gain agency by means of their representative onstage, who is performing an important fictional role in the drama's conclusion. Moss states that this distinction is deliberate:

we often sell ourselves as having an actor-character duality that we talk about in rehearsals where, when you're watching the show, you've always got the knowledge in your head as an audience member that you're watching an actor playing a character'.¹¹⁴

This absence of actor interiority or naturalistic illusion of character recalls Long's description of the RSC's early experiences of the liminal distance between multiple levels of onstage identity which they created at Renaissance faires as being 'like Russian dolls. When I was onstage playing Ophelia, I wasn't actually Ophelia. I was still Ajax Semaphore playing Ophelia, although really I was Adam Long playing Ajax Semaphore playing Ophelia'.¹¹⁵ Brook's assertion that that 'a popular audience usually has no difficulty in accepting inconsistencies of accent and dress, or in darting between mime and dialogue, realism and suggestion'¹¹⁶ represents the most tangible connection between the RSC and The Handlebards in that both create a shared experience for an audience that manages to succeed in being reverent towards Shakespeare and

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Adam Long, Personal interview, Skype, 29 September 2017.

¹¹⁶ Brook, p. 75.

irreverent towards the cultural attitudes and appropriations which form part of his legacy. Moss describes the RSC's influence on the company as 'inherent. It's always been there'.¹¹⁷ This confirms the connection: both companies perform Shakespeare with a cast of three to four actors, have expanded to tour with multiple companies performing different shows in repertory and employ comedic performance techniques that make metatheatrical acknowledgement of the prodigious task faced by their reduced casts.

Have The Handlebards, however, taken the concept of a reduced Shakespeare cast further than the RSC themselves by making the conscious decision to diversify their company in 2015, when their female troupe toured *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Romeo and Juliet*? The RSC's focus on male-centred comedy, written by men, has left them open to criticism in an age where the calls for gender diversity have grown considerably in the thirty-seven years since their formation. In addition to Tichenor's wish to give greater prominence to female characters in *Long Lost*, their 2016 collaboration with the pop-up book artist Jennie Maizels somewhat reflects a shift away from the exclusively male artistic voice, albeit within a non-theatrical project. And while Moss confesses that the initial purpose of the Handlebard's all-female group was simply 'to show that women are just as funny as men and they can do the job exactly the same way',¹¹⁸ he admits that it ultimately 'meant that we've been exploring different ways of making comedy too without just playing on gender stereotypes by men playing women. It's expanded our horizons'.¹¹⁹ The all-female production of *Long Lost* in 2019 by Chickspeare, referred to in Chapter 4, will undoubtedly produce a talking point, and, hopefully, additional study in terms of the RSC's own continuing development.

Conclusion: Appetite for Reduction

For its record-breaking duration at the Criterion Theatre, *Complete Works*

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Moss, 17 April 2017.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

must be considered as a preeminent example of a late twentieth-century parody's impact on contemporary performers of the genre. RSC actor Matthew Pearson suggests, for instance, that

by running for ten years in the West End, *Complete Works* gave people an appetite for that type of thing. I'm not sure if *The 39 Steps* would have happened without the RSC. The comedy coming from reduction and the impossibility. It's the struggle that comes from that and now there's *The Play That Goes Wrong*. Audiences love watching actors struggle and if you can eliminate a fourth wall it becomes even funnier.¹²⁰

He alludes here to a particular continuum of reduced performance which is found within the Criterion itself which, since *Complete Works* ended in 2005, has hosted *The 39 Steps* (September 2006 – September 2015) and *The Comedy About a Bank Robbery* (March 2016 – present), the latter of which was written by the members of Mischief Theatre, the company responsible for *The Play That Goes Wrong*. Although the first version of *The 39 Steps* was written in 1991 and adapted by National Theatre of Brent artistic director Patrick Barlow in 2005, thus making any direct RSC influence unlikely, Pearson reasons that the RSC's success set a precedent as well as a demand for that particular type of fast-paced, irreverent, reduced performance. Like the other productions discussed in this chapter, *The 39 Steps* consists of a small ensemble cast playing a large variety of roles and combining references to a range of media, in this case melding elements from John Buchan's 1915 novel and different films by director Alfred Hitchcock, who adapted the novel in 1935. Mischief Theatre's productions largely consist of a reconstruction of a well-known book or genre, such as *Peter Pan* and murder mystery, framed within a performance by a fictional hapless Cornley Polytechnic Drama Society. Although neither are Shakespearean in content, the decision to place two comedies of this format in the Criterion following the success of *Complete Works* is useful in considering

¹²⁰ Matthew Pearson, Personal interview, London, 18 January 2017.

the clear extent of the RSC's legacy.

A further visible aspect of the RSC's legacy is the unofficial repertory of 'reduced' performers which has developed in recent years, as evidenced by the following small sample of actors: in addition to his RSC roles, Pearson was an understudy cast member for *The 39 Steps* and performed with all-male Shakespeare company Propeller Theatre; his castmates for the 2017 UK tour of *Long Lost*, Joseph Maudsley and James Percy, had previously performed together in the Oddsocks production of *Julius Caesar* (2012) and *Potted Potter*; David Ellis is a regular performer in *Shitfaced Shakespeare*, who has also performed in *Potted Potter* and 2014-15 tours of *Complete Works* and *Bible*. The RSC have thus been partly responsible for the development of a modern style of vaudeville performance, which has been executed in productions by both themselves and those who might be considered as their contemporaries and followers. Indeed, Maudsley and Percy's involvement in *Long Lost* suggests a reciprocal loop of influence, whereby the RSC have been in existence long enough that those on whom they impacted have, in turn, contributed to their performances and further development as an international theatre brand.

The RSC's cultivation of a genre based around an abridged formula is a legacy which resurfaces across many of these case studies, particularly in the case of The Pantaloons, MBP and Q Brothers. Like the RSC, each of these companies realised that audiences who were willing to see Shakespeare 'cut down to size' and given an accessible, modern twist would be likely to enjoy a similar approach to other well-known authors, genres or periods of history. The recurring chosen subject matter is indicative of particular literary narratives and aspects of popular culture that continue to fascinate modern society: Dickens, Austen and musical theatre, to name just three.¹²¹ It is important to note that these theatre-makers should be considered in their own

¹²¹ Spymonkey, Q Brothers, The Pantaloons and the RSC's Adam Long have produced comic abridgements of Dickens. The Edinburgh Fringe show, *Austentatious* (2014-17), presents the novels of Jane Austen as improvised parody, and the production has subsequently been staged in London's West End. Improvised musicals are a popular subgenre of musical theatre commonly found in Edinburgh. The most prominent example is *Showstopper! The Improvised Musical*, the revolving troupe of which includes members of the Shakespeare improvisation company The School of Night.

right, as part of a continuum of parodic performance which sustains the popular demand for accessible renderings of Shakespeare that are removed from the limitations or barriers of institutional Shakespeare to be found in venues such as the National or Royal Shakespeare Theatres. I hope that, by having examined these companies in relation to the RSC, this thesis will prompt others to investigate their work, development and methodologies in greater detail.

As my research demonstrates, the work of the RSC is structured around a series of collisions between characters who differ both in ideology and purpose. The dramatisation of these opposed viewpoints about how Shakespeare's plays and characters ought to be interpreted, and for whom his work is intended, is what elevates their productions beyond superficial parody and delivers an often accurate, if hyperbolic, version of the conversations held between Shakespearean scholars, performers and aficionados. I offer their work as a culturally important representation of reduction as an increasingly popular and significant way in which society expresses itself. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram necessitate brevity, whether through the designation of a specific number of characters within a single tweet or, indeed, user preference to abandon words altogether in favour of communication in a purely visual sense, such as the screenshot or the omnipresent emoji.

Society is increasingly vocal in its disapproval of the dominant male voice in popular culture, individuals are in an apparent rush to express themselves online in as simultaneously succinct and considered a way as possible, and politicians deal in pithy, self-serving, fact-deviating soundbites rather than comprehensive and extended explanations. It is my contention, therefore, that despite the RSC's foundation and early work, which predates these cultural shifts and technological developments by more than two decades, this is a highly appropriate moment in history to document and analyse this specific company's history and body of work. In the twenty-first century Twittersphere and in the wake of a series of high-profile, international Shakespeare anniversaries, the concept of reducing Shakespeare's plays into as small a space as possible, as an act of celebration, is, arguably, as apt and

ripe for study as it has ever been.

The three RSC founders were born between 1959 and 1961; Martin and Tichenor were also born in the early 1960s. The company members, therefore, grew up during the postmodern era of the late twentieth century, with their foundations variously embedded in the countercultural movement of renaissance faires and influenced by satirists such as The Goons and Monty Python. If one adds to the mix their reliance on irony and the subversion of Shakespearean tropes, relationships and settings, it is plausible to view them as part of the postmodern tradition. However, as my analysis of their primary performance-based, Shakespeare-inspired works has illustrated, the RSC frequently oscillate between irony and sincerity, a behaviour which positions them, I contend, as an example of metamodernist art. Although the term appeared as early as 1975, metamodernism was first proposed as an alternative term to post-postmodernism by Dutch cultural theorists, Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, in their essay *Notes on metamodernism* (2010), where they argue that

[...] metamodernism oscillates between the modern and the postmodern. It oscillates between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony [...] Each time the metamodern enthusiasm swings toward fanaticism, gravity pulls it back toward irony; the moment its irony sways toward apathy, gravity pulls it back toward enthusiasm.¹²²

Luke Turner, a British metamodernist artist who collaborates with the American actor Shia LaBeouf and Finnish artist Nastja Säde Rönkkö as the performance art collective LaBeouf, Rönkkö & Turner – all of whom were born in the 1980s – suggests that

[o]urs is a generation raised in the '80s and '90s, on a diet of *The Simpsons* and *South Park*, for whom postmodern irony and

¹²² Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, 'Notes on metamodernism' in *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 2:1 (Routledge, 2010), pp. 5-6.

cynicism is a default setting, something ingrained in us. However, despite, or rather *because* of this, a yearning for meaning – for sincere and constructive progression and expression – has come to shape today’s dominant cultural mode.¹²³

Turner is describing Millennials and the increasing tendency for contemporary artists to produce work that rejects outright sarcasm in favour of art which meta-textually acknowledges the irony inherent in its own plot, setting or process of adaptation, whilst attempting to reach a level of sincerity with which its audience can identify, and thereby gain a greater understanding of their personal identity and issues within the wider world.¹²⁴ Turner goes on to express his belief 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’.¹²⁵ Although the RSC members belong to an older generation, their work nevertheless adheres to many of the principles outlined by Turner in his ‘Metamodernist Manifesto’, such as the need to ‘recognise oscillation to be the natural order of the world’¹²⁶ and his definition of metamodernism ‘as the mercurial condition between and beyond irony and sincerity, naivety and knowingness, relativism and truth, optimism and doubt, in pursuit of a plurality of disparate and elusive horizons’.¹²⁷

In *Complete Works*, for instance, the company members make an undeliverable promise by suggesting that Shakespeare’s oeuvre can be performed by three actors in ninety minutes: nonetheless, they set about accomplishing this very task. Their work frequently oscillates between

¹²³ Luke Turner, ‘Metamodernism: A Brief Introduction’ <http://www.metamodernism.com/2015/01/12/metamodernism-a-brief-introduction/> [Accessed 11 April 2019].

¹²⁴ For instance, the online movie magazine *Screen Junkies*, which focuses on contemporary film and television, published a video essay *How Lord & Miller Make Bad Movies Good: Spider-Verse Analysis* (2019) in which it was suggested that the films of writer-directors Phil Lord and Christopher Miller, especially their recent Oscar-winning animation *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* (2018), were examples of metamodernism. This is due to the film-makers’ ability to recycle ‘intellectual property’ which has been reinterpreted on an exhaustive number of occasions, such as with comic book superheroes like Spider-Man, to create a critically and economically successful film that both acknowledges this process of reiteration and attempts to harness the ideals which drew audiences to those characters and storylines in the first place.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Luke Turner, <http://www.metamodernism.org/>

¹²⁷ Ibid.

attempts, on the one hand, to preserve the purity of Shakespeare's language, cultural image and reputation and, on the other, to breathe new life into texts which are stereotypically regarded as boring or archaic, using modern cultural forms such as American football, cookery programmes and Disney films. I believe that the series of collisions which are at the core of the company's corpus and identity (highbrow/lowbrow, RSC/'other' RSC, academic/actor, work/play, sincerity/irony, nostalgic/neoteric) identifies them as metamodernist artists, who have staged plays which revolve around conflict and resolution throughout their thirty-seven year history. This thesis has explored those creative collisions, as well as the ways in which these have varied in different media, and how the RSC have influenced contemporary theatre companies in the exploration of similar tensions within their own work.

The central purpose of my thesis has been to illustrate how and why the company reduce Shakespeare's plays and the various forms which this work has taken throughout their existence. By delivering the first research project on the RSC, I wish to inspire and encourage others to conduct further study of the company's work, including such aspects as the wealth of material waiting to be analysed in their non-Shakespearean output; the company members' interaction with Shakespeare's work outside the confines of the RSC; productions of RSC plays by other professional or amateur performers and schools; and how the company will develop to remain popular, relevant and innovative.

Appendix A:

Reduced Shakespeare Company Timeline

(1981-2018)

- 1981:** Daniel Singer holds auditions in August for his half-hour version of *Hamlet* to be performed at the Northern Renaissance Pleasure Faire (RPFN) in Novato, California. He casts Jess Winfield (né Borgeson), Michael Fleming and Barbara Reinertson. Adam Long later joins the troupe after Reinertson breaks her ankle during the second weekend of the Faire. Long eventually replaces Reinertson as a full-time company member.
- 1982:** Singer, Winfield and Long depart to undertake degrees at higher education institutions in Washington, Berkeley and Portland. During the autumn, they perform a twenty-minute version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.
- 1983:** Singer and Long reunite to perform a two-man *Romeo and Juliet* at the faires during the summer.
- 1985:** After completing his degree, Winfield returns to the company. The company become a 'pass-the-hat' act and perform their two-man *Romeo and Juliet* and four-man *Hamlet* in repertory, with a fourth actor, David Springhorn, playing Claudius and the Ghost.
- 1987:** Having become a trio, Singer, Winfield and Long decide to write a full-length play for the Edinburgh Festival Fringe: the first, one-hour version of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)*. It premieres at the Renaissance Pleasure Faire of Southern California (RPFS) in June and is taken to the Fringe in August, where it is met with critical approval and popular acclaim, despite its unfavourable 10 a.m. performance slot.

- 1988:** The RSC establish a formal partnership. Props, costume and set designer, and sometime performer, Sa Winfield (née Thompson) is made a full member. The company begin to tour the US and expand their show to ninety-minutes by writing new material including a rap version of *Othello* and introducing audience participation.
- 1989:** The company continue to tour the US and perform in Melbourne, Australia. Singer leaves the company to become an 'Imagineer' for the Walt Disney Company. He is replaced by Reed Martin, a Berkeley classmate of Borgeson and former Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus clown. Martin contributes new material to *Complete Works*.
- 1990:** Martin becomes a Managing Partner of the RSC.
- 1991:** The RSC become a full-time company and tour Japan and Ireland. They also make their New York and London debuts.
- 1992:** In March, the RSC begin an unlimited engagement at the Arts Theatre in London's West End. Three months later, Winfield leaves the company and is replaced by Austin Tichenor, another Berkeley graduate and classmate of Winfield and Martin. Their show runs for eleven months. Tichenor becomes a Managing Partner.
- 1993:** Long, Martin and Tichenor create a second stage play, *The Complete History of America (abridged)*. They also write and perform *The Reduced Shakespeare Company Radio Show*, a six-episode radio series.
- 1994:** *Radio Show* is broadcast by the BBC World Service. Long cuts down on his touring commitments to remain in the UK with his English family. Matt Croke, a former Ringling Bros. clown and friend of Martin, joins the company.
- 1995:** Long, Martin and Tichenor (with additional material by Croke) write *The Bible: The Complete Word of God*. *The Reduced Shakespeare Company Christmas* is broadcast nationally in the US on Public Radio International. The RSC introduce a repertory theatre system, with Long taking charge of a company in Britain and Martin, Tichenor and Croke performing in America. Long's company undertake a year-long UK tour of *Complete Works* and *America*.

- 1996:** In March, the RSC begin a nine-year run at London's Criterion Theatre, performing *Complete Works* and *America* in repertory. The script of *Complete Works*, with accompanying parody footnotes, is published and made available for licensing in the US.
- 1997:** *Complete Works* is nominated for Best Comedy at the Laurence Olivier Awards and *Bible* opens for a limited run at the Gielgud Theatre in August, meaning that the company have three shows running in the West End simultaneously.
- 1998:** The RSC premiere their first musical *The Complete Millennium Musical (abridged)*, featuring Martin, Tichenor and new performer Dee Ryan. She provides additional material for the script.
- 2000:** Long, Martin and Tichenor film a television special of *Complete Works* for PBS (Public Broadcasting Service), featuring Singer in an anonymous cameo role as the Ego.
- 2001:** PBS broadcasts *Complete Works*.
- 2002:** *All The Great Books (abridged)*, the company's fifth stage production, receives its premiere.
- 2003:** The *Complete Works* television special is released on DVD and *Bible* joins *Complete Works* and *America* in repertory at the Criterion. Long formally leaves the company.
- 2005:** The nine-year, record-breaking Criterion run ends in April. The RSC premiere their new show, *Completely Hollywood (abridged)* in August at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe.
- 2006:** Martin and Tichenor write their irreverent reference book *Reduced Shakespeare: The Complete Guide For The Attention-Impaired (abridged)*, which is published by Hyperion. In December, the *Reduced Shakespeare Company Podcast* airs for the first time.
- 2007:** The *RSC Podcast* is nominated for two People's Choice Podcast Awards for *Best Production* and *Cultural/Arts* (also receiving nominations in 2008 and 2009). Martin and Tichenor write and appear in two television episodes for a TBS pilot called *The Week Reduced*. Singer and

Winfield update *Complete Works* in a revised version of their original script.

- 2010:** Martin and Tichenor write, and with Matt Rippy, perform *Lost Reduced* for Sky TV. They also unveil their seventh play, *The Complete World of Sports (abridged)*. Tichenor and Ryan tour the Folger Shakespeare Library vaults, where Tichenor receives inspiration to write *William Shakespeare's Long Lost First Play (abridged)*.
- 2011:** Martin and Tichenor celebrate the RSC's thirtieth anniversary by airing a live webcast with Jess and Sa Winfield and Daniel Singer. In November, the company premiere their eighth stage production: *The Ultimate Christmas Show (abridged)*.
- 2012:** The RSC perform *Sports* at London's Arts Theatre for six weeks during the 2012 Summer Olympics. They return to the US for an Autumn tour of the 'Special Election Edition' of *America*.
- 2013:** In April, the company begin an eight-month UK tour of *Complete Works*. Over the course of the year, they perform six different shows in five countries on four continents. Their ninth play, *The Complete History of Comedy (abridged)*, opens in November.
- 2014:** The RSC break the Guinness World Record for Highest Theatre Performance by performing on board an EasyJet flight from London to Verona on the 23rd April 2014, the 450th anniversary of Shakespeare's birthday. In September, Reston Center Stage in Virginia hosts *The Complete Works of the Reduced Shakespeare Company (abridged) Extravaganza*: seven of the RSC's nine stage shows are performed over two weeks. Martin and Tichenor begin the script development of *Long Lost*, working again with Peter Holland as a textual consultant, who first advised on *Reduced Shakespeare: The Complete Guide For The Attention-Impaired (abridged)*.
- 2015:** Martin and Tichenor direct Dan Sasaki, Teddy Spencer and Chad Yarish in two workshop productions of *Long Lost* at Shakespeare Napa Valley (26 June–12 July) and the Notre Dame Shakespeare Festival (4–30 August).

- 2016:** *Long Lost* premieres at the Folger Theatre in Washington, D.C. on Thursday 21 April, two days before the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death. The show is directed and performed by Martin and Tichenor, with third actor Spencer retained after his participation in the workshops. The show transfers to the UK in August for the duration of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe.
- 2017:** In January, Tichenor directs a UK company of actors, Joseph Maudsley, Matthew Pearson and James Percy, who embark on a 50-city tour of *Long Lost*. This culminates in a month-long run of an hour-long version of the show at Edinburgh's Gilded Balloon. Martin, Tichenor and Spencer tour the show in the US. Meanwhile, Martin and Tichenor also write *Pop-Up Shakespeare*, a pop-up children's book on the playwright's life and works, in collaboration with illustrator Jennie Maizels.
- 2018:** The US cast performs *Long Lost* off-Broadway at the New Victory Theatre in March and the Pittsburgh Public Theatre in June. The script is published simultaneously in America and Britain and made available for licensing. Martin and Tichenor begin work on their eleventh stage show, *Hamlet's Big Adventure (a prequel)*. Singer, Winfield and Long reunite to collaborate on a new version of *Complete Works*, an update of the revised 2007 version.

Appendix B:

Translations of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged) (1994-2017)*

Language	Contract	Date of Original Contract
Bosnian	Bosnia-Herzegovina	16/02/2005
Catalan	Spain	02/07/2004
Croatian	Croatia	06/03/2003
Czech	Czech Republic	08/05/2008
Danish	Denmark	01/07/1994
Dutch	Hague, Holland	27/03/2017
Estonian	Estonia	19/11/1996
Euskera	Spain	02/07/2004
Finnish	Finland	01/07/1994
Flemish	Belgium, Holland	25/05/2016
French	France, French-speaking Switzerland, Belgium, Luxembourg	10/01/2000
Gallego	Spain	02/07/2004
German	Germany, Austria, German-speaking Switzerland	01/04/2007
Greek	Greece	17/04/2003
Hebrew	Israel	28/05/2009
Hungarian	Hungary	14/05/2001
Icelandic	Iceland	01/07/1994
Italian	Italy	23/03/2012
Korean	Korea	27/03/2014
Mandarin	Shanghai, China	02/08/2016
Norwegian	Norway	01/07/2014
Polish	Poland	15/02/1998
Portuguese	Portugal	10/10/2013
Russian	Belarus	18/01/2006
Slovak	Slovakia	25/02/2008
Slovene	Slovenia	10/01/2013
Spanish	Mexico	10/09/2010
Swedish	Sweden	01/07/1994
Turkish	Turkey	19/09/2013
Yugoslavian	Yugoslavia	23/10/2003

Appendix C:

Glossary of Adaptation Terms

By means of this glossary, I outline the terms (some of which may, at first glance, appear interchangeable) that are used to describe the RSC's processes of adaptation, as well as those of other theatrical practitioners discussed in this thesis.

- **Abridgement** – the act of shortening a text. This is used to describe both comic abridgements and cut-down versions of full-length plays. Each RSC play title ends with '*(abridged)*' irrespective of its subject matter.
- **Collage** – a term used in visual arts to describe metaphorically the process whereby a script is constructed out of disparate elements that have been appropriated and reassigned across a new text.
- **Compression** – taking something large and figuratively squeezing it together to create a new, smaller entity.
- **Condensation** – breaking something down into a more manageable size. The word was included in an early, suggested name for the company.
- **Expansion** – exploring how certain characters (especially those in minor roles) might behave or affect the action differently with increased stage time.
- **Mash-up** – Combining two characters or scenes from Shakespeare in order to create alternative conversations and scenarios. The term is widely used in popular music to describe mixing two tracks and in 'fan fiction', a genre which relates to the RSC's more recent work.
- **Parody** – imitating a writer or genre in an exaggerated style for

comic effect, though sometimes inverted by the RSC to achieve pathos. The company also parody the medium in which they work, aping its features and tropes, often focusing on this in equal measure to their source material.

- **Reduction** – the process by which something is made smaller or less in amount. As their name suggests, this is the RSC's primary tool of adaptation. Reduction also describes the process of intensifying flavour, a sub-definition which can be applied to the ways in which the RSC reduce the meaning of a play to its basic essence by means of a series of iconic scenes, quotations and images.
- **Recycling** – the act of repurposing material into something new; this has slightly pejorative connotations when applied to Shakespearean adaptation, from the implication that what exists is out of date.
- **Revision** – the companies discussed in this thesis often revise and change their material according to location and audience. The RSC, for instance, have in-built instructions within their scripts to ensure topicality.

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