ALL EARLY MODERN DRAMA IS VIRTUAL TO US

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Critical interest in Shakespeare and virtual reality (VR) has grown steadily in recent years, inspired in part by the proliferation of newly available VR productions or adaptations of Shakespeare's plays. Peter Otto has helpfully observed that 'by tying virtual reality to specific technologies', scholars 'preclude attempts to compare digital virtual realities with those constructed in other eras and with other media'.[1] My interest, in this article, lies in extending Otto's more capacious understanding of virtual reality to a consideration of sensory manipulation in a metaphorical sense in relation to the constructed, controlled or otherwise limited perspectives that I argue have become ingrained in the way we, as Shakespeare scholars, apprehend the field of early modern drama.

Inherent in the modern sense of 'virtual' is an element of the 'supposed' or 'imagined', but for the early moderns, the term carried a sense of relating to 'essential' (as opposed to 'physical' or 'actual') existence.[2] Of course, all early modern drama exists primarily in this virtual sense – the essential 'work' itself (as distinct from its textual witnesses) is ephemeral and event-based, such that lost plays are in one important sense no more lost than a well-papered play such as *Titus Andronicus*.[3] In this article, I want to focus on the *essence* of plays now lost and think about ways to work with them in relation to the drama that continues to possess a textual (or what we might call 'physical' or 'actual') existence. How do we know what we're dealing with, and how might we think differently about the ways we apprehend early modern drama from the perspective of theatre history?

In his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, René Descartes drew a distinction between beliefs acquired '*from* the senses or *through* the senses'.[4] The distinction seems instructive to me as I contemplate how a Shakespeare scholar might make sense of early modern drama. I might think I know what the dramatic corpus looks like *from* my senses, by reading the surviving playtexts; but I can also know the corpus *through* my senses, by examining the trace evidence that points to a much larger and more complex set of theatrical events. The trouble is, we tend to be conditioned to leap over lacunae in evidence, telling ourselves: 'There's nothing to see here, move along.' *Nothing will come of nothing*. And so the story of early modern drama is often the story of surviving plays and surviving evidence: history as written by the conquerors (or should I say, the survivors?). What can be done about this? If we treat the act

[1] Peter Otto, *Multiplying Worlds: Romanticism, Modernity, and the Emergence of Virtual Reality* (Oxford, 2011), p. 5.

[2] *OED Online*, 'virtual', sense II 4a.

[3] On the distinction between the text or document and the underlying 'work', see G. Thomas Tanselle, 'The nature of texts', in *A Rationale of Textual Criticism* (Philadelphia, 1989), pp. 11–38. See also Roslyn L. Knutson and David McInnis, 'Lost documents, absent documents, forged documents', in *Rethinking Theatrical Documents in Shakespeare's England*, ed. Tiffany Stern (London, 2020), pp. 241–59, on the relationship between *Titus* and the documentary evidence pertaining to lost plays.

[4] Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy, with Selections from the Objections and Replies*, trans. and ed. John Cottingham (Cambridge, 1999), p. 12 (emphasis mine).

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of Shakespeare scholarship itself as an exercise in virtual reality, and contemplate how our senses are deployed in the apprehension of early modern drama, might we comprehend the field in different ways?

At the heart of this article is an attempt to ponder new and better ways to work productively with nothingness, with not just lost plays but gaps in evidence and knowledge. Through metaphors, I'll explore how we might experiment in altering our perception of the relationship between the plays of Shakespeare's London. I'm thinking here in terms of repertory studies, commercial responses and artistic influence. From Roslyn Knutson's pioneering work, we know about duplicate plays, serial plays, spin-offs and other commercial tactics used by the London companies;[5] but, of course, such pragmatic business responses can sometimes be left to one side when Shakespeare is one of the playwrights in question. Too often we think of milestones in Shakespeare's career in relation to Shakespeare's other output – or, at best, to the surviving output of his fellow playwrights.

In part this is because dealing with loss is hard: a quick survey of scholarly responses conforms rather amusingly to the traditional stages of grieving. This includes *shock* (the typical response to learning that the surviving drama is in the distinct minority of the period's total output); *denial* (typified by the nineteenth-century scholarship of Frederick Gard Fleay, who lumped together the titles of lost plays with surviving plays to minimize the losses);[6] *blame* (exemplified by the infamous story, told by W. W. Greg, about the callous cook named Betsy who supposedly used John Warburton's extensive collection of unique play manuscripts as baking paper for her pies);[7] *anger* (that men like Edmond Malone or John Payne Collier, who had unfettered access to documentary evidence, didn't always preserve or transcribe it); *depression* (exemplified by Andrew Gurr's reluctance to recognize the value of lost plays: he adopts the baseless if 'self-comforting assumption' that 'only those plays that were most famous and successful in their own day were likely to be turned into print, or survive in manuscript');[8] and, most recently (at last), a kind of *acceptance*, as found in Martin Wiggins's magisterial *British Drama*, or the *Lost Plays Database* and its numerous publication offshoots.[9] I take all this as a positive: acknowledging how far we've come with the discussion of lost plays, and how acceptance – acknowledging loss – is the precursor to developing ways of dealing with loss productively.

I want to try a thought experiment or two. What follows will be somewhat gestural, as I run through some different approaches to conceptualizing nothingness and the virtual – the common element is a desire to move beyond the too easy and debilitating dichotomy of 'lost' and 'extant', and to provoke consideration of more productive ways to apprehend data *through* our senses, not just from our senses.

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In my recent book, *Shakespeare and Lost Plays*, I addressed lost plays by using the metaphor of negative space and Rubin's vase: the iconic two-dimensional image of a vase, the contours of which (one slowly notices) are shared with a contiguous image of two faces looking at one another.[10] The image demonstrates how when 'two fields have a common border', there exists the potential for the 'figure' and the 'ground' in an image to interrelate in unstable ways, and to

[5] Roslyn Lander Knutson, *The Repertory of Shakespeare's Company, 1594–1613* (Fayetteville, 1991).

[6] Frederick Gard Fleay, *A Biographical Chronicle of the English Drama, 1559–1642*, 2 vols. (London, 1891).

[7] W. W. Greg, 'The bakings of Betsy', *The Library* 7 (1911), 225–59.

[8] Andrew Gurr, 'What is lost of Shakespearean plays, besides a few titles?' in *Lost Plays in Shakespeare's England*, ed. David McInnis and Matthew Steggle (Basingstoke, 2014), pp. 55–71; p. 56.

[9] Martin Wiggins, with Catherine Richardson, *British Drama, 1533–1642: A Catalogue* (Oxford, 2012–); David McInnis, Matthew Steggle and Misha Teramura, gen. eds., *Lost Plays Database* (Washington, DC, 2009–): https://lostplays.folger.edu.

[10] David McInnis, *Shakespeare and Lost Plays: Reimagining Drama in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2021), pp. 21–6.

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be mutually shaping.[11] The metaphor works really well, I think, for helping think through the mutually constitutive nature of great swathes of lost plays and the surviving plays with which they once mingled. The first metaphor of this article is slightly different, in that I want to narrow the focus and think instead about *individual* plays behaving weirdly, and consider an alternative 'enabling' metaphor, pertaining to the relationship between a single surviving play and a single lost play. I draw my inspiration from the sensational discovery of a new planet.

In 1848, when J. P. Nichol, Professor of Astronomy at the University of Glasgow, explained to his readers the process by which Neptune was discovered, he could barely contain his enthusiasm: 'Never was there accomplished a nobler work, and never work more nobly done!'[12] Uniquely in the history of astronomy, the new planet's existence had been predicted before the planet itself had been observed directly, because Neptune was clearly exerting influence on its neighbour: Uranus. As Nichol described it: 'The orbit of Uranus, as explained by the theory of the Law of Gravity, differed from the observed orbit . . . and the success or verisimilitude of any new theory, simply depended on its power to make these discrepancies disappear'.[13] Noting these 'irregular movements' in the elliptic orbit of Uranus, the French mathematician Urbain Le Verrier realized that something significant must be disrupting Newton's universal law of gravitation.[14] He recorded the variations systematically and used these to calculate within a degree of precision the exact location of the previously unknown planet. In a letter dated 23 September 1846, he communicated his research on the new planet's likely coordinates to Johann Gottfried Galle at the Berlin Observatory, where Galle verified the planet's existence within *half an hour* of searching.[15]

Studying lost plays is not entirely dissimilar to searching for planets. Uranus behaves idiosyncratically and its behaviour is explained by Neptune. The known commodity (Uranus; extant plays) reacts to the unknown commodity (Neptune; lost plays). Moreover, even without seeing Neptune itself, we can infer its qualities and existence from the effect it exerts on its neighbour. My astronomical conceit thus focuses on the repertorial interaction of a single lost play and a single extant play. The guiding principle from astronomy is that our knowledge of the visible or 'known' body is in some way tempered by an awareness of its relationship to the invisible or 'absent' body; accordingly, I argue that greater awareness of the lost play's subject matter and possible contents helps us notice 'irregular movements' in the surviving play, prompting fresh analyses of those elements which had previously been considered marginal in the extant drama.

The direction of influence might run the other way, of course: there are instances where the dramatic equivalent of gravitational distortion is evident in a lost play, and where understanding that play as a response to an influential surviving play may be illuminating. In the repertory system, it was perfectly normal for companies to attempt to emulate the success of their own plays or their competitors' plays by duplicating or otherwise engaging with them.[16] Although a company might pioneer a new type of play or subject matter, they would also inevitably perform plays that would respond to or depend upon the competition in some way. Just as Uranus's orbit cannot be understood without Neptune, surviving plays and lost plays cannot be understood without each other, through analysing 'gravitational' effects.

I'm not necessarily thinking about traditional source studies here: these, in the past, have

[11] Edgar Rubin, 'Figure and ground', in *Visual Perception: Essential Readings*, ed. Steven Yantis (Philadelphia, 2001), pp. 225–31; p. 225.
[12] J. P. Nichol, *The Planet Neptune: An Exposition and History* (Edinburgh, 1848), p. 83.
[13] Nichol, *The Planet Neptune*, p. 84.
[14] Nichol, *The Planet Neptune*, p. 79; see also David Aubin, 'Le Verrier, Urbain-Jean-Joseph', in *Biographical Encyclopedia of Astronomers*, gen. ed. Thomas Hockey (New York, 2014), p. 1316.
[15] Mihkel Jõeveer, 'Galle, Johann Gottfried', in *Biographical Encyclopedia of Astronomers*, ed. Hockey, p. 776.
[16] Knutson, *The Repertory*, pp. 40, 48–50.

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moved in terms of similitude not difference, and thus capture only one form of reaction to precedent.[17] For example, Shakespeare's use of Chaucer is well studied, but only partially explains why *Troilus and Cressida* is so unrelentingly cynical and bleak; understanding Shakespeare's dark comedy as a creative reaction against the lost 'Troilus and Cressida' of 1599 by Chettle and Dekker for the Admiral's Men is probably just as helpful as combing through Chaucer.[18] Geoffrey Bullough, who compared the fragmented backstage plot of the lost Admiral's Men play to the text of Shakespeare's, observed that 'Shakespeare's piece owed something both positively and negatively to Dekker and Chettle's potboiler.'[19] He implied that the lost play was cast in a more tragic mode than Shakespeare's when he noted that the plot ends with the confrontation between Achilles and Hector, and when he conjectured that the lost play may even have continued to present Troilus' death.[20] Regardless of whether it did do that, the lost play (from what we know about it for certain from its backstage plot) is indeed more tragic than Shakespeare's – though my frame of referencing here is symptomatic of the very problem I want to address: I should reverse that emphasis and note that Shakespeare's *subsequent* play was cast in a *less tragic* mode than the established precedent.[21]

In a slightly different example, E. A. J. Honigmann suggested that Shakespeare may have dramatized Othello's story as a deliberate response to a lost 'True History of George Scanderbeg' play by the Earl of Oxford's Men in 1601, noting that 'Scanderbeg, a renegade Christian, led Turkish armies against Christians, and Othello could have been written as a counter-attraction, with a Moor starring as a Christian general against the Turks.'[22] The analogy is imperfect, though, since Scanderbeg's subsequent *defection* from the Turkish armies and his coup on behalf of the *Christians* is the more usual point of remembrance for the early moderns.[23] Scanderbeg – revered by the Turks, hence his honorific (alluding to Alexander the Great) – was originally and ultimately a Christian. In this instance, Shakespeare seems more likely to have offered a play with an outsider as protagonist (Othello leading the Christian, Venetian army against the Turks) in emulation of the complexity of the Albanian national hero's allegiances.

We might also think about the bathetic killing off of Falstaff offstage in Shakespeare's *Henry V* (1599) in relation to the Admiral's Men's two-part 'Sir John Oldcastle' plays from later that same year (November for the extant *Part 1*) and early the following year (for the lost Part 2).[24] Actually, this seems an interesting example of the gravitational distortion phenomenon: Shakespeare's play predates the Oldcastle plays, but in the close community of early modern playwrights, it's at least possible he got wind of Munday, Drayton, Wilson and Hathway's plans. If then, as Wiggins prudently assumes, the martyrdom of Oldcastle over the road at the Rose may have been dramatized in a manner 'faithful to the account in Foxe' (burned into the minds of many from the elaborate woodcut), Shakespeare's anticlimactic report of the fat old knight's death would have been a marked contrast at the Globe.[25]

For that matter, we might think too about Shakespeare's inclusion of a famously Eastern fairy king, Oberon, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* not just in terms of postcolonial readings and the Indian

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17 The contributors to Dennis Austin Britton and Melissa Walter's *Rethinking Shakespeare Source Study: Audiences, Authors, and Digital Technologies* (New York, 2018) exert welcome pressure on such older models.

18 See 'Troilus and Cressida' in the *Lost Plays Database*: https://lostplays.folger.edu/Troilus_and_Cressida, or Wiggins, *British Drama*, entry #1182.

19 Geoffrey Bullough, 'The lost "Troilus and Cressida"', *Essays and Studies* 17 (1964), 24–40; p. 40.

20 Bullough, 'Lost "Troilus"', p. 37.

21 Bullough, 'Lost "Troilus"', p. 40.

22 E. A. J. Honigmann, 'The First Quarto of *Hamlet* and the date of *Othello*', *Review of English Studies* 174 (1993), 211–19; p. 217.

23 See David McInnis, 'Marlowe's influence and "The true history of George Scanderbeg"', *Marlowe Studies: An Annual* 2 (2012), 71–85.

24 See 'Sir John Oldcastle, Part 2' in the *Lost Plays Database*: https://lostplays.folger.edu/Sir_John_Oldcastle,_Part_2.

25 Wiggins, *British Drama*, #1236 (following Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge, *The Oldcastle Controversy* (Manchester, 1991)).

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child over whose custody Oberon fights with Titania, but in terms of playgoer familiarity with this established stage character via not only Robert Greene's *Scottish History of James IV* (1590) but also the lost 'Huon of Bordeaux' play staged by the Earl of Sussex's Men at the Rose in 1593–1594.[26] The Huon romance in prose form, in which the protagonist meets Oberon on the way from France to Babylon, is the *locus classicus* of the Oberon legend, having been translated into English from French since the 1530s. Even in the unlikely event that Shakespeare did not have it in mind a year later when writing *Dream*, many of his playgoers would have.

Or we might ask why – of all the available means of purportedly establishing guilt and catching the conscience of the king – would Shakespeare's Hamlet resort to the involuntary extraction of confession via a thinly veiled staging of Claudius's sins? This remarkably specific ruse was, of course, inspired by an infamous real-life incident known to playgoers from a performance of a lost 'Friar Francis' play performed by Sussex's Men, at which a woman in the audience confessed to poisoning her husband after witnessing (as Heywood tells us) the staging of 'a woman, who insatiately doting on a yong gentleman, had (the more securely to enioy his affection) mischieuously and seceretly murdered her husband, whose ghost haunted her'.[27] The notorious event was subsequently recounted in a Chamberlain's Men's play at the turn of the century: *A Warning for Fair Women*.

And again, as with the Chaucer example, we might ask not just where Shakespeare found pertinent narrative details, but what might have prompted him to focus on them. Holinshed, for example, relates that Macbeth had such faith in the prophecies that he 'beleeued he shoulde neuer be vanquished, till Byrnane wood were brought to Dunsinnane, nor yet to be slaine with anye man, that should be or was borne of any wom[an]'. The historical Macduff, though, announced that 'I am euen he that thy wysards haue told the of, who was neuer borne of my mother, but ripped out of hir wombe.'[28] There's no ambiguity, then, around where Shakespeare found such details to dramatize (clearly it was Holinshed). But why he chose to do so at all – when there are always choices to be made about what to include and exclude, what to embellish and what to downplay from source texts – is another question. Such deceptive prophecies were not unique to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, and an avid playgoer may recognize the trope from elsewhere. In the Admiral's Men's 'Valentine and Orson' play of 1598, for example, there's every likelihood that, following available sources, Valentine and Orson had 'to do battle with a Green Knight who can reputedly only be defeated by a king's son who was not suckled by a woman'.[29] (Orson, separated at birth from his brother Valentine and raised in the woods by bears, as a wild man, is thus able to succeed in the task.)

I've written at length elsewhere about the lost 'tragedie of Gowrie' play performed twice by the King's Men in the late autumn of 1604, and its relationship to *Macbeth*: both are Scottish histories, but 'Gowrie' was evidently about very recent Scottish history and an ostensible assassination attempt on King James. We learn from a letter sent by John Chamberlain to his friend Ralph Winwood in the Hague, in December 1604, that certain councillors were very displeased with the play, but whether that was because 'the matter or manner be not well handled, or that yt be thought unfit that princes should be plaide on the stage in theyre life time' remains unclear.[30] The implication is that the subject matter was too sensitive, and

[26] See 'Huon of Bordeaux' in the *Lost Plays Database*: https://lostplays.folger.edu/Huon_of_Bordeaux; Wiggins, *British Drama*, #921.

[27] Thomas Heywood, *Apology for Actors* (1612), sigs. Gv–G2r; see also 'Friar Francis' in the *Lost Plays Database*: https://lostplays.folger.edu/Friar_Francis; and Wiggins, *British Drama*, #924.

[28] Raphael Holinshed, 'The Historie of Scotlande', in *The Firste Volume of the Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande* (London, 1577), p. 251.

[29] Wiggins, *British Drama*, #842 (his conjectural plot summary of the lost Queen's Men play on the same topic; see #1135 for the lost Admiral's Men play).

[30] John Chamberlain, *The Letters of John Chamberlain*, ed. N. E. McClure, vol. 1 (Philadelphia, 1919), p. 199; see also McInnis, *Shakespeare and Lost Plays*, pp. 120–8.

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that the King's Men had misjudged the political climate. Scholars have noted that *Macbeth* walks that fine line more securely, broaching the king's interests but distancing itself from the sensitivities. What has not been remarked upon previously, to my knowledge, is that a much more explicit, material link exists between the two plays: Holinshed tells us in no uncertain terms that Macbeth himself ordered and oversaw the building of Dunsinane castle – and that it was situated 'in Gowry, ten myles from Perth'.[31] This historical titbit makes the King's Men's apparent contrition (*Okay, we'll try something else to please the king*) suddenly seem more like subversive defiance (*FINE, here's a historical play – about the exact same place that caused offence last time . . .*).

I won't keep reeling off examples; my point is that we don't need the text of a lost play in order to observe gravitational distortion at work in the surviving drama of the period. If something's amiss, grab your copy of Wiggins or browse the *Lost Plays Database*, and see whether it might have made more sense to an early modern playgoer.

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I'd like to try another metaphor about apprehension and comprehension. In his discussion of plot, 'an organization that humanizes time by giving it form', Frank Kermode once wrote:

> Let us take a very simple example, the ticking of a clock. We ask what it *says*: and we agree that it says *tick-tock*. By this fiction we humanize it, make it talk our language. Of course, it is we who provide the fictional difference between the two sounds; *tick* is our word for a physical beginning, *tock* our word for an end. We say they differ. What enables them to be different is a special kind of middle. We can perceive a duration only when it is organized. It can be shown by experiment that subjects who listen to rhythmic structures such as *tick-tock*, repeated identically, 'can reproduce the intervals within the structure accurately, but they cannot grasp spontaneously the interval between the rhythmic groups,' that is, between *tock* and *tick*, even when this remains constant. The first interval is organized and limited, the second not.[32]

Too often, I suggest, we may be guilty of imposing a Shakespearian (or at least canonical) *tick-tock* of a rhythmical structure onto our accounts of the early modern English stage, moving between anthology-worthy plays such as *Tamburlaine* and *Henry V* with little concern for George Chapman's intervening *Tamburlaine* parody, *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria*, despite it being one of the most profitable plays at the Rose according to Henslowe's records.[33] The kinds of plays that Bernard Beckerman dismissed as repertorial 'filler' should fall in the measured interval between *tick* and *tock*, not the impenetrable void between *tock* and *tick*.[34] Presumably I am not alone in thinking instinctively of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as curious for being a so-called 'royal play'; for dramatizing Scottish history; and for being an emphatically Jacobean tragedy in this regard – opposed (in my mind at least) to the quintessentially Elizabethan *Hamlet*, whose Denmark, following a decade of stage plays in which the political fates of England and Denmark are intertwined, engaged closely with Elizabethan concerns.[35] In that context, *Hamlet* is the *tick* and *Macbeth* is the *tock*; others will no doubt have a different internal referent point for measuring an arc of Shakespeare's career.

But the narrative of *Macbeth* also grows out of these late 1590s concerns with Scandinavia that would have meant, for an early modern playgoer, a different *tick* to *Macbeth*'s *tock*. *Macbeth* is a Scottish history, but Holinshed explicitly frames the Macbeth story in terms of the Scots repelling a Norwegian invasion of Scotland by Sueno, and England's King Canute sending reinforcements after his brother Sueno's defeat at the hands of

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[31] Holinshed, 'The Historie of Scotlande', p. 248.

[32] Frank Kermode, 'Fictions', in *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction, with a New Epilogue* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 44–5.

[33] See Holger Schott Syme, 'The meaning of success: stories of 1594 and its aftermath', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 61 (2010), 490–525; p. 507.

[34] Bernard Beckerman, *Shakespeare at the Globe: 1599–1606* (New York, 1962), p. 16.

[35] See McInnis, *Shakespeare and Lost Plays*, pp. 95–104; Steven Mullaney, 'Mourning and misogyny: *Hamlet*, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and the final progress of Elizabeth I, 1600–1607', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 45 (1994), 139–62.

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Macbeth.[36] This historical subject matter was not entirely new to the public theatres. The anonymous manuscript play *Edmund Ironside* (British Library, MS Egerton 1994, fols. 96r–118r), which Wiggins plausibly dates to 1597 (from within a broader range of 1593–1603), features the competition between Canute and Ironside for the English throne, culminating in a duel that establishes how perfectly equal the contenders are, resulting in an amicable resolution to share the kingdom. All is not quite wrapped up neatly, however, for Earl Leofric of Chester, who sided with Edmund, is outraged when Canute kidnaps and mutilates his sons; the play ends with Leofric still craving revenge on Canute.

Henslowe records performances of a 'knewtus' (i.e. 'Canute') or 'ha*rdicu*te' (i.e. 'Hardicanute') play in 1597 at the Rose, and the purchase of the book of the play ('Hardicanewtes') by 1598.[37] Evidently this play dramatized events in the life of Hardicanute, who succeeded his father, King Canute, in England. *Macbeth*, whose second scene conspicuously announces the defeat of 'Sweno, the Norway's king' (1.2.59) – despite being '[a]ssisted by that most disloyal traitor / The Thane of Cawdor' (1.2.52–3) – thus continued the commercial theatre's interest in Scandinavian history as it affected what, under James, would become Great Britain (albeit focusing on Scotland rather than England).

The prehistory of *Macbeth* at the Rose can also be detected in the spring to summer of 1598, when the Admiral's Men staged Chettle, Dekker, Drayton and Wilson's two-part play about Earl Godwin and his sons. When Canute died, Earl Godwin had hoped to insinuate his own offspring into the line of succession, but as playgoers had already seen in 'Hardicanute', that was not to be the case at first.[38] When Hardicanute in turn died, the crown then passed to Edward the Confessor, and Godwin was, for a time, exiled. When Edward's mother, Emma of Normandy, died in 1052, Godwin returned to England; such was his continued clout that the Normans in England (whose influence over Edward was much despised by the English) were in turn banished. Holinshed tells us, for example, that Sir Osbern Pentecost, a Norman knight who had followed Edward to England in 1042, and his companion Hugh, 'by licence of Earle Leofrike withdrewe through his countrey into Scotlande, where of Kyng Mackbeth they were honorably receyued'.[39] (This is the same Earl Leofric who, in *Edmund Ironside*, despised Canute.) In other words, the narrative material dramatized in London theatres in 1597–1598, about King Canute, his detractor Earl Leofric, Canute's son Hardicanute, *his* successor Edward the Confessor, and Earl Godwin, with his various plans for his own children and the English crown, all had material links to happenings in the reign of the historical Macbeth in Scotland. Even an emphatically Jacobean play such as *Macbeth* had strong Elizabethan roots.

Would all playgoers have recognized the historical intersections? Maybe not. But some evidently grasped what was at hand: Simon Forman's remarkably precise and seemingly unprompted observation, of the Globe performance of *Macbeth* in 1611, that 'yt was in the dais of Edward the Confessor',[40] suggests that he knew his Holinshed well enough to extrapolate precise historical context from a Lord's passing reference (in his conversation with Lennox) to Malcolm living 'in the English court' and being 'received / Of the most pious Edward' (3.6.26–7). The alternative explanation is that Forman and fellow playgoers in 1611 witnessed in performance nonverbal markers of historical setting – costumes or props familiar from other plays perhaps, or location boards hung on the stage, disclosing the

[36] Holinshed, 'The Historie of Scotlande', p. 243. Svein Knutsson – Holinshed's 'Sueno' – was historically the *nephew* of Canute.

[37] R. A. Foakes, ed., *Henslowe's Diary* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 60, 323.

[38] Harold Godwinson – son of the earl, as his name attests – was eventually crowned; he was the last pre-Norman King of England, ruling until the Battle of Hastings.

[39] Holinshed, 'The Historie of Englande', *Chronicles*, p. 274.

[40] Simon Forman, 'The Bocke of Plaies and Notes therof per forman for Common Pollicie' (1611), Bodleian MS Ashmole 208, fols. 200r–207v, via *Shakespeare Documented*: https://shakespearedocumented.folger.edu/resource/document/formans-account-seeing-plays-globe-macbeth-cymbeline-winters-tale.

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setting[41] – in which case *Macbeth*'s status as an uncanny companion piece to the manuscript *Edmund Ironside* play and the lost 'Canute' and 'Earl Godwin' plays would have been more readily apparent to the average playgoer.

One consequence of reading *Macbeth* through this alternative set of dramatic relationships that relate to the defeat of Sweno in the play's opening scenes is that, although James's own interest in witchcraft and the notable tracing of his ancestry to Banquo are often remarked upon as indicators of *Macbeth*'s evident relevance to the company's new patron, *Macbeth* might be reconstrued as a royal play in a different manner. As Holinshed makes clear in his account of the defeat of Sueno, the *Macbeth* subject matter may just as easily have served to flatter the new Queen of England. Holinshed says: 'A peace was also concluded at the same time betwixte the Danes and Scottishmen, ratified as some haue written in this wise. That from thence foorth the Danes shoulde neuer come into Scotlande to make any warres agaynst the Scottes by any maner of meanes.'[42] Such accord would hold special significance in the presence not only of the Scottish King James, but also of his wife, the Danish Queen Anna: a royal union that guaranteed the peace introduced earlier, in the reign of Macbeth. One way of interpreting this data is to suggest that, in dramatizing history from the period of Macbeth's rule in Scotland, the King's Men co-opted what had previously been another company's repertorial strength in pre-Norman English history (at the end of the Elizabethan period), and naturalized it as the now-King's Men's own distinctive subject matter (at the start of the Jacobean period). If *Macbeth* is a nominal *tock* in an argument's arbitrary chunking up of theatre history by periods of time, what we designate as the originating *tick* is crucial in giving shape to and organizing the duration of Kermode's 'special kind of middle'.

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Beethoven, with his many and varied uses of structural silence, understood gaps and their value.[43] Shakespeare did too, I think: Lavinia's forced silence and Katherina and Petruchio's uncomfortable talking over the awkwardness of their final encounter morphs into Isabella's refusal to speak and Cordelia's articulated silence ('Nothing, my lord' (*Lear* Folio text, 1.1.87)).[44] We could learn something from Shakespeare's valuing of silence. Now that the time for nihilism and despondency is past, we can revalue gaps and lacunae when constructing our accounts of theatre history. It's heart-warming to see the recent surge in scholarship situating Shakespeare alongside his contemporaries, including the lost works of his contemporaries. Once upon a time it was 'Shakespeare, and the rest'. It's no longer enough to say that the rest is silence.

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[41] See Tiffany Stern, 'Watching as reading: the audience and written text in Shakespeare's Playhouse', in *How to Do Things with Shakespeare*, ed. Laurie Maguire (Malden, 2008), pp. 136–59; pp. 148–51.

[42] Holinshed, 'The Historie of Scotlande', p. 243.

[43] See Barry Cooper, 'Beethoven's uses of silence', *The Musical Times* (2011), pp. 25–43.

[44] On the *Lear* example, see Jill L. Levenson, 'What the silence said: still points in *King Lear*', in *Shakespeare 1971: Proceedings of the World Shakespeare Congress*, ed. Clifford Leech and John M. R. Margeson (Toronto, 1972), pp. 215–29.

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RSC LIVE FROM STRATFORD-UPON-AVON: TEN THINGS I THINK I KNOW, OR, *OF COURSE* WE'RE MAKING A MOVIE

JOHN WYVER[1]

In late July 2022, in the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, the RSC Live from Stratford-upon-Avon team completed the recording of the project's thirty-third production. *Richard III*, which was shown in cinemas from 28 September, brought to a close the company's Histories Cycle of the past decade. It also marked former artistic director Gregory Doran's final production before the appointment of Daniel Evans and Tamara Harvey as co-artistic directors in September.

The team has also recorded a screen version of Blanche McIntyre's production of *All's Well That Ends Well*, but this was done in a very different mode from the familiar 'classical' form employed to date. With the projected screening of *All's Well* on Sky Arts in the spring of 2023, the project remained two shows short of completing a First Folio canon for the screen, having adapted neither *Henry VIII* nor, perhaps more surprisingly, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Yet.

Richard III will very likely be one element in the endgame of a cycle of screen adaptations that flowered and flourished in Britain over the past decade and a half. These years saw a rich and remarkable sequence of high-end creative screen adaptations of staged Shakespeare from the RSC, the National Theatre (NT), Shakespeare's Globe and others, but even though NT Live has since announced future productions, including *Othello* in 2023, my sense is that this work, at least in the familiar form it has taken in recent years, is drawing to a close.

This article returns later to some of the reasons why this may be the end of an era, but first it offers a loosely connected clutch of thoughts about such work – that is, linear screen adaptations of stage productions, not 'born digital' or other work for online that has also been expansively creative in the recent past.

My position is that of someone who has worked since the mid-1990s both as a stage-to-screen producer and as a researcher with a strong interest in the theory and practice of such work. Some of these thoughts are put forward as questions, some as assertions, some even recommendations. Each, needless to say, is at best tentative.

TEN THINGS I THINK I KNOW, NUMBER ONE

'If this be magic, let it be an art'
(Leontes, *The Winter's Tale*, 5.3.110)

I think I know that what I have called elsewhere 'the myth of non-mediation' remains (almost) as potent as ever.

Actors, theatre creatives, scholars and, more broadly, audiences of all kinds for screened Shakespeare stagings (including many who are well informed and deeply engaged) continue to

[1] The original version of this article was written at the kind invitation of Michael Dobson for the International Shakespeare Conference (ISC) in July 2022. It was delivered in the Shakespeare Institute, Stratford-upon-Avon, and in revising it for publication I have aimed to retain a quality of spoken informality. I wish particularly to thank my RSC Live collaborators Hayley Pepler and Todd MacDonald, ISC co-organizer Erin Sullivan, and also Judith Buchanan for conversations that prompted elements of the following.

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believe, by and large – when they consider the matter at all – that the process of translation and mediation from the stage to the screen happens almost by accident, as if by some rude magic. Or, if it's not magical or accidental, then the process is somehow straightforward, simple, transparent, spontaneous – and, indeed, essentially unauthored.

As a consequence, the results are often referred to as a 'relay', a 'capture', a 'recording' or a 'stream', and the neutral passivity of these designations drains away the complexities and intentionalities of process. Yet, if done to the levels that NT Live and RSC Live have worked at in recent years, each screen adaptation involves teams of fifty or more skilled practitioners, months of planning, and budgets of hundreds of thousands of pounds.

If observers do at some level recognise this, they still regard the process as essentially technical, the result of, at best, craft, and not *creative* practice, and certainly not the outcome of the extraordinary level of artistic engagement that is involved. Nor of literally tens of thousands of decisions about camera placement, lens choice and adjustment, crane and dolly movements, framing, crew choreography, lighting adjustments, mic positioning, audio levels, cutting rhythms, colour balancing, grading judgements, delivery CODECs and much more.

Each of those decisions involves a choice and, while many – indeed, the overwhelming majority – of them are immediate, instinctive and intuitive, each one is deeply informed by the extensive experience of the person and the team involved. Screening staged Shakespeare is not magic but, rather, fundamentally mediated – and an art.

TEN THINGS I THINK I KNOW, NUMBER TWO

'Such shapes, such gesture, and such sound, expressing'
(Alonso, *The Tempest*, 3.3.37)

I know that I want to question the idea that the camera, or cameras, in a screen adaptation of a staged Shakespeare are in some way a surrogate, or surrogates, for the viewer. This notion underpins the persistent and attractive view that screen adaptations offer 'the best seat in the house', albeit one that is constantly shifting. This was an early marketing notion for NT Live and it was revived more recently by the Young Vic's choose-your-own-camera-feed project. It certainly underpins common-sense notions about what the cameras are offering the viewer, as shots are taken from different positions in the auditorium, with different shot sizes, framings and movement. It also chimes with the paratextual reinforcement, through shots of audience arriving, auditorium views, etc., of the idea of the viewer being virtually 'present' in the theatrical space. Yet I believe this idea limits our understanding of these productions for the screen, and, moreover, that it is both mistaken and misleading.

Leaving aside the fundamental differences between human eyes and the camera eye, such as angle of vision, perceptual boundaries and so forth, the surrogacy idea remains wrong-headed as a way to conceive of the operation of screen adaptation. The adaptation is being created, at least notionally, within a continuous space and temporality, but each shot has been planned, prepared and – if all goes well – executed to develop the screen narrative and to enhance the expressivity of the drama. The shots are not primarily intended to give the viewer the 'best' view, whatever that might be, of the stage action, but rather to develop a parallel form of storytelling.

A more productive way of thinking about the process is, perhaps, to work with Richard Wollheim's idea of the 'internal spectator' proposed by (certain) works of art. Wollheim suggests that when we look at a painting – and Daniel Morgan has recently extended this to film sequences – we come to imagine what it would be like to occupy a position in the virtual space of the artwork where we can see everything that the picture represents and as the picture represents it.[2]

[2] See Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an Art* (Princeton, 1987), p. 102; Daniel Morgan, *The Lure of the Image: Epistemic Fantasies of the Moving Camera* (Oakland, 2022), pp. 76–83.

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