



PROJECT : NEW FACES

Intellectual Output n°4-3

NEW FACES STUDENTS' BEST WORKS

THIRD YEAR BEST WORKS

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Bensalem, North Korea, and our inability to imagine a utopian alternative

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INTRODUCTION

The genre of classical utopian fiction raises some skepticism in the postmodern world. We prefer to entertain ourselves with (post)apocalyptic narratives, suggesting that the only fathomable hope for a new social order is in the total demolition of democratic capitalism, and through such an escape from capitalist realism, followed by a period of rebuilding.

Perhaps this discomfort with the antiquated genre is to do with its structuring, the narrator being foreign and excluded from utopian life, and, as such, less trustworthy to a contemporary audience familiar with the unreliability of the exported, propaganda-based “reality” of totalitarian rule(s). The stranger must be kept at arm’s length for the genre to be successful, his function being observational, rather than proactive. This is perhaps exemplified best in *New Atlantis* by Francis Bacon, in which the stranger is kept in a literal Strangers’ House, with limits constraining his capacity to explore the utopian society of Bensalem, so that he is only able to experience it through dialogue with representatives of the utopia. A contemporary reader need only compare this to the eerie footage of visits to North Korea, available through *Vice News*, to be skeptical of the legitimacy of unsubstantiated claims of a perfect social order. What would happen if the stranger were invited in? The rise of the dystopian genre implies that the answer to this question is, “nothing good,” and points towards the unsustainability of the utopian genre from a closer vantage point.

In this paper, contemporary discomforts with the early modern utopia will be interrogated, and it will be theorized that within our globalized world it becomes nearly impossible to imagine a never-before-seen alternative world order. What’s more, there is ample evidence that one should fear



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an upheaval of our modern democratic capitalism, be it fictionalized, or else rooted in reality, for example the utterly isolated and regimented life within North Korea. As the world becomes more homogenous beneath a global rule, with those opting out of the global social order seemingly leaning into a totalitarian order, it is no wonder that the only imaginable escape from our current capitalist system seems to be through apocalypse and subsequent rebuilding.

NEW ATLANTIS AND THE STOCK CHARACTER OF THE STRANGER

The stock character of the stranger can be observed in classical utopian texts such as Thomas More's *Utopia*, Tommaso Campanella's *La Citta del Sole* and, perhaps most starkly, and as such most importantly for this essay, Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*. The stranger is not meant to be strange to the early modern reader, but rather to the utopian society itself. An explorer, he encounters the utopia, but is never truly invited in, as there is always some sort of limitations imposed upon him. Take, for example, the stranger in *New Atlantis*. The stranger's experience of Bensalem is firstly mediated by a representative, in this instance the governor of the Strangers' House. Although the stranger is able to move around the utopian space, this movement is limited, and not reported upon in the narrative. Rather, the conversation between the stranger and the governor is what the text concerns itself with.

The conversation that makes up the bulk of the text reveals the limitations of the stranger's stay. Along with his team of sailors, he must stay in The Strangers' House, a space serving none but this very function. Furthermore, the stranger cannot stay indefinitely. He is told by the governor that, "The state hath given you license to stay on land for the space of six weeks" (Bacon 157) and although there is mention that the stranger could likely stay longer, this sets the expectation that the visitors are being tolerated as outsiders, rather than welcomed into the society as potential future citizens. During their stay, they are told that, "none of you must go above a karan, (that is with them a mile



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and an half) from the walls of the city, without especial leave.” (Bacon 157-58) These restrictions serve the utopian genre, with the utopia meant to function, not as a place, rather as a foil for the stranger’s local community to juxtapose their own societal shortcomings against.

This juxtaposition is most evident in the ways in which the utopia is described. It is often not described in isolation, but in relation to what the stranger already knows. Upon his arrival, the stranger observes that, “The Strangers’ House is a fair and spacious house, built of brick, of somewhat a bluer colour than our brick” (Bacon 159) and then later, after having tasted the food, that it was, “better than any collegiate diet that I have known in Europe.” (Bacon 156) The use of comparative adjectives, such as “bluer” and “better” instead of “blue” or “good” gives a hierarchy to the different forms of governance, with the utopia unarguably in the more powerful place in this comparison. As such, these descriptors serve a dual purpose, both commenting on the exemplary nature of the utopian space, and also conversely giving attention to the inadequacy of the stranger’s (familiar) world.

As the early-modern utopia served the purpose of commenting reflexively upon the reader’s society, this distancing tactic of experiencing the text through dialogue rather than narrative prose makes it easier for this comparison to occur. Rather than concern himself with the quality of life of the utopian citizen, the stranger only wants to report back to his own society, in order to draw attention to those aspects of which he views as problematic.

Although the goal of the stranger is to explore, the exploration is constrained the moment the stranger enters the utopian space. Even the notion that the stranger is kept in a special guest-house reveals the totality of the control the utopia must impose upon its own narrative. However, to the contemporary reader, the utopia implies, rather than perfection, some sort of a propaganda state. What forms of governing benefit from strict propaganda in our contemporary world? Not capitalism, which, though flawed, allows at least for self-criticism through art and entertainment. Instead, totalitarianism



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comes to mind, casting a backwards facing shadow upon the naive trust of the stranger in utopian narratives.

TOTALITARIANISM: NORTH KOREA, ISOLATION AND PROPAGANDA

An attempt to analyze utopian narratives such as *New Atlantis* from a contemporary vantage point is to see parallels between the utopian city portrayed in the text and present day totalitarian political systems. Given the necessity of the total isolation of the utopia from global political structures, a parallel can be drawn between Bensalem and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

In *New Atlantis* Bensalem is able to improve itself by simultaneously looking externally at the world and keeping its own social structures hidden, revealed only in mediated and small doses to their occasional visitors. The governor explains, “that by the means of our solitary solution, and of the laws of secrecy which we have for our travelers, and our rare admission of strangers, we know well most part of the habitable world, and are ourselves unknown.” (Bacon 159) Again, it is worth bearing in mind that this is a representative of the state that is relaying this information. It is easy to imagine that this knowledge of the external world may not permeate all of the social stratospheres of Bensalem, all the more so if Bensalem is compared to the propaganda state of North Korea. Dukalskis and Hooker note when considering North Korea that “without access to the country and its people, achieving analytical subtlety is extremely difficult.” (53) Or that, because any access the rest of the world has to North Korea is in many ways mediated by the state itself, it is difficult not to have a simplified understanding of the structures within. In utopian fiction, this simplified understanding allows for an idealization of the unknown state to occur. However, here we see a perversion of the same interaction. Because we, as western media consumers, can only access two extremes, the idealized portrayal in what North Korean propaganda we can access through watching state-produced



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media, juxtaposed against the first-person testimonies of North Korean refugees, we must grow suspicious of any indication of an idealized utopian existence being constructed for us. When considering a contemporary reader's discomfort with the utopian genre, this again can be contextualized when taking into account what allows any totalitarian society to be successful. It's elaborate that, "a totalitarian regime [...] because it is concerned with political participation and allegiance to its all-encompassing ideology, will tolerate very little activity that is contrary to its worldview." (Dukalskis, Hooker 55) Or, merely stating that a political structure is perfect is no longer enough to prove perfection to the modern reader, as such statements are in actuality one indicator of a state that controls the movements, behaviors, and ideas of its populace.

When watching Vice's documentary series on North Korea there is much made of the distinction between what is being curated for the visitor's experience, and what is believed to actually be the quality of life based on a western understanding of the regime. Similarly to in *New Atlantis*, the visitor is kept in special quarters. What's more, their movements are monitored and controlled, and their access is limited. Even gaining initial access proves difficult, Shane Smith reflecting that, "We tried to get in for a year and a half, but couldn't because North Korea does not let anyone in. They do not want anyone to corrupt their one-hundred-percent homogenous society." (Smith) Here, again, the similarity to Bensalem is evident in the self-isolating tactics of the walled-off society. When access is finally granted, it is evident that Smith is not having an authentic, unmediated experience.

Once granted access to North Korea, Smith visits the philosopher hotline located in The People's Library of North Korea, where philosophical Marxist dialectic problems can be asked to a professor who will then, "give them the correct answers immediately," according to Smith's North Korean tour guide. (Smith) The idea of the immediacy and totality of the knowledge resembles in some ways *New Atlantis'* Salomon's House, which is described as, "the noblest foundation (as we



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think) that ever was upon the earth; and the lanthorn of this kingdom,” (Bacon 167) where all knowledge is being collected with some semblance of finality. Taking notice of the switch from comparative adjectives to superlatives, the description mirrors the tactics used by a totalitarian state, implying that the established order is undeniably and inarguably the best. Amongst the many things the father of Salomon’s House tells the stranger about, he boasts, “We have also precious stones of all kinds, many of them of great beauty, and to you unknown,” (Bacon 182) “We have also sound-houses, where we practise and demonstrate all sounds, and their generation,” (Bacon 182) “We have also a mathematical-house, where are represented all instruments, as well of geometry as astronomy, exquisitely made,” (183) and so on and so on. The use of “all” in these sentences represents a totality of knowledge that is unrealistic, and as such suspect to the contemporary reader. Much as the professor in The People’s Library of North Korea can be viewed as suspect because the claim is made that he can give all correct answers *immediately*, and with no caveat, the concept of a utopian state must be questioned if it presents itself as having access to *all* knowledge. As such, and without unmediated access to the lived experience of the citizens in any utopian state, it is easy for a modern interpretation of classical utopian texts such as *New Atlantis* to be one of skepticism.

CAPITALIST REALISM AND OUR INABILITY TO IMAGINE A UTOPIAN ALTERNATIVE

Gone is the notion that one might be able to sail a ship to a faraway land and come into contact with a more advanced unknown. With the only large-scale political alternatives seemingly more dystopian than utopian, it becomes difficult to imagine anything that could function smoothly while also existing external to the globalized social order of democratic capitalism. This sentiment lends itself to capitalist realism, defined by Mark Fisher as, “the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible to even *imagine* a



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coherent alternative to it.” (8) The death of the popularity of utopian fiction supports this idea. Reliant on the stranger, it is no wonder that, in a globalized world, it is difficult to imagine how such a narrative could possibly manifest. *Who* could possibly exist outside of this system, to be encountered and subsequently learned from?

Paradoxically, capitalism gains its power through its ability to conquer, implying that there was once some other, but it has since been subsumed. The different system must always be found and then dominated, made to bend itself to the capitalist world order or else risk global exclusion. As such, perhaps early days of capitalism were defined by a similar mode of exploration as is envisioned in the utopian genre. However, when applied in our contemporary world, the symbolic “stranger” must never have recognized the potential utopia as such, but rather must have concluded time and time again that the only way for global progression was through subsuming the other until it fit into the pre-established world order. As capitalism makes itself more ubiquitous, the question becomes, “having all too-successfully incorporated externality, how can [capitalism] function without an outside it can colonize and appropriate?” (Fisher 12) As evidence of capitalism’s global domination: only some 30 years after the Berlin Wall fell, symbolizing the fall of the Soviet Union, Moscow itself is saturated with craft beer bars and a McDonald’s is situated 1.5 kilometers from Red Square. This total encapsulation helps to explain why it is so difficult to imagine something external from what is already known and established.

Even internal modes of resistance don’t seem capable of withstanding the larger social order. For example the notion of “punk” became a commodity almost as soon as it was a form of resistance, most famously with Malcom McLaren’s cultivation and marketing of the image of the Sex Pistols. The punk music of the mid-to-late-1970s concerned itself with being a removal from the capitalist infrastructure that enabled most music production. Rather than affiliate itself with big and expensive



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labels, the movement found other cheaper and independent avenues to gain exposure. Instead of signing on with one of the Big Six record labels, “punks reverted to ‘front-room studios’ and recorded their music relatively cheaply, using four-track tape recorders” (Thompson 51). This was in line with the punk ideology, which fancied itself to be more interested in DIY, both in style and in music production, than commercial and fiscal success. However, by eventually signing with larger labels, early punk bands such as the Sex Pistols and The Clash gave away much of their agency, seemingly the price to be paid for inclusion in the capitalist market that the movement had initially eschewed.

In this way the concept of rebelling against the system was sold almost as quickly as it was established. In contemporary representations of UK culture, rather than the notion of “punk” being a radical reaction against commercialization, it has been almost entirely subsumed by the commodifying machine of capitalist realism. Consider, at the opening ceremony of the 2012 London Olympic Games, alongside Daniel Craig’s James Bond delivering the Queen to the arena, Arctic Monkeys’ rendition of “Come Together” by The Beatles, and Mr Bean playing the keyboard, can be heard “Pretty Vacant” by the Sex Pistols. Video footage of the lead singer Johnny Rotten leers behind masked dancers with cartoonish Mohawks atop their artificial bobble-heads. (Boyle) At the time of the performance, the Queen was in the audience watching. This is a far removal from the reaction in 1977, when the Sex Pistols track “God Save the Queen” was banned from play on the BBC. If the opening ceremony can be considered as representative of the idealized cultural heritage that the UK, and namely England, wants exported globally, then the Sex Pistols’ inclusion in the opening ceremony reveals the totality of the declawing and commodification of the original punk sentiment of anarchy and upheaval. By 2012, the Sex Pistols were palatable enough to be tastefully performed in front of royalty, and accepted as something aesthetic, rather than anarchic.



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Ruth Adams notes in regards to the Sex Pistols, “Arguably the band themselves have been complicit in the ‘Pistols Heritage Industry,’ staging their own ‘Silver Jubilee’ celebrations in the form of a(nother) reunion concert in 2002 and licensing numerous souvenir commodities from pencil cases to fridge magnets” (473) but one need not wait until the early 2000s to see this rapid commodification. Nearly as soon as the punk movement was started, it was perverted, as the sudden global awareness of the movement seemingly sapped all authenticity from the image of the rebellious outsider it had previously strived for. By 1979, “Punk was history, finished; the full story could now be told,” (Adams 473) as evidenced by the biographies already published by that date, including: *Sex Pistols: The Inside Story* (1977) by Fred and Judy Vermorel, *The Boy Looked at Johnny* (1978) by Julie Burchill and Tony Parsons. (Adams 473) This “ending” of the movement, meaning its incorporation into the world of capitalist commodity exchange through “selling-out” as it has been criticized of doing, occurred a mere 5 years after what is understood to be its birth in New York City’s CBGBs, circa 1974.

This quick turnaround experienced by the punk movement, from resistance against to product of a capitalist culture, can be illuminated by Fisher’s concept of “precorperation”. Fisher explains, “what we are dealing with now is not the incorporation of materials that previously seemed to possess subversive potentials, but instead, their *precorperation*: the pre-emptive formatting and shaping of desires, aspirations and hopes by capitalist culture.” (12) Punk may have been the first instance of this phenomena, being subsumed by the consumeristic machine so that the concept of independence from said machine could be oxymoronicly purchased and worn. In this way, the alternative became the mainstream, and the feelings of antipathy towards society became muted and controlled; the rebellion and dissent against commercial capitalism repackaged as something that would fit cleanly within the framework provided.



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All of which leaves us with a dual problem. We cannot find the change externally, as any external system is demonized as either regressive or totalitarian, or else ultimately incorporated and forced to conform to the already established system, and yet we also can't seem to enact change within, as any attempt to do so is swallowed up by the machine, repackaged, and then sold as acceptable, and ultimately aesthetic, dissent. The only option that presents itself easily is to burn the world down and begin again. There, the utopian state can be glimpsed, although it is ultimately post-apocalyptic.

POST-APOCALYPTIC FICTION: STARTING OVER AS THE ONLY MEANS OF RECONSTRUCTION

One genre of fiction benefits from our inability to imagine ourselves out of the contemporary global world order of capitalism. Although exact and up-to-date figures are difficult to locate, a study on the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic cannon conducted by Jerry Määttä suggests that, “In future, a similar study would likely show a sharp rise in interesting apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic disaster stories from the years 2000–2015, following a decade of slightly less important work in the genre.” (421) This rise in popularity is problematic in that it supports Fisher’s theory that we cannot imagine anything outside of our contemporary social order. Furthermore, if we cannot imagine a new global order as solution, how could we then implement it?

Capitalism continually refuses to solve the problem of impending disaster. Capitalism, and not capitalists. Returning to Mark Fisher, he makes the point that, “Instead of saying that *everyone* – i.e. every *one* – is responsible for climate change, we all have to do our bit, it would be better to say that no-one is, and that’s the very problem. The cause of eco-catastrophe is an impersonal structure which, even though it is capable of producing all manner of effects, is precisely not a subject capable



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of exercising responsibility.” (70) Given that capitalism keeps itself powerful by instilling the belief that individual decisions drive good or bad outcomes, it is difficult to imagine a solution to large and difficult problems such as climate change arising from it. Because it fixates on the individual rather than the systematic, much as novels do, we see these individual narratives follow the same path that we ourselves feel pulling us, that of being subject to the tides of history, rather than proactive in changing them.

Margaret Atwood’s MaddAddam series exemplifies this inability within our global society to imagine a solution. In *The Year of the Flood*, we are introduced to the Gardeners, a radical environmental group that styles itself after the Garden of Eden. This is arguably a utopian state within the dystopian landscape. The society lives in near-total isolation, and does not let in just anyone. What’s more, the individual has been subsumed by the collective, so that all women in leadership roles are named Eve, the men named Adam. This functions so that the members identify with the group, rather than with their own egos, mirroring the representations of early-modern utopias, which are more concerned with the larger societal dynamics than individual agency.

The Gardeners’ idealized ecological acts of resistance, such as living as “strict-vegetarians” and farming their own produce, are still not enough to stall the end of the world. Although the Gardeners are living an eco-friendly, utopian life, their bubble is too small to enact any real change. They venture out in order to hold protests, described by Toby thusly, “The leader had a beard and was wearing a caftan that looked as if it had been sewn by elves on hash. Behind him came an assortment of children—various heights, all colors, but all in dark clothing—holding their slates with slogans printed on them: *God’s Gardeners for God’s Garden! Don’t Eat Death! Animals R Us!*” (Atwood 66) but the Gardeners are dismissed immediately by the surrounding public. Utopian idealism, it seems, when attempting wider-scale impact, is met by distrust and skepticism. How, with



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a contemporary understanding of the world, can *these* people be trusted? With the knowledge of how closed groups oftentimes are riddled with their own internal power dynamics, resulting in them being much less idealistic than they present themselves to be, the Gardeners are working for change at a deficit, being forced to prove themselves as truly utopian, rather than just aesthetically so. As such, the Gardener's plead for change must be met by heckling, ““Shut the fuck up, ecofreak,”” (67) a bystander chides.

Compare these efforts to the current UK-based movement Extinction Rebellion. Arising in the UK circa 2018, they have three key demands: Tell the truth, zero emissions by 2025, and the instillation of a Citizens' assembly to address the crisis. Although it is inarguable that their efforts have made a global media ripple, the question remains: How effective can these protests be to enact change? As of September 2019, their successes have been mostly superficial, and based on rhetoric, rather than truly radical societal change. On May 1, 2019, members of the UK parliament declared a climate and environment emergency, followed by the convening of a citizen's assembly in June, with this later concession being only a partial victory, due to the fact that the recommendations deriving from the assembly will not be legally binding. (Knight) Notably, the demand that has been most ignored by those in power, being zero emissions by 2025, also requires the most concrete and systematic governmental action. Consider how capitalist realism is enabled by 'interpassivity,' or the performance of anti-capitalism which eventually functions as a cathartic act that ultimately allows the participants to remain within the capitalist system, all the while pacified by knowing in their hearts that they are not the problem. (Fisher 16) The fight is ongoing, and the next action seems to be a withholding of taxpayer money until demands are met. This opting out at least appears as something new, a refusal to participate in the system as long as it remains as it is. However, due to the fact that the demands are aimed rather broadly at one small aspect of capitalistic governing, and considering



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that the efforts of both the Gardeners and Extinction Rebellion exist within a system dominated by capitalist realism, it is suggested that these efforts, both fictional and non-fictional, will be ultimately aesthetic, rather than truly world-changing.

At the climate march in Berlin, Germany on September 20, 2019, the images evoked were those of apocalypse. Placards were illustrated with images of the Earth burning. As has been seen in other major cities throughout Europe, a girl stood before Brandenburger Tor on a block of ice with a noose around her neck, waiting for the ice to melt away and hang her where she stood. As one theorist observes, “Arguably, modern environmentalism has been infused with a strong current of apocalyptic sentiment from its very birth, being distinct from earlier forms of conservationist or preservationist activism – and from social movement activism in general – through its invocation of impending global doom as a tool to rouse action and mobilize support.” (Cassegard, Thoin 562) The debate seems to be whether this forward-looking pessimism is rallying, or debilitating.

Returning to the girl at the climate march who stood atop the block of ice with her hands positioned as if tied behind her back and a noose around her neck, the image becomes all the more poetic when considering the idea of someone having their hands tied. Having one’s hands tied meaning having the will to do something, but not the power, due to some invisible force which stops the person from acting freely. There is the disaster happening right in front of us, but there is also this hands-tied feeling of ‘interpassivity’. We recognize the problems but, beyond building awareness of the depth and breadth of them, feel an inability to enact real societal change, which is keeping us from the revolutionary upheaval that is likely required to actually save the planet, and ourselves.

CONCLUSION



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Long gone are the days when utopias could be used to instruct and warn the public. Where in the early modern period utopian texts might have been used as a foil to comment upon preexisting social structures, in our contemporary world they instead seem to share traits with totalitarian regimes. Furthermore, the hope that one might stumble upon some other society that is both exemplary and removed from our own, as the stock character of the stranger does, seems to have disappeared as capitalism tightens its global chokehold. Though still dissatisfied with the current social order of democratic capitalism, trends in fiction seem to indicate that we are unable to imagine anything that could challenge the accepted world order. In the place of utopian dreams, we are left with grim narratives centralized around our impending societal collapse.

The death of human society has been constructed and reconstructed, however today's speculation feels different. The antinuclear activism of the 60s and 70s, which concerned itself with warnings against a sudden apocalypse, has been replaced by the protest of today, described as, "Neither to be nourished by a strong sense of hope, nor of a future disaster, but a sense and an idea that the catastrophe is already ongoing." (Cassegard, Thom 562) There is an overarching feeling of being too late, without the capacity or the time to imagine an alternative global order. As such, the question becomes not how we could remove ourselves from this global rule, but rather what we can do once capitalism has finally run its course. The only hope left is in the imagining of an apocalypse with the capacity to wipe out the capitalistic beast. With any luck, this apocalypse might spare a few, and allow for rebuilding once there is a fresh slate to work with.

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New Faces essay collection, Eline Reinhoud, September 2019

“Dive, thoughts, down to my soul’: The Politico-Aesthetic Function of the Vice and the Machiavel in *Richard III* and *House of Cards*”

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While a comparison between politicians and actors usually leads to cynical jokes more than anything (e.g. one acts for money, and the other one is the actor), today’s popular television series about politics actively play with it, and in some cases even erase the difference altogether. The most astonishing recent example is perhaps Volodymyr Zelensky, who played the role of the Ukrainian president, first on screen in *Слуга народу* (*Servant of the People*) and since the 2019 Ukrainian elections also in real life, despite having practically no political experience.¹ Such transgressions of the difference between aesthetics and politics are characteristic of the so-called ‘age of post-truth’, where facts are rapidly losing value and emotion reigns supreme.

This ‘post-truth’ phenomenon has of late sparked a lively debate concerning its possible causes, but a solution remains out of reach, partly because the definition of the idea itself is still under discussion.² Post-truth is popularly understood as “[r]elating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping political debate or public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief,”³ but this is a limited understanding. For example, one could argue that the ‘post’ of post-truth is misleading, because emotions have *always* been more influential than facts in politics, as demonstrated for example by Lauren Berlant in her theorisation of public intimacy. She signalled the immense influence of emotion and affect in shaping the American public debate already in 1997: “[T]he political and the personal [have been collapsed] into a world of public intimacy” which concerns itself with such private issues as “pornography, abortion, sexuality, and reproduction; marriage, personal morality, and family values.”⁴ Additionally, one might argue for the importance, effectiveness, and historicity of lying in politics, especially in comparison to the notion of ‘objective facts’,

¹ Cf. Kara Fox, “Volodymyr Zelensky Played Ukraine’s President on TV. Now It’s a Reality,” *CNN*, 21 Apr. 2019, www.cnn.com/2019/04/21/europe/volodymyr-zelensky-ukraine-president-profile-intl/index.html. Accessed 24 August 2019.

² For a detailed analysis of the phenomenon of post-truth and the discussions surrounding it, see Eline Reinhoud, *The Post-Truth Era: Crises of Truth in (Post-)Postmodern Literature*, RMA Thesis, Utrecht University, 2019, dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/384022.

³ “Post-Truth, Adj.” Def. 2. *OED Online*, 2019, www.oed.com/view/Entry/58609044. Accessed 3 July 2019.

⁴ Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*, ed. Michèle Aina Barale et al. (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1997), 1.



as for example Martin Jay does in *The Virtues of Mendacity: On Lying in Politics*, where he refers to Michel de Montaigne's defence of "*mensonges officieux* (altruistic lies that are for someone else's benefit[]),"⁵ which is in turn based on Plato's similar justification of "'noble lies' ... when politics is involved".⁶ Briefly put, I understand post-truth as a specific, but not altogether new attitude and rhetoric that has gained unprecedented currency today,⁷ largely due to information overflow and pollution on and of contemporary online, social, and news media. It consists of two major components, namely a selective use of information and an apathetic disregard for the distinction between truth and lies. In other words, we have arrived at a dangerous but immensely interesting crossing of emotion and apathy: a certain segment of our society (think anti-vaxxers, climate change deniers, flat-earthers, conspiracy theorists, et cetera) acts on what *feels* true, and does not care whether it *is* true.

This crisis of truth, where facts easily become lost in a wilderness of fake news, cannot be solved by referring to more truths and facts, primarily because it is exactly this wilderness, this overflow, that exacerbates, or even constitutes, the problem. Therefore, in this essay I will take a different approach. Rather than adding more facts to the already existing, but largely ignored pile, I will try to turn post-truth on itself, by approaching the post-truth audience using something that makes them feel good: theatre, or rather television series. Drawing on Jacques Rancière's theory of politics and aesthetics as forms of dissensus, or agents of change, I will (re)conceptualise the politico-aesthetic function of Early Modern and postmodern descendants of the medieval Vice character and the Early Modern Machiavel,⁸ in order to explore how such characters encourage what Rancière calls the emancipation of the spectator. I will look

⁵ Martin Jay, *The Virtues of Mendacity: On Lying in Politics* (Charlottesville, VA: U of Virginia P, 2010), 50.

⁶ Jay, 50.

⁷ This post-truth attitude and rhetoric are not necessarily split between audience and disseminator, one having a particular attitude and the other using a particular rhetoric. Rather, these elements are both present on either side; as such, post-truth is not so much a question of intent as of general stultification, to the extent that people may not even be aware of being either audience to or disseminator of it. Then again, there are also plenty of individuals who have noticed this stultification and have become adept at feigning it for political purposes. The difference is roughly that between a Donald Trump and a Boris Johnson; both are post-truth types, but one at least appears to know what he is doing.

⁸ It is unfortunately beyond the scope of the current essay to engage with the exact connections between the Early Modern and the postmodern period in detail. The connections between these two periods, for example as times of epistemological crisis, have been extensively discussed by various scholars, including Attila Kiss, *Double Anatomy in Early Modern and Postmodern Drama* (Szeged: JATEPress, 2010); and: Ágnes Matuska, *The Vice-Device: Iago and Lear's Fool as Agents of Representational Crisis* (Szeged, JATEPress, 2011). All future page references to Matuska will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text. See Matuska especially for an in-depth examination of the Vice and his descendants.



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particularly at how these functions are performed by Shakespeare's character Richard III (1590s) and *House of Cards*' Frank Underwood (2013-2018): how they involve the audience in their plots, the dynamic this creates, and the degrees of spectator complicity they evoke. While it would be overly ambitious to propose any solutions to the crisis of post-truth in this paper, I will nonetheless take some first steps in exploring how the apathy and general disengagement of a post-truth audience may be punctured by a(n) (re)emancipation of the subject as brought about by descendants of the Vice and the Machiavel.

As I have already mentioned, the relation between aesthetics and politics is particularly strained in this time of post-truth, but it is also where we may begin looking for solutions. Over the past few decades, Rancière has famously brought aesthetics and politics together in his notion of the distribution, or partition, of the sensible. In summary, this is “the system of divisions and boundaries that define, among other things, what is visible and audible within a particular aesthetico-political regime.”⁹ A helpful notion to unpack this idea is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's distinction between different kinds of representation, via the German *Vertretung* and *Darstellung*, which she respectively understands as “representation as ‘speaking for,’ as in politics, and representation as ‘re-presentation,’ as in art or philosophy.”¹⁰ That which is represented, either politically, aesthetically, or both, becomes visible, audible, sensible. That which is not, remains invisible, inaudible, insensible. The act of representation or lack thereof determines what can and cannot be discussed and changed. In other words, art, politics, and the combination and mutuality thereof – after all, “politics has its aesthetics, and aesthetics has its politics”¹¹ – function as agents of change, as “forms of *dissensus* [that may] effect a redistribution of the sensible.”¹²

This redistribution of the sensible may be brought about in various ways within the realms of aesthetics and politics. Rancière argues that in theatre, it occurs in the interaction between the actors and the audience, rather than by the actors alone.¹³ As he explains, he rejects

⁹ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, transl. Gabriel Rockhill (New York, NY: Continuum, 2004), 1.

¹⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Champaign, IL: U of Illinois P, 1988) 271–313: 275.

¹¹ Rancière, *Politics* 62.

¹² Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. Steve Corcoran (New York, NY: Continuum, 2010) 1, emphasis as in original.

¹³ Jacques Rancière, “The Emancipated Spectator,” opening of the 5th international summer academy in Frankfurt on August 20, 2004, published in a slightly revised form in *Artforum* (March 2007): 270-281: 277-8.



the common assumption that the audience is either passive or active, let alone an entity separate from the actors. While playwrights like Bertold Brecht and Antonin Artaud sought through various means to activate what they perceived as a passive audience, Rancière argues that this rests on a false dichotomy. Rather, he argues, “it is precisely the attempt at suppressing the distance [between actor and spectator] that constitutes the distance itself.”¹⁴ Such binaries and their accompanying assumptions (e.g. spectatorship is bad because it is passive, and acting is good because it is active) constitute a partition of the sensible, because the value judgement inherent in these binaries creates a power dimension, an inequality, that is not necessarily there, but nonetheless influences the representation of either side of that binary. In line with the *theatrum mundi* metaphor, Rancière argues that individual spectators are also actors in their own way; they “see, feel, and understand something to the extent that they make their poems as the poet has done; as the actors, dancers, or performers have done.”¹⁵ Through the understanding that the audience and actors alike are active, emancipated, and intelligent – in other words, equal –, the false dichotomy and distribution of the sensible can be overthrown. It might be questioned, however, whether Rancière’s argument still applies today. A post-truth audience, struck by inertia and apathy, is in many ways opposed to Rancière’s emancipated spectator. Even if a dialogue is established, it is much easier to shout ‘fake news!’ – which has of late become more a tool to discredit and dismiss information that does not suit one’s (political) agenda than an actual statement regarding the information’s factuality – than to engage critically with either aesthetics or politics.

However, Rancière’s concepts can nonetheless illustrate how a(n) (re)emancipation of the audience, or the subject more generally, may theoretically be achieved. By actively playing with and explicitly reflecting on the partition of the sensible, the Early Modern and postmodern descendants of the Vice and the Machiavel may remedy this post-truth apathy. Before looking specifically at this function, it is necessary to outline the differences between these characters. Admittedly, this is a difficult task, as on the Early Modern stage the more psychologically complex villains would usually display traits of both characters and as such cannot be categorised as either one or the other. The characters are similar in many ways: while they

¹⁴ Rancière, “Emancipated” 277.

¹⁵ Rancière, “Emancipated” 277.



come from different backgrounds and date from different time periods – the former from the medieval morality plays, the latter from Niccolò Machiavelli’s notorious socio-political treatise, *The Prince* – both characters are traditionally known for their slippery appeal and skilful manipulation of other characters and audiences alike. They tend to be ambiguous, either regarding their moral status and their part within the play, or more generally in the scholarly understandings of the character. This ambiguity makes the combination of the Vice and the Machiavel in a single character such as Richard III or Frank Underwood particularly agile and difficult to pin down, and as such sufficiently fascinating to rigorously redistribute the sensible.

In the case of the Machiavel, there appears to be no consensus on the features of the archetype beyond the *OED*’s definition,¹⁶ which simply refers to the term’s derogatory use and its roots in Machiavelli’s treatise. This definition makes no distinction between the theatrical type and off-stage persons, and as such applies as much to the character as to any ‘real-life’ Machiavels, making it rather unhelpful in an attempt to understand the theatrical type specifically. Beyond the *OED*, understandings of the type go in completely opposite directions. The *McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of World Drama*, for example, understands the Machiavel as a character that is “[devoted] to evil for its own sake, with no other motivation required,”¹⁷ while Michael Donkor, writing for the British Library, states that “there is a clear purpose and design to [the archetypal Machiavel’s] savagery”, and that this savagery “is to be carefully and sparingly deployed.”¹⁸ This lack of consensus can be traced as far as the Elizabethan period, when Machiavelli’s work was primarily known in England through imperfect translations and distorting secondary material, which led to numerous misinterpretations, misunderstandings, and exaggerations;¹⁹ this is also why, in the late nineteenth century, Edward Meyer argued “for

¹⁶ The *OED* defines the Machiavel as follows: “A person who acts on principles recommended, or supposed to have been recommended, by Machiavelli in his treatise on statecraft; an intriguer or schemer. In early use also appositively. Usually *derogatory*.” (“Machiavel, N.” *OED Online*, 2019, www.oed.com/view/Entry/111831. Accessed 8 July 2019, emphasis as in original.)

¹⁷ Stanley Hochman, ed. *McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of World Drama: An International Reference Work in 5 Volumes*. (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1984) 241.

¹⁸ Michael Donkor, “Richard III and Machiavelli,” *The British Library*, www.bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/richard-iii-and-machiavelli. Accessed 7 July 2019.

¹⁹ See N.W. Bawcutt, “‘Policy,’ Machiavellianism, and the Earlier Tudor Drama,” *English Literary Renaissance* 1.3 (1971), 195-209: 208; and: Margaret Scott, “Machiavelli and the Machiavel,” *Renaissance Drama* 15 (1984), 147-74: 147. Contemporary critics such as Martin Jay have provided more favourable readings of Machiavelli’s treatise, arguing that *The Prince* rather shows an acute (albeit blunt) awareness of the realities of statesmanship, which requires flexibility and decisiveness. As Jay argues, Machiavelli’s preference for the cunning of the fox may rest not on a delight in deceit but on a distaste for the violence of the lion; his stress on keeping up the



the severance of the Machiavel from Machiavelli.”²⁰ Fear may also have played a part – after all, this was a time of brutal religious persecution and general upheaval. The distinguishing trait of the Machiavel, however, may be found in the character’s roots in socio-political discourse rather than the theatre: whereas the Vice functions primarily as a dramatic, extradiegetic force (see also next paragraph), the Machiavel ultimately reflects human qualities, and is driven by human motivations, however deplorable. The most common motivation is a selfish desire for personal advancement, wherein the end justifies the means – as for example in the cases of Richard III and Frank Underwood, who both have ultimate power as their goal, either as king or as president.²¹ Having accomplished that goal, the plot and the characters’ development tend to stagnate and end in death: a reelection is simply not as glamorous as an election, just as defending a crown pales in comparison to obtaining one.²² The Machiavel’s difference from the Vice, however, is one of degree rather than kind: both characters have extradiegetic functions, drive the narrative, and the motivations for their actions may be dramatic as well as emotional. This becomes especially clear in their joint descendants: both Iago and Richard, for example, can be said to act out of jealousy and ambition, but are also

appearance of morality indirectly acknowledges the importance of that same morality; his rejection of abstract values derives from the understanding that these are of little use in the concrete, often ambiguous reality of politics; by grounding statesmanship in illusion and appearance, he acknowledges the untenability of natural or divine order, or even absolute truth; and finally, he appears to be highly aware of how ethical intentions may nonetheless result in counter-ethical outcomes (5-6). In this light, Machiavelli’s sometimes brutal advice can be read as containing a certain realism, not sadism.

²⁰ Scott 148. Elizabeth Scott casts doubt on this understanding of Machiavelli’s work in Early Modern England, arguing that “a dramatist like Kyd or Marlowe would have had little difficulty in securing reasonably accurate and readable versions of Machiavelli’s original works” and that “Machiavelli was widely read, much debated, and quoted at length in literary circles and at universities” (151). While this argument may be valid for the playwrights and literati of the time, it does not mean that they did not play with these stereotypes, or that the general audience did not rely on them. As Scott admits, there was “little attempt to distinguish between what might be educated from Machiavelli’s precepts and what could be justly said of his own practice” (154).

²¹ Underwood resembles various other Shakespearean characters as well, including Iago from *Othello* and Henry Bolingbroke from *Richard II*. Another popular example of the Vice-Machiavel in contemporary television would be Petyr Baelish, or Littlefinger, from *Game of Thrones*. A detailed discussion of Shakespearean traces in such series would be most illuminating, but this is unfortunately beyond the scope of the current essay.

²² In Underwood’s case, however, his death was rather due to the accusations of sexual assault against actor Kevin Spacey, which resulted in his character being written out of the series. Incidentally, Spacey had played the character of Richard III (dir. Sam Mendes, 2011-2012) just prior to playing Underwood on *House of Cards* (cf. Ian Crouch: “Richard III’s House of Cards,” *The New Yorker*, 4 Feb. 2013, www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/richard-iiiis-house-of-cards. Accessed 19 June 2019). Soon after Underwood becomes president at the end of the second season, though, the series’ tension already slackens, and the plot becomes repetitive, because the ultimate goal had already been accomplished.



“the driving force behind the game.”²³ As such, any distinction between the Machiavel and the Vice, especially between their descendants, is always artificial to some degree.

The scholarly understanding of the Vice is equally conflicted, but one prevalent difference between the characters is that unlike the Machiavel, the Vice does not need a clearly defined goal or motivation. The character of Falstaff is an excellent case in point: he is happy to simply cause chaos for the sake of it, not caring particularly whether his actions result in anything either good or bad.²⁴ As Peter Happé explains, the traditional Vices were “not characters so much as embodiments of dramatic forces,”²⁵ and Ágnes Matuska adds to this that they were “not really part of the play’s events” (46), but can be seen rather as abstract, allegorical dramatic functions.²⁶ This outsider-status allows the character to provide critical commentary at a slight remove from the action and to function as a mediator between the audience and the play. Due to the character’s generally appealing nature, and despite his ambiguous moral status, the Vice establishes a degree of trust and complicity with the audience. Through a clever use of humour and dramatic irony, for example in soliloquies and asides directed at the audience, in which the Vice explicitly reflects on his own actions and schemes, the Vice guides the audience through the action. As Matuska explains, later Vices take this capacity for metadrama and liminality further, by explicitly drawing attention to the theatricality of the theatre, destabilising meaning, and even corrupting the boundaries between reality and fiction (104-5, 112-3). Of particular interest for the purposes of this essay are the Vice’s meta- and melodramatic qualities, the Machiavel’s ruthless socio-political cunning, and the politico-aesthetic devices they use to influence the audience.

As I have already mentioned in a previous paragraph, both Richard and Underwood can be read as Machiavels. Richard even explicitly identifies himself as such in *3 Henry VI*, or

²³ Matuska 99.

²⁴ Matuska specifically classifies Falstaff as a descendant of the Vice-Fool and explores the different kinds of Vice descendants in greater detail. As she rightly points out, however, the Vice and the Fool “are not clearly distinguishable” (72), and this appears to be the case with most later Vice characters; they often borrow and blend characteristics from other archetypes in addition to those of the Vice.

²⁵ Qtd. in Matuska 45.

²⁶ There is an interesting link to be made here to the field of perpetrator studies, where the trope of the monstrous villain is understood as a device to create a safe distance between the ‘good’ audience and the ‘evil’ villain. Such portrayals prevent audiences from confronting and understanding how horrible things can and do happen in reality. In the case of the theatre, subtle performative choices may influence the villain’s place on the scale ranging from abstract evil, such as portrayed more commonly by the Vice(-descendants), to the more human and tangible (though no less cruel) kind of the Machiavel.



rather more: he claims he could “set the murderous Machiavel to school” (III, ii, 193). Both Richard and Underwood have been characterised as Machiavels, but they can also be read as a critique on Machiavelli’s treatise.²⁷ L. Joseph Hebert, for example, argues that the shortcomings in Machiavelli’s argument are also the cause of Richard’s final downfall, and his argument is equally applicable to Underwood. As neither Richard nor Machiavelli (nor Underwood) recognises any objective good apart from fulfilling their own desires, these desires become arbitrary, unfulfilling, unmoored, and meaningless:

[Richard’s] conscience—far from being a manifestation of cowardice—is in fact the voice of practical reason within him, revealing that he has done no good to himself by committing villainous deeds for the sake of a crown that in itself is neither objectively good nor subjectively satisfying. (n. p.)

Robert Heilman, too, reads Richard as a Machiavel, although he finds “[h]is ‘I am determined to prove a villain’ and ‘I am subtle, false, and treacherous’ ... too explicit, and we scent the thinned-out, allegorical air of the morality play” (59). This combination of allegory and conscience, of ultimate power and inevitable downfall, is what made Richard, and now Underwood, such an appealing villain. Both are ruthless, cunning, and successful, with a vindictive lust for power, but are also witty, appealing, and metadramatic; in other words, makers and masters of play. Like their archetypal ancestors, they exude what Matuska calls a “genuine allure” (69). The audience is drawn to them against their better judgement, for their wit, their skilful directing of the play, and their acknowledgement and even flattery of the audience when they share their plans and motivations. As Stephen Greenblatt points out, the loathsome Richard “has seduced more than four centuries of audiences,” and the similarly deplorable Underwood was lauded for his “smiling and eager villainy” and his “twisted version of integrity.”²⁸ While they are the villains of their stories, they are the heroes of their stages. In

²⁷ For Richard as a Machiavel, see Scott 152; and: Robert B. Heilman, “Satiety and Conscience: Aspects of Richard III,” *The Antioch Review* 24.1 (1964), 57-73: 59. For Underwood as a Machiavel, see Don Fallis, “Machiavelli Would Not Be Impressed,” *House of Cards and Philosophy: Underwood’s Republic*, ed. J. Edward Hackett (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2016) 92-101. For Richard as a critique of the Machiavel, see L. Joseph Hebert, “Richard III and the Machiavellian Madness of Postmodernity,” *Public Discourse*, 15 Sept. 2017, www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2017/09/20004/. Accessed 22 September 2019.

²⁸ For Richard, see Stephen Greenblatt, “Richard the Third.” Introduction to the play. *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York, NY: Norton, 2016) 555-562: 557; and for Underwood, see Crouch. This adoration became problematic after Spacey was accused of sexual harassment. His frankly bizarre “Let Me Be



both Underwood's and Richard's case, the character is best read as a combination of the Vice and the Machiavel, resulting in a particularly powerful player, able to redistribute the sensible by simultaneously showing and hiding their true nature: abstract evil, human evil, or perhaps a bit of both. The Machiavel alone cannot do justice to the characters' antics or their success, but when the Machiavel's drive is combined with the Vice's metadramatic awareness, the players become playmakers. This power, especially when it begins to crumble near the end of their respective narratives, is what makes the Vice-Machiavel a potential remedy for a stultified audience: in the act of showing the puppet-master's strings, these strings become sensible in Rancière's sense to both Early Modern and post-truth audiences.

I have mentioned in passing some of the metadramatic techniques deployed by Richard and Underwood: witty asides, dramatic irony, and addressing the audience directly. The television series, but also screen adaptations of *Richard III*, also break the fourth wall by having the actor make eye contact with the camera. These are all typical Vice-techniques, but they serve a Machiavellian purpose, and have long been associated with the role of Richard III.²⁹ Similar to current-day populist politicians, they present themselves as honest, open, or at least direct to their audiences, in order to flatter them with their confidences and corrupt them by drawing them into their plots – both in terms of the narrative and in terms of their conspiracies. They invite the audience to watch the plot unfold from a metalevel that they exclusively share with them, or at least give that impression. Depending on the performance, such flattery can make the villain appear most charming; in Richard's words, "I can smile and murder whiles I smile";³⁰ a statement that easily and chillingly transgresses from the realm of aesthetics to that of politics in President Trump's assertion that he could shoot someone on Fifth Avenue and not lose any voters.³¹ This puts the audience in a difficult position: on the one hand, they know

Frank" video statement, where he indirectly addresses his personal situation as Underwood, did not help matters: when Spacey started to sound like Underwood in reality, the infatuation quickly ended.

²⁹ See Barbara Freedman, "Critical Junctures in Shakespeare Screen History: The Case of *Richard III*," *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, ed. Russell Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) 47-71, for an analysis of the use of direct address in performances of *Richard III*; ranging from Frederick Warde's 'sideshow' commentary on his silent film, reciting passages and explaining the situations like a doubly extradiegetic Vice character (48), to Lawrence Olivier's "flirting with the camera ... audiences were shocked and delighted by Olivier's use of a direct address to the camera; it continues to rivet audience attention today" (59).

³⁰ *3 Henry VI III*, ii, 182.

³¹ Jeremy Diamond, "Donald Trump Could 'Shoot Somebody and Not Lose Voters,'" *CNN*, 24 Jan. 2016, www.cnn.com/2016/01/23/politics/donald-trump-shoot-somebody-support/index.html. Accessed 10 July 2019. The question whether Trump might be a Vice-Machiavel in disguise—seeing his background in television and his



that they are dealing with a villain, aware as they are of his true intentions and cruelty, but on the other hand, the villain's guile and centrality – being the only one to acknowledge the audience – makes the audience eager to root for him.

The fact that both Richard and Underwood are crafty statesmen within their relative plots is noteworthy here: in a sense, they (aesthetically) represent (political) representation itself, bringing the aesthetic, abstract, Vice-dominated realm together with the socio-political realm of the Machiavel, traditionally overlapping but separate spheres. By representing representation and focusing the audience's attention on the politico-aesthetic tools deployed by the Vice-Machiavel to actively influence this representation, the play and series dramatise the partition of the sensible: they show, aesthetically, the brutality of how representation works, politically. One important difference between Richard and Underwood illuminates this further. While Richard is generally honest to his audience, Underwood rarely gives full disclosure and lies to his audience even at the metalevel, brazenly admitting this afterwards and calling the audience fools for believing him.³² Although this only temporarily damages the audience's willingness to be Underwood's co-conspirator, such moments, in combination with various metadramatic techniques, puncture the illusion of the play and the metalevel alike. It shows the audience that there is more to the story than the controlling Vice-Machiavel is letting on; an even more exclusive, more private metalevel. *Richard III* contains a similar puncturing moment, albeit inverted: rather than showing a superior meta-metalevel control of the Vice like Underwood, Richard's Vice-ness temporarily leaves him on the eve of the Battle of Bosworth, when his confidence is shaken by the revenging ghosts. It is one of the few scenes where Richard is alone on the stage without addressing the audience; instead, he talks to himself; "that is I and I" (V, iii, 181). This is the only moment when Richard's control of the metalevel crumbles, and he withdraws into a more private level of play that he shares neither with the

foray into politics—is an interesting one that would deserve more thought; in my opinion, he possesses some characteristics of both types (the drive to power, the melodrama verging on caricature), but lacks the nuance demanded by either, let alone the combination. This might explain the split reaction to Trump, with some seeing through his puppeteering (a fatal flaw in a Machiavel), while others believe he holds none at all (an utterly failed Vice).

³² For example, in "Chapter 64" (*House of Cards*, dir. Robin Wright, season 5, episode 12, Netflix, 30 May 2017): "... I'm guilty as hell, but then so are all of you. Yes, the system is corrupt, but you wanted a guardian at the gate like me. And why? Because you know I will do whatever it takes. And you have all enjoyed it, been party to it and benefited by it. [Aside:] Oh, don't deny it. You've loved it. You don't actually need me to stand for anything. You just need me to stand ..." (48:45-50:30).



characters nor with the audience. While they do so through different techniques – one by reasserting his control, the other by losing it – both scenes serve to shake the audience’s trust in the Vice-Machiavel character; Underwood by asserting his Vice, Richard by losing it. By grabbing the audience’s attention on the first metalevel and showering them with attention, and then excluding them from a more private level, the Vice-Machiavel plays with the audience’s emotions and shows them the puppet-strings that allow him to control both the characters and the audience – in the case of Underwood, by showing that the strings are attached to yet more strings, or, as in the case of Richard, by temporarily dropping them. Their unusually direct relationship with the audience – making the audience complicit, part of the plot, before shutting it out again – can serve as a device to force the audience to reconsider their position vis à vis the performance: to become aware of the strings, and to decide whether they accept them and the partition of the sensible proposed by the Vice-Machiavel, or whether they will discard the strings and (re)claim their agency within play; perhaps even making them, as Rancière says of the emancipated spectator, “see, feel, and understand something to the extent that they make their poems as the poet has done; as the actors, dancers, or performers have done.”³³

The combination of traits derived from the Vice and the Machiavel are what give Richard and Underwood their particular crooked allure. It allows them to capture audiences and to play with their emotions, and in staging the partition of the sensible, the audience is encouraged to (re)emancipate – to put themselves on equal footing with these sly rogues, to claim their own agency in the play of aesthetics and politics alike, to see them for what they are, and to decide how they want the story to continue: whether they reject the villain or continue to allow his puppeteering. As such, the Vice-Machiavel’s politico-aesthetic function is to provide a way for a stultified audience to become an ‘emancipated spectator’ in Rancière’s sense, and so encourages the audience to pierce through the fictions spun before their eyes. Having become aware of the many metalevels involved in aesthetics, audiences could— theoretically – apply this awareness in other areas of life as well, motivating them to shake off their apathy and break the vicious cycle that the current problem of post-truth is threatening to become.

³³ Rancière, “Emancipated” 277.



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New Faces essay collection, Ondřej Polák, September 2019

I speak as my understanding instructs me: Information Mobility, Withdrawal and the Echo Chamber of *The Winter's Tale*

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The greatest advance that we have witnessed in the 20th and early 21st century cannot be subsumed under a single invention such as the combustion engine, the plane, or the internet. But together, these inventions give people access to unprecedented mobility, and mobility is what defines our time. It seems impossible for us to imagine a world where we do not have access to planes, trains and automobiles. However, mobility of people is only one facet of the globalized world, as there are other mobilities with a far greater impact than we have hitherto realized, with one in particular, mobility of information, being a source of crisis. Mobility of information is inseparable from the mobility of people, as Peter Adey writes in *The Routledge Handbook of Mobilities*: “Whilst people are mobile, the equally differentiated mobilities of information, capital, goods and services that are essential for contemporary life are a sustained feature of mobilities research.”¹ While today’s discussions of mobility relate primarily to the movement of people, it is crucial to remember that the mobility – or circulation - of information and knowledge plays a crucial role in the globalized world. In fact, sharing information, news and knowledge is a cornerstone of our society. As Flavio Soares writes, “Information structures and personal information structures have been pre-requisites for the construction of our society.”² The result of the hyper-increase in the circulation of information is twofold. On the one hand, access to knowledge is unprecedentedly easy, but in the age of the internet, social networks, instant messaging and mass media, we are also overwhelmed by a constant flow of information, and the ability to

¹Peter Adey, et al., eds. *The Routledge Handbook of Mobilities* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014) 267.

² Flavio Soares, et al., *Information Flow and Knowledge Sharing* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2008) 17.



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process this body of data proves to be a challenge and a weakness that can be exploited by those who manipulate information to their will; a fact that is now becoming painfully clear. Soares notes that information in a digitalized and global world is “the means to approach reality”³, but this reality can be easily distorted. Recently, a new dangerous phenomenon has arisen: “With the digital age and the rise of social media phenomena such as filter bubbles, echo chambers, and algorithms have emerged.”⁴ These algorithmically generated echo chambers make individuals withdraw from the circulation of new information and create cut-off social circles where pre-existing anxieties are validated and multiplied, while at the same time making objective discussion impossible, thus making echo chambers into a breeding ground for misinformation. Interestingly, the theme of withdrawal from the circulation of information and its negative effects finds its reflection in one of William Shakespeare’s plays.

Circulating, sharing or withholding information: all these play a crucial role in Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*; a play defined by mobility of individuals, but also of the information about them – from the very first scene, when we are told of the visit of Polixenes to Sicilia, to the penultimate scene of the play when the climactic moments are being relayed to us. Particularly act I, scene II, describing Leontes’ quick turn from friend to tyrant serves as a warning about what happens when the circulation of knowledge is distorted, or when an individual actively avoids objective discussion. This scene inevitably results in crises that define the destinies of individual characters, but also the entire nation of Sicilia, and it is only when the free flow of information and people are restored in Sicilia that the play can come to a peaceful conclusion. In this paper, we will examine the importance of the circulation of

³ Soares, 17.

⁴ Vincent D. Guffy, ed. *Digital Human Modeling and Applications in Health, Safety, Ergonomics and Risk Management* (New York: Springer, 2019) 442.



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information in the play, show the disruption of the flow of information in act I scene II and reveal its effects on the rest of the text. Finally, we will mirror the themes in the contemporary crises. However, first we must briefly explore mobility of information in *The Winter's Tale* as a whole.

Mobility in all its forms plays an important role in *The Winter's Tale*. Each act is bookended by acts of mobility, from Polixenes' arrival to his escape, from Perdita's banishment all the way to her return in the final act. However, these acts are always preceded or followed by information spreading through the world of the play. The necessity to relate and mediate information is established at the very start. The introductory scene merges the themes of physical mobility and the circulation of information as Archidamus and Camillo discuss the relationship of their respective rulers and, while doing so, they relate the information not only to each other, but to the audience as well:

CAMILLO

Sicilia cannot show himself over-kind to Bohemia.
They were trained together in their childhoods; and
there rooted betwixt them then such an affection,
which cannot choose but branch now. Since their
more mature dignities and royal necessities made
separation of their society, their encounters,
though not personal, have been royally attorneyed
with interchange of gifts, letters, loving
embassies; that they have seemed to be together,
though absent, shook hands, as over a vast, and
embraced, as it were, from the ends of opposed
winds. The heavens continue their loves!⁵

Most importantly for us, this information precedes the physical appearance of the characters and serves as an integral part in the creation of their image. While we never learn to what extent the stories about the young princes and their supposed friendship are real, they are the

⁵ *The Winter's Tale*, I, i, 21-32.



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only pieces of information we have and are therefore essential in our view of the following scene and the rest of the play. This effect of judging people based on the circulation of information about them extends from the audience to the characters on stage, as they too rely on the stories. When Archidamus says: “I think there is not in the world either malice or matter to alter it.”⁶ – he bases his assumptions on the stories; they are enough for Archidamus to judge the reality of the friendship between Leontes and Polixenes. Indeed, the construction of reality based on circulation of information and the following subversion of that reality are apparent throughout the play. In an article “‘But It Appears She Lives’: Iteration in *The Winter’s Tale*”, James Edward Siemon says: “Life as it is depicted in the play is a thing of wonder, constantly betraying the neat theories of men.”⁷ However, what Siemon calls theories in his work are not just scientific theories, he encompasses the way individuals create theories of the world around them, thus constructing their reality. And nowhere is this construction more apparent than in act I, scene II.

This famous scene shows the king of Bohemia as he prepares to leave Sicilia. Despite pleas from his lifelong friend Leontes, Polixenes remains unshaken in his resolve to return to his home and tend to royal matters there, as he is spurred on by his lack of information about his home country:

POLIXENES

Sir, that's to-morrow.
I am question'd by my fears, of what may chance
Or breed upon our absence; that may blow
No sneaping winds at home, to make us say
'This is put forth too truly:' besides, I have stay'd
To tire your royalty.⁸

⁶ *The Winter’s Tale*, I, i, 34.

⁷ James Edward Siemon, “‘But It Appears She Lives’: Iteration in *The Winter’s Tale*”, *PMLA*, Vol. 89, No. 1 (1974): 11. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/461662> 23 Jun 2019.

⁸ *The Winter’s Tale*, I, ii, 10-14.



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This brief quote again shows the importance of information on the mindset of characters. It is the lack of information that pushes Polixenes to leave. Nonetheless, once queen Hermione speaks to Polixenes but for a moment, his views change. He is suddenly willing to stay, a fact that is not lost on Leontes. In an instant, Leontes steps away from the conversation and reverts into his thoughts. He begins talking to himself and reaches the conclusion that Polixenes' willingness to listen to Hermione is not a mere coincidence. He begins to contemplate the possibility that Hermione and Polixenes have been in an ongoing romantic relationship, going so far as to assume that Polixenes is the father of Leontes' children. Leontes eventually convinces himself that these assumptions are reality and once Hermione and Polixenes leave the scene, Leontes begins to plot Polixenes' assassination and Hermione's imprisonment.

Leontes's quick turn from a brotherly friend to a mortal enemy of Polixenes, and from a loving husband to a blind tyrant to Hermione, is famous for its incongruous nature and chaotic delivery. It encapsulates the mental processes of a person overtaken by jealousy and the phantoms of their own imagination. Leontes jumps from one argument to another, he hastens from conclusion to conclusion. At moments, he seems willing to believe that his train of thought is only a flight of fancy:

LEONTES

I' fecks!

Why, that's my bawcock. What, hast smutch'd thy nose?

They say it is a copy out of mine.⁹

But he then dismisses these thoughts as folly and goes on pursuing his hunch about Hermione's infidelity. Finally, he says:

Affection! thy intention stabs the centre:

Thou dost make possible things not so held,

⁹ *The Winter's Tale*, I, ii, 120-122.



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Communicatest with dreams; – how can this be? –
 With what's unreal thou coactive art,
 And fellow'st nothing: then 'tis very credent
 Thou mayst co-join with something; and thou dost,
 And that beyond commission, and I find it,
 And that to the infection of my brains
 And hardening of my brows.¹⁰

Only after he is fully convinced that Polixenes and Hermione are in a romantic relationship, Leontes turns back to them and resumes the conversation. The thing that defines this scene, other than Leontes' chaotic speech, is the cut that occurs when Leontes gets the first hints of suspicion. What had been up to that point going on as a conversation where the three involved freely exchanged stories of days past, suddenly turns into two separate conversations, one of which involves Leontes reverting into himself and completely cutting himself off from Hermione and Polixenes. As Siemon notes, this is emblematic of *The Winter's Tale*, as “The ritual action of the play takes the form of a withdrawal from the world followed by a return to it.”¹¹

Leontes withdraws himself from the reality surrounding him and begins constructing a reality of his own. His own past, his marriage, his son, even the stories about his own life – so important to the reality constructed by the dramatic fiction – no longer apply once Leontes withdraws from the world. He is no longer willing to listen to his wife and friend, who are literally meters away. Once the flow of information is broken, Leontes enters a downward spiral which is driven, as he says himself, by “affection”. And affection does not require objectivity or facts to construct truth, it makes “possible things not so held, communicates with dreams” and is coactive “with what's unreal”. It would be possible to prevent the entire conflict if Leontes were willing to turn back to Hermione and Polixenes and ask them to

¹⁰ *The Winter's Tale*, I, ii, 138-146.

¹¹ Siemon, 10.



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clarify the situation in an open discussion, but that does not happen. Instead of listening to facts and information, Leontes weaves his own out of thin air. What is more, from this point onwards, Leontes is unshakable in his opinion that the conspiracy he fabricated is more real than anything anyone else can say:

LEONTES

How blest am I
 In my just censure, in my true opinion!
 Alack, for lesser knowledge! how accursed
 In being so blest! ¹²

Although he is certain that his version of events is the definitive truth, Leontes also feels the need for confirmation from a higher source, believing that it will cement his beliefs in the eyes of the public and convict both Hermione and Polixenes:

Though I am satisfied, and need no more
 Than what I know, yet shall the oracle
 Give rest to th' minds of others, such as he
 Whose ignorant credulity will not
 Come up to th' truth. ¹³

To do so, Leontes commands his lords, Cleomenes and Dion to travel to Delphi and seek the oracle, who should provide the divine and unquestionable truth, one that Leontes believes is correspondent to his own. This plan, however, does not work since the message from the oracle reads:

Hermione is chaste;
 Polixenes blameless; Camillo a true subject; Leontes
 a jealous tyrant; his innocent babe truly begotten;
 and the king shall live without an heir, if that
 which is lost be not found. ¹⁴

¹² *The Winter's Tale*, II, i, 38-41.

¹³ *The Winter's Tale*, II, ii, 189-193.

¹⁴ *The Winter's Tale*, III, ii, 131-134.



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The oracle, whose visions are eventually fulfilled, is understood as the bearer of definitive truth, and therefore a source of objective information. However, once Leontes undergoes his change objective reasoning and the search for truth loses all meaning to him. He can no longer relate to truth and, when faced with the prophecy, he dismisses it: “There is no truth at all i’ the oracle: The sessions shall proceed: this is mere falsehood.”¹⁵ Since even divine truth no longer has any power in the reality Leontes has constructed, he freely proceeds to take action that ruins the lives of everyone involved and changes the face of Sicilia for more than a decade.

The actions Leontes takes reverberate throughout the play and lead to further crises of mobility. Stephen Greenblatt echoes Siemon’s point about the ritual withdrawal and return when he mentions that Leontes’ withdrawal forces Hermione to do the same: “*The Winter’s Tale* then at once rehearses and reverses the ritual pattern [...] the tainting of the female, her exclusion from the social contracts and her ultimate reintegration into a renewed community.”¹⁶ By making Leontes’ withdrawal from the circulation of information the cause of all further trouble, *The Winter’s Tale* critiques action that is not based on well-drawn reasoning and discussion. Siemon brings back his notion of theories when he says that by showing us Leontes’ falsehood, the play “calls into question his easy conviction that simple theory can be directly translated into simple action”¹⁷ Furthermore, it berates the severing of oneself from the circulation of information. Siemon says: “what [*The Winter’s Tale*]

¹⁵*The Winter’s Tale*, III, ii, 139-140.

¹⁶ Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010) 132-133.

¹⁷ Siemon, 11.



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condemns is any attempt to act upon those theories without regard to the ambiguities of appearance and the complexities of reality”¹⁸

Luckily for the inhabitants of Sicilia, there are still those willing to listen to the objective truth the oracle represents. As Virginia Lee Strain writes, “Paulina and Camillo, safeguard the oracle’s relationship to the royal family and its relevance to the political reality by enabling the return of mother and daughter: Paulina obstructs plans to have Leontes produce a new heir and secretly shelters Hermione, and Camillo directs Perdita and Florizel to run away to Sicily. The oracle’s supernatural powers of truth-finding are thus directly related to the success of the human advisors in the play.”¹⁹ It is exactly those that Leontes refused to listen to, the advisors, who are the bearers of truth. This gives further significance to the necessity of discussion, of listening to advice, in guiding action and constructing realities, a trait that Leontes has lost by withdrawing from the flow of information around him. And precisely these issues prove crucial in today’s world.

As we said at the very beginning, the advances in mobility are perhaps the greatest steps that humanity has taken in the last century. No wonder then, that the anxieties we can see in *The Winter’s Tale* are exponentially multiplied and reflected in today’s events. Information and its circulation are instantaneous thanks to the internet, and while this has brought immeasurable boons to mankind, especially in recent years the incredibly large amount of information proves to be a threat to more than one aspect of liberty and democracy, particularly since the social circulation of information has shifted from public discussion onto social media. Recently, the social media phenomenon known as filter bubbles has emerged

¹⁸ Siemon, 11.

¹⁹ Virginia Lee Strain, “*The Winter’s Tale* and the Oracle of the Law”, *Legal Reform in English Renaissance Literature*, by Virginia Lee Strain, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2018, p. 177. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctv7n0997 23 Jun 2019



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and is described as: “digital communities of like-minded individuals that are created through algorithmic filtering”²⁰ which “tailor online content to users’ political beliefs, partisanship, and opinions.”²¹ Social filter bubbles slowly enclose individuals with other individuals who echo their own opinions leading to the greatest danger of social media: echo chambers. These are an outcome of filter bubbles, where “one’s opinions, attitudes and even prejudices are magnified and stoked through skewed information [...] and could lead to misconceptions about the actual state of the world.”²² What echo chambers represent, is a complete withdrawal from the circulation of information into a sphere where all one hears are the echoes of their previous beliefs, thus perpetuating a disconnection from reality and the construction of a new one. This is exactly the case with Leontes, whose fears only developed because he detaches himself from the outside reality and proceeds to creating his own version of the truth based on his own beliefs and a great dose of self-invention perpetuated by pre-existing insecurities. But whereas this is only an individual’s personal turn, in the era of echo chambers the construction of a false reality is a mass issue. Social media of all kinds gradually enclose individuals into impenetrable bubbles that hinder objective discussion. As we see in Leontes’ example, this kind of enclosure can lead to destructive effects.

What is more, such withdrawal allows for the creation of issues essentially from thin air. Affection is coactive with what is unreal and makes the unreal possible, as says Leontes. No wonder then that misinformation is very common in echo chambers. Worst of all, this fact can be essentially weaponized by those so inclined. Left enclosed within themselves and detached from the outside world, these modern Leonteses of the social media will eventually

²⁰ Ilan Manor, *The Digitalization of Public Diplomacy* (New York: Springer, 2019) 137.

²¹ Manor, 137.

²² Manor, 137-138.



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construct their own reality and embolden one another in their beliefs, but the direction of their construction can be easily manipulated. As we have seen in cases such as those of Cambridge Analytica, it is frighteningly easy to target specific groups with information that then spreads and steers the internal discussions of said groups. Leontes' drastic shift of opinion and subsequent cruelties were caused only by his own fancies but imagine a situation in which an invisible character, a "virtual Iago" whispers to Leontes and spurs him on in his transformation. That is a blueprint for catastrophe. Sadly, the virtual Iagos and Leonteses are an everyday reality of our globalized world, wherein information can be twisted or completely constructed to fit nefarious goals without the knowledge of the recipients. However, while Shakespeare's play serves as a warning of the negative effects of enclosing oneself and refusing to listen to outside sources, it also shows the potential solutions to the problem. Naturally, the resolution of *The Winter's Tale* requires Leontes to open to the bearers of truth, to objective discussion. Only then can Sicilia open its borders and allow mobility to return to the island nation, both in terms of the mobility of people, but also of objective information. After all, it is only open discussion with people and sources previously rejected that allows the play to reach a positive conclusion.

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New Faces essay collection, Jamie Rose, September 2019

Servitude in Death: Lucrece/tia's Suicide and the Necropolitics of Representation

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Revolutionary suicide does not mean that I and my comrades have a death wish; it means just the opposite. We have such a strong desire to live with hope and human dignity that existence without them is impossible.¹

Og við sverðs míns egg
Loks af friður hlýst.²

Overthrowing the current governing system and replacing it with one that is, at least theoretically, fairer and more just is never an easy task. It requires several ingredients to be added into the pot of revolution – among them mass discontent, the willingness to make sacrifices and, more often than not, an inciting incident, typically an act of violence that underscores the problems of the status quo. *The Rape of Lucrece*, one of Shakespeare's extended poems, takes place at such a time and it is Lucrece's rape and subsequent suicide that become Lucius Junius Brutus's *casus rebelli* against the Roman monarchy.

This is perhaps all well and good on a macro level, but what are we to make of the position of Lucrece's death in the matter? If this rebellion is indeed carried in her name, what sort of concern does Brutus show for her plight and that of other women, if any? As he pulls the knife out of her still-bleeding body and solemnly swears to punish the monarchical system for the crimes of the king's son, Lucrece is already fully turned from a subject into an object – or, more precisely, an instrument by which a rebellion may be carried out and justified. In a way, the old feminist adage of “the personal is political” is just as relevant as ever, as her personal experience becomes transmuted by Brutus into a microcosmic representation of all the injustices, real and imagined, that Romans suffered under the political system of monarchy. Yet, it is also a personal power-grab, as Brutus and the other aristocrats who join in his pact suddenly have the opportunity to usurp the power of the king and distribute it among themselves.

This is, unfortunately, an all-too-common scenario in the script of revolutions and struggles for social change – the initially deeply personal circumstances of the inciting incident become

¹ Huey P. Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009) 3

² Austin Wintory, “Only We Few Remember It Now,” *The Banner Saga 3*, track 22, *Bandcamp* <<https://austinwintory.bandcamp.com/track/only-we-few-remember-it-now>>

<http://www.new-faces-erasmusplus.fr/>



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overwritten by the political desires of those who wish to use the victim's or survivor's experience as a rallying cry. I am not suggesting that this is always necessarily to the detriment of society³ or that this always goes against the wishes of those whose suffering and death become utilised in such ways, but I would nevertheless like to explore Livy's and Shakespeare's representation of the story of Lucretia and compare them to some modern examples in which the suffering and death of marginalised people are emptied of their personal situatedness and become, instead, a socio-political reference point. As someone coming from an activist background, I am particularly concerned about the long-term negative impact of these desubjectivised and decontextualised narratives both on the survivors/victims as well as on the stability of socially progressive movements. How do we represent individual experiences in a way that always centres and gives voice to the survivors/victims while also using them as exemplifiers of systemic issues that warrant addressing? In other words, how do we ensure that the personal and the political are allowed to exist at an equilibrium, rather than one becoming substituted by the other?

The politics of representing suffering and the conversion of said suffering into praxis is clearly nothing new – there is a vast cornucopia of texts that deal with similar issues, particularly in the context of journalism, a field which often tries to be a medium through which personal experience is converted into transformative praxis. Among many noteworthy examples, John Hersey's *Hiroshima*, a 120-page article that took up an entire issue of *The New Yorker* magazine in August 1946, attempts to mediate, through the perspective of multiple witnesses, the otherwise unimaginable horrors of nuclear warfare. This microcosmic-to-macrocosmic nature of *Hiroshima* allowed for the flow of empathy and directly helped initiate the first waves of anti-nuclear activism across the anglophone world:

[...] here, for the first time, is not a description of scientific triumphs, of intricate machines, new elements, and mathematical formulas, but an account of *what* the bomb does – seen through the eyes of some of those to whom it did it: of those who endured one of the world's most catastrophic experiences, and lived.⁴

³ Even drawing from recent Czech (and Slovak) history, it is rather clear that the Velvet Revolution protests of 1989 that led to the overthrow of the Soviet-inspired totalitarian system would not have grown to such a scale had it not been for rumours (later proven untrue) of a student being killed by the riot police.

⁴ John Hersey, *Hiroshima*, "Publisher's Note" (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1946) ix.

<http://www.new-faces-erasmusplus.fr/>



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It is for this reason that any such analysis must be inextricably linked to journalism and historiography or, if we allow ourselves a broader expression, to the practice of truthmaking.

Where does this, then, leave Lucretia/Lucrece? How did her story get told by those who approached it and where did they place their emphasis? Let us begin with a brief overview of Titus Livy's version of the tale and do so with the presupposition that not only is historiography itself an act of storytelling and ideological construction, but also that the story as recorded by Livy would have already passed through numerous sieves of alteration, regardless of whether the events even occurred to begin with. In her book *The Rape of Lucretia and the Founding of Republics: Readings in Livy, Machiavelli and Rousseau*, Melissa M. Matthes presents Aubrey de Selincourt's translation of *The Early History of Rome* on which I will base my own reading, as well:

One day several men, among them Collatinus, Lucretia's husband, were drinking in the quarters of Sextus Tarquinius, the son of the then ruling tyrant. Soon the subject of wives arose, and each man bragged that his wife was the most virtuous. Collatinus interrupted the rivalry urging, "What need is there of words when in a few hours we can prove beyond doubt the incomparable superiority of my Lucretia?" With this the men galloped off to Rome, where they found all of the other men's wives luxuriously enjoying themselves in their husband's absence while only Lucretia was found modestly dressed and "hard at work by lamplight upon her spinning."

During the subsequent dinner, Tarquin was inflamed with lust by Lucretia's beauty and proven chastity. Several nights later he burst into Lucretia's bedroom, demanding she submit to him. Even when he threatened her with death, Lucretia refused. Finally, he reviled her: "If death will not move you, dishonor shall. I shall kill you first, then cut the throat of a slave and lay his naked body by your side. Will they not believe that you have been caught in adultery with a servant—and paid the price?" With this threat, Lucretia yielded.

The following day she called her father, her husband, and Brutus, a family friend, around her. She recounted the rape and demanded revenge. She would testify to her innocence, she asserted, by killing herself: "My heart is innocent, and death will be my witness".



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Her family tried to dissuade her, arguing vehemently that only her body, not her honor had been violated, that without intention there could be no guilt. Refusing to listen, Lucretia plunged a dagger into her heart.

While her husband and father were lost in grief, Brutus pulled the dagger from Lucretia's breast and urged the men to join together to drive the despotic Tarquins from Rome. Roman men rallied around Brutus's call for vengeance, and Rome was subsequently liberated and Brutus named the founding father of the republic.⁵

I am choosing to cite this passage in full in large part to illustrate how closely, in fact, the plot contained in Shakespeare's poem follows Livy's rather simple outline. Notable here is also the fact that, already within this account, there is some attention paid to Lucretia's inner struggle with what she's been through paired with the lack of external judgement of her as "impure" or "dishonoured" – after all, the first paragraph very strongly presents Lucretia as a paragon of Roman feminine virtue.⁶ Additionally, what is more relevant to the concerns of this essay, Matthes observes the important fact that while Brutus already had a very clear *casus rebelli* against the Tarquin family, as they murdered his brother and father, it was actually Lucretia's rape that was the rebellion's inciting incident.⁷ In this sense, Lucretia's rape and subsequent suicide actually carries more weight than even the act of murder. Brutus's reaction, which remains the same both in Livy's and Shakespeare's versions, is then both more personal and cynical. On one hand, he is once again forced to grapple with the power the Tarquins have over the lives of Roman nobility, the same power that ended the life of his brother and of his father, and these are certainly images that come back to him as he bears witness to Lucretia's suicide. On the other hand, her death becomes the instrument through which he can not only accumulate more power by wresting it out of the hands of the king, but also as a way through which he may finally achieve his own revenge, as he begins to build his alliance of outraged noblemen. The

⁵ Titus Livy, *The Early History of Rome*, trans. Aubrey de Selincourt (New York: Penguin, 1978), 1.57 98-99.

⁶ Of course, this begs the question of whether Livy would have been similarly charitable in his judgement towards the other women who did not prove themselves to be as chaste as Lucretia if they had been raped under similar circumstances.

⁷ Melissa M. Matthes, *The Rape of Lucretia and the Founding of Republics: Readings in Livy, Machiavelli and Rousseau* (Pennsylvania State University Press: University Park, Pennsylvania, 2000) 26.

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fact that one of Brutus's goals is vengeance dramatically recontextualises his character, as he is not only the perpetrator of political violence, but also a victim of it.

Returning, then, back to Shakespeare's poem, we can now contrast its focus with that of Livy. As stated earlier, Livy already hints at Lucretia's psychology and the tragedy of a woman who was compelled to commit suicide, despite her husband's assurances of innocence, because she was unable to cope with her trauma. The bulk of *The Rape of Lucrece* is comprised of depictions of two inner struggles – one on Tarquin's side, the other on Lucrece's. The important effect here is one of humanisation of both the rapist and of the survivor and the movement of action from the external into the introspective, the result of which is that far more attention can now be paid to Lucrece herself who would, otherwise, be forced to remain a fairly passive actress throughout the narrative (with the exception of her temporarily assuming agency through suicide, a trope that has historically plagued many fictional representations of women). Shakespeare's insertion of the psychological element into Livy's outline represents a radical shift in the act of truthmaking, as it recognises that the "truth of the matter" is not merely contained in the description of observable action and social transformation, but must also seek to depict the emotion and psychology that motivates people to these actions.

In a way, this recontextualisation of the story of Lucrece follows the pattern that many contemporary activists, journalists and historians who are concerned with the praxis of radical social transformation favour over accounts of the world that are rooted in physically observable evidence and numbers – in other words, it resists the notion of empiricism as the singular valid tool through which a human and social experience should be represented.

Yet, even today, there remains a strong tension between the politics of representing the suffering of one as opposed to the oppression of the many and, more often than not, this distinction often follows social patterns of marginalisation and dehumanisation in cases where the human subject becomes reduced to a numerical figure. Broadly speaking, those who already possess some degree of privilege are given more opportunity to have their negative experiences represented as being particular to them, as being simultaneously personal as well as symptomatic of some greater socio-political issue that warrants addressing. Staying with the example of sexual violence, the #MeToo movement is a prime example of this inequality of access to <http://www.new-faces-erasmusplus.fr/>



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subjectification. While it has been widely known that women, particularly marginalised women, experience high rates of sexual harassment and violence in the workplace, their stories were routinely denied the same media attention and, by extension, cultural and political impact that the stories of privileged, rich, typically white, Hollywood actresses. In the wider global arena, we can observe the ways in which death becomes framed along similar axes of significance. What makes the loss of certain lives “grievable” while others get reduced to statistics or to Livy-like accounts that prioritise depersonalised description over the actual circumstances of an individual internal and external life?

For this, I would like to look at an annual event that remains important to my community and that has already been subject to relevant criticism, the Transgender Day of Remembrance that occurs every 20th November. The history of the Transgender Day of Remembrance (otherwise known as TDoR) goes back to 1999, when it was originally started as a vigil for Rita Hester, a trans woman from Allston, Massachusetts who was murdered in a transphobic attack. The modern importance of the event is two-fold: Firstly, it honours the memories of those whose lives would have otherwise been deemed ungrievable by a society that systematically devalues the lives of trans people. Secondly, this act of remembering the dead also reminds the participants of how much there is still left to be done in the field of social change as well as of their own complacency. In other words, TDoR retroactively makes the lives of trans people into lives that mattered and continue to matter through the act of grieving, putting into practice what Judith Butler describes in her introduction to *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*: “Only under conditions in which the loss would matter does the value of life appear. Thus, grievability is a presupposition for the life that matters.”⁸ Yet now, twenty years later, it remains dubious whether TDoR truly achieves this.

As the project itself grew, so did the list of those deemed to have been the victims of transphobic violence, a list that predominantly contains the names of trans women of colour, many of whom lived in parts of the world far away from the remembrance ceremony. Beyond their names (many of which are listed as anonymous), the only other records on the list typically contained in an entry are month of death and cause of death. Can it then, in any reasonable way, be said

⁸ Judith Butler, “Introduction: Precarious Life, Grievable Life,” *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2016) 14.

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that this is an act of resistance to the depersonalisation of marginalised death? That we are somehow honouring the hundreds of names that list contains every year in a way that remains aware of each individual life? Are we truly grieving for people or are we, instead, grieving for the concept of transphobic violence?

As the organiser of last year's Transgender Day of Remembrance in Prague, these were questions that weighed quite heavily on me and which, over time, made me inherently suspicious of similar depersonalised representations of the suffering and pain of others. I did not want to instrumentalise the lives and deaths of people I never knew for the benefit of my own local activism, a criticism raised against Berlin-based trans activists by C. Riley Snorton and Jin Haritaworn in "Trans Necropolitics: A Transnational Reflection on Violence and the Trans of Color Afterlife":

"Their" deaths were not in vain, one of the speakers is said to have stated: "they" made it possible for "us" to come together today. Among "them" was Tyra Hunter. Like so many of its globalizing predecessors, the Berlin TDOR thus incited a trans community into life whose vitality depends upon the ghosting of poor trans people, trans people of color, and trans people in the Global South.⁹

A similar, albeit a much more personal, criticism of how TDoR has been transformed from an act of remembrance into one of political activism also appears in Amber Dawn's essay "How to Bury Our Dead" where she describes her experience of attending TDoR in Vancouver in order to grieve for a trans woman she personally knew and who was brutally murdered a few months prior. She went to the event with hopes of being given some space to speak and inform people about what a resilient and strong woman Shelby Tom was, especially considering this event was held in her home city. Instead her name was simply read out from a long list that included a gruesome description of her murder, which made Amber Dawn break down in tears, as she was denied the chance to publicly honour Shelby's memory.¹⁰

⁹ C. Riley Snorton and Jin Haritaworn, "Trans Necropolitics: A Transnational Reflection of Violence and the Trans of Color Afterlife," *The Transgender Studies Reader vol. 2* (New York: Routledge, 2013) 74.

¹⁰ Amber Dawn, "How to Bury Our Dead," *How Poetry Saved my Life: A Hustler's Memoir* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2013) 97.

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Such an approach very strongly echoes the ways in which Brutus responds to Lucretia's murder. While her husband and father bicker over which one of them has a greater claim to grief (which in some ways mirrors other discussions surrounding TDoR that have to do with whether certain people memorialised were truly victims of transphobic violence or of violence that had a different motive), Brutus wastes no time as he pulls the knife from her body and immediately begins instrumentalising her corpse as well as the weapon for his own needs. Furthermore, as Melissa M. Matthes catalogues in *The Rape of Lucretia and the Founding of Republics*, the mythological event of Lucretia's rape has been used to justify different forms of society and constitutes a "[...] memory designed to ignite political action even as it aims to occlude femininity."¹¹ In other words, issues such as masculinity, power, ideal constructions of womanhood etc. become overwritten with what philosophers and historians (often one and the same) would consider to be more "pressing matters" – the political system at large as it pertains to the distribution of power among privileged men. As Brutus and the two other men go "To show her bleeding body throughout Rome,/ And so publish Tarquin's foul offence,"¹² the suffering of this Lucretia undergoes an irreversible transformation from the personal to the political, employed to change the Roman system to one that is just as unfair to women as the previous one. In a way, as Tarquin forcibly claimed Lucretia's living body, so does Brutus claim her corpse to sate his own desires for power and revenge. It is unavoidable to think of the real-world parallels to Brutus's instrumentalisation of Lucretia's death, some of which have already been outlined here, but the question remains of how we should transform our praxis in order to be fairer to both the living and the dead.

An example presents itself in the recent coverage around the five-year anniversary of the death of Eric Garner, an African-American New Yorker killed by a member of the NYPD, which became one of the sparks that ignited the Black Lives Matter movement across the United States. While much of the recent re-emergence of coverage had to do with the fact that the statute of limitations would run out if none of the cops were charged with his murder – which

¹¹ Melissa M. Matthes, *The Rape of Lucretia and the Founding of Republics* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000) 159.

¹² William Shakespeare, "Lucrece," *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, edited by Arthur Henry Bullen (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1994) 1224.

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they were ultimately not, not even the one who put Mr Garner into an illegal chokehold which eventually caused him to suffocate – and the fact that New York City mayor Bill DeBlasio, a self-proclaimed progressive and a Democratic candidate for the presidential office, refused to punish the perpetrators through some of the extra-judicial means available to him, such as firing them, progressive media outlets like *Democracy Now!* provided space for the voices of Mr Garner’s family to be heard, bringing grief and personal outrage to the forefront.¹³ Decisions such as these regarding the presentation of socio-politically important violence and death ensure that, while the act itself may be instrumentalised by movements with which the victim/survivor may or may not have allied themselves with, the personal impact of this violence is not forgotten in the protests that it helped spark. In fact, this polarity between the personal and the political can be seen in how another event that had to do with racism and police brutality is remembered in name – the Rodney King Riots are also known as the 1992 LA Riots. One preserves the name of the man who was beaten for the LAPD’s entertainment, the other does little but tell us where and when the event took place.

This is, to some extent, the same barrier that separates Livy from Shakespeare. Livy cares little for who Lucretia may have been as a person, what things must have been going through her head for her to take her own life even as she was ensured that her honour had not been sullied. While glimpses of the internal may be spotted in his account, she remains a mere tool for his narrative of social progress, more useful as a corpse than as a living woman. On the other hand, Shakespeare is far more interested in the living woman and, in order to present her as such, he is forced to take Livy’s story and begin writing in its margins, breathing new life into the void of Lucretia and transforming her into Lucrece. Yet, as I praise Shakespeare for the act of giving her an interiority, it is important to also keep in mind that the Lucrece of his poem only comes to life at the moment of her rape – her mind is hidden to us up until that point and we are instead forced to witness Tarquin’s thoughts – which presents a whole new challenge of its own, one that similarly echoes the ethical issues of grievable violence, where the perpetrator’s background is often picked apart and analysed while what we know of the victims/survivors rarely extends beyond the event they had been through, as was the case with the 2016 Pulse

¹³ “‘They Didn’t Do Their Job’: Eric Garner Family Outraged DOJ Won’t Prosecute His Death by Police.” *Democracy Now!*, *Democracy Now!*, 17 July 2019, <www.democracynow.org/2019/7/17/eric_garner_justice_dept_no_charges> 23 July 2019.

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Nightclub shooting in Orlando, Florida. It is in this regard that I find my edition of Shakespeare's work, a reprint of the 1904 Stratford Town Edition, to be quite striking, as it refers to the poem simply as *Lucrece* – the rape is nowhere to be found in the title. While we may speculate over this particular choice, the impulse for which was likely a conservative one, it does remove the character of Lucrece from the traumatised state, the only state in which she appears to us in the poem, and opens up new possibilities for us to think of what she may have been like as a person, as a woman and a human being. The title, *Lucrece*, is the next step on the road towards genuine compassion and empathy, a step that many people, be they activists, writers, journalists or readers, have, unfortunately, yet to take. This is because the politics of representation not only represent what happened, but they also alter the memory of the very thing they are representing, as Susan Sontag writes in *Regarding the Pain of Others*: “Something becomes real – to those who are elsewhere, following the ‘news’ – by being photographed. But a catastrophe that is experienced will often seem eerily like its representation.”¹⁴ In order for a shred of ethicality to be preserved in how we write about events as personally catastrophic as rape, suicide and murder, we must build our representation from the experience rather than constructing the experience around its representation.

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¹⁴ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003) 21
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From Privilege to Necessity: The Dual Nature of Mobility in *The Winter's Tale* and Today

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The twenty-first century might be described as the age of mobility. If we approach the term in its literal meaning as a geographical displacement, we will observe that the members of our society are constantly on the move. However, there are different kinds of mobility and not all people travel for the same reasons. Generally speaking, there are two kinds of mobility – one driven by interest, the other by compulsion. While some people travel in order to visit exotic places and learn about distant cultures, others are driven on the road to escape from danger and to save their lives. The first kind of mobility is enabled by privilege and freedom of movement, the second by necessity and the lack of freedom. The former focuses on arrival, the latter on departure. People with the desire and the means to travel do so with the vision of eventually returning back home. Those, who run away from their homes for salvation, can only hope to find a new home somewhere else.

Both of these kinds of mobility are represented in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. Although the conditions of traveling are vastly different from our own, the characters in this play experience similar reasons for mobility as we might encounter today. Polixenes, the King of Bohemia, travels to Sicilia in order to pay a visit to his friend King Leontes. Due to a sudden change of circumstances, his visit ends prematurely and Polixenes needs to escape the country in order to save his life. Similarly, but contrariwise, his son Florizel is driven from Bohemia in order to save his marriage and, through a sudden revelation of some hidden facts, his refuge in Sicilia turns into a pleasant visit. In this way, the contrary movements of these two characters reflect the two kinds of mobility present in our own age. It is, therefore, still



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relevant to read Shakespeare, for his plays often provide a valuable commentary on contemporary issues. In this particular case, I am going to show how *The Winter's Tale* presents the way in which a simple change of circumstances might result in the transformation of mobility from something pleasant to something imperative, from privilege to necessity.

In his lecture entitled “Des Espaces Autres”¹ (Of Other Spaces) delivered in March 1967, the French philosopher Michel Foucault suggested that as opposed to the nineteenth century, which had been marked by its obsession with history, the subject of the present age would be space. While before, the emphasis was on the development of events on a temporal scale, today we are more interested in the spatial experience of reality. However, what we need to be focusing on is the combination of these two dimensions, for there is an inevitable link between them. As Foucault observed, “space itself has a history in Western experience, and it is not possible to disregard the fatal intersection of time with space.”² In this essay, I will observe the role of this intersection and its representation through the theme of mobility in Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*.

As a spatial transformation enabled by temporal progression, mobility might serve as one of the most vital expressions of the intersection of the time and space. Over the course of its plot, *The Winter’s Tale* observes many mobile developments that propel the action and influence the timespan. It is precisely through movement that most of the events in the play are initiated and the plot moves forward. This strategy is not, of course, exclusive to this

¹ This text, entitled “Des Espaces Autres,” and published by the French journal *Architecture Mouvement Continuité* in October, 1984, was the basis of a lecture given by Michel Foucault in March 1967. Although not reviewed for publication by the author and thus not part of the official corpus of his work, the manuscript was released into the public domain for an exhibition in Berlin shortly before Michel Foucault’s death. Translated from the French by Jay Miskowiec.

² Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16 (1986): 22, Foucault.info <<http://foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html>> 22 July 2019.



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particular play, as it was often employed by previous literary texts. In fact, the merging of time and space and its reflection in movement was used both as a theme and as a vehicle of plot development in literature ever since ancient times.

This representation was most famously described by the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin. By observing the intersection of time and space in its fictional representation, Bakhtin opened up a field of research that has been considered relevant in our discourse ever since. He applied the term “chronotope” (from the Russian *хронотоп*, a portmanteau of the Greek words *χρόνος*, meaning “time,” and *τόπος*, “space”) to refer to “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature.”³ According to Bakhtin, the chronotope plays a significant role in the definition of literary genres; it is, in fact, the main defining factor in generic distinctions. He recognizes several different types of chronotopes, among which the one involving the act of taking to the road could be considered the paramount one. “The importance of the chronotope of the road in literature is immense,” Bakhtin asserts, “it is a rare work that does not contain a variation of this motif, and many words are directly constructed on the road chronotope, and on road meetings and adventures.”⁴

The Winter's Tale is precisely one of these works of literature that incorporates the chronotope of the road as the main driving force of the plot. Whether physical or imaginary, the theme of journey and movement seem to govern this play. While the two chief locations, Sicilia and Bohemia, are hardly described with any degree of geographical accuracy, they function more as symbolic spaces endowed with exotic quality and characterized by spatial separation and cultural estrangement. It is the ceaseless movement between these two spaces

³ Mikhail Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel,” *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 84.

⁴ Bakhtin 98.



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that propels the action of the plot. This is not, however, any haphazard kind of movement. In fact, most of the geographical displacements undertaken by the characters in the play have their own designs and they acquire certain significance within the plot. It is for this reason that we describe the present kind of motion as mobility rather than a simple movement, employing the distinction introduced by Tim Cresswell in his influential study of mobility in the modern west.

According to Cresswell, “mobility is central to what it is to be human. It is a fundamental geographical facet of existence.”⁵ Considering this prominence of mobility in our culture, it is quite baffling that the term itself should have been present in critical discourse for so long without being properly defined. It was only a decade ago, in 2006, that Cresswell’s influential study provided the definition of mobility as it is understood in contemporary theory. According to his now-familiar formula, mobility is the realization of movement equipped with meaning and power. In other words, the difference between simple movement and mobility is that the latter has “been given meaning within contexts of social and cultural power.”⁶ Since there is no inherent value in movement, it is only through society and culture that it becomes mobility; “its meaning is created in a constant process of cultural give and take.”⁷

This is precisely the case with all the geographical dislocations in *The Winter’s Tale*. Since the movement between Sicilia and Bohemia is always driven by certain purpose and endowed by cultural or social significance, it should be understood as mobility in our present comprehension of the term as suggested by Cresswell. The play itself begins with a situation

⁵ Tim Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006) 1.

⁶ Cresswell 2.

⁷ Tim Cresswell, “Mobility as Resistance: A Geographical Reading of Kerouac’s *On the Road*,” *Transaction of the Institute of British Geographers* 18.2 (1993): 253, JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/622366>> 12 Feb 2019.



brought about by such mobility. It is the trip of king Polixenes to the kingdom of his friend Leontes, which takes place before the play's opening scene and which sets in motion the dynamics of the plot. The social function of this trip has many layers. It is not only a friendly visit paid by the king of Bohemia to his lifelong acquaintance, the king of Sicilia, but also the performance and consolidation of a relationship between the two kingdoms. In this sense, the figure of the head of the nation serves as a metonymy for the nation as a whole. This is demonstrated in the official quality of the language used by the two kings, as well as in the way they are referenced in the speech of others.

The short opening scene witnesses this kind of reference in the dialogue between Camillo, a lord of Sicilia, and Archidamus, a lord of Bohemia. When talking about the kings, Camillo makes the following observation: "Sicilia cannot show *himself* over-kind to Bohemia... [emphasis mine]."⁸ The use of the highlighted pronoun "himself" betrays the actual referent of "Sicilia," which is not the country as such but rather the king. At the same time, the body of the king serves as a representation of the whole nation and all of his acts are to be interpreted on a national level. The mobility of king Polixenes from Bohemia to Sicilia thus acquires even a greater degree of significance precisely for it is to be understood as a symbolic movement of the kingdom as a whole.

The peaceful visit is suddenly interrupted by mobility of a different kind. It is the inner motion of thought in king Leontes's mind that gives way to a new series of incidents leading up to Polixenes's eventual departure from Sicilia. The internal movement thus becomes reflected in the external dynamics of the play. Although it remains unclear what gave Leontes the reason for his abrupt change of thought, this spiritual kind of mobility nevertheless plays an important role in the development of the plot. The result of this inner

⁸ *The Winter's Tale* I, i, 20–21.



motion is the presumed infidelity of Leontes's wife and Polixenes's alleged betrayal. The friendly status of the relationship between the two kingdoms is disrupted and Polixenes's own life is put in danger. In this way, the pleasant visit turns into a troubling situation, the only solution of which is another mobility, a physical one this time – a flight.

Polixenes's departure from Sicilia is followed by yet another, less observed, kind of mobility. It is the removal of Leontes's newborn daughter, who is deemed to be his wife's illegitimate child and whose presence at the court is thus seen as undesirable. This occurrence concludes the first half of the play and sets the stage for the events of the second one. These will come to mirror the incidents of the first half, especially as regards mobility. The two parts are separated by a passage of time, sixteen years to be precise, during which period the mobility between the two kingdoms is halted along with any significant events shaping the plot. The second half of *The Winter's Tale* begins with happenings that soon call for another mobility.

Although physical movement has been on pause for sixteen years, there was yet another kind of mobility that took place during this passage of time. It was the motion of growth and personal development, especially in the case of Perdita, the daughter of king Leontes. Brought up far from her birthplace – in a shepherd's house in the land of Bohemia – Perdita grew up to be a beautiful young woman, whose evolution as a human being had a profound effect on the subsequent events in the play. As Florizel, the prince of Bohemia, finds himself in love with the young princess, whose royal status is yet unknown, his father Polixenes is faced with a new challenge – how to deal with a situation that might result in his son marrying bellow his social class?

When Polixenes finds out about his son's objective of marrying Perdita, a similar kind of inner motion takes place in his mind that characterized the previous change of thought in



king Leontes. Although this transformation is much more justified and understandable than the former one, the result is virtually the same: another need for physical mobility, again in the form of a flight. Similar to Polixenes himself in the first half of the play, Florizel is now forced to leave the country in order to save what is dear to him – the prospect of his marriage with the love of his life. Interestingly enough, Florizel finds refuge where, many years before, his father found a threat to his life – at the court of king Leontes. The distressing conditions of Florizel's parting with Polixenes and the escape to the kingdom of Sicilia are, fortunately, not to last long.

Soon after their arrival to Sicilia, Florizel and his bride are delivered from their predicament by the revelation of Perdita's real origin and social status. After many years of hostility between the two kingdoms, Leontes's error is brought to light and the friendly relation between Sicilia and Bohemia is allowed to resume. The marriage of Florizel and Perdita serves to foster this relationship and secure its positive future course. In order to give this event a proper share of attention and celebrate the happy conclusion of all events, the last instance of mobility brings king Polixenes and Camillo on the scene, and the reunion of the two kingdoms is thus complete. The end of the play brings us to the same geographical location where we started and the joyous meeting of the two kings is again described through the words of secondary characters rather than being displayed directly on stage. Polixenes and Leontes are again referred to as representatives of their kingdoms and their encounter is depicted by one of the witnesses as the happiest of all occurrences.

In my analyses of the theme of mobility in *The Winter's Tale*, I have shown the way in which movement, both physical and spiritual, acquires social and cultural significance within the play and contributes to the development of the plot. What I am going to argue in the following section of the present study is that not only does movement acquire meaning in the



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context of the play's dynamics but this meaning also rises in importance when perceived in relation to our contemporary age.

Mobility has been an essential part of western culture for centuries. In order to emphasize this relevance, I am going to borrow from Ingrid Horrocks, who, in her observance of literary texts at the turn of the nineteenth century, distinguished the traveler as “the emblematic modern subject.”⁹ With the contemporary, tourism-driven nature of our society, the importance of traveling and mobility seems only to have increased. However, it is not only the touristic endeavors that provoke movements in the twenty-first century. Just as I have described in the introduction, the current migrant crises in Europe shows that there are, in fact, other kinds of motivations for mobility. These are not, however, exclusive to our present age. Although the migrant crises might be described as a contemporary issue, mobility as a means of escape and salvation was always present in our society. This might be demonstrated by the use of *if* as a theme in many works of literature, including Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*.

In the following discussion of the play's events in relation to the present age, I will desist from comparing the situation of Shakespeare's characters to that of the modern refugees, for that would not only be historically inaccurate but also gravely disrespectful and underestimating in terms of the latter's situation. Instead, I am going to point out some of the instances within the play that might make the modern reader aware of the thin line between mobility as a privilege and as a necessity. As the play shows, the need to take to the road for the purpose of refuge does not necessarily befall people in distressful

⁹ Ingrid Horrocks, *Women Wanderers and the Writing of Mobility, 1784–1814* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) 67.



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economic or social situations. In fact, it is the members of the royal family itself that experience the need to escape their predicaments in *The Winter's Tale*.

The beginning of the play witnesses the king of Bohemia enjoying his visit in a distant land, a situation one might perceive in terms of his royal privilege. However, a slight change of circumstances soon drives even the king himself back on the road. While his trip to Sicilia was endowed with positive prospects of his stay abroad, the expeditious return home acquires the character of an escape one would hardly associate with a king. The situation of his son in the second half of the play is different in that Florizel has no home to escape *to*. Instead, he needs to escape *from* home if he wants to remain true to his principles. In this way, although he is the prince of Bohemia and his domestic situation is thus hardly in danger, Florizel finds his own concerns that challenge the peaceful quality of his dwelling in Bohemia and drive the young prince into exile. Neither the king's nor his son's relationship to home or the road should be thus taken for granted. The nature of their mobility is constantly affected and shaped by the physical and imaginary movements of others around them and the privileges afforded by their social status are not always sufficient in determining their motivation for traveling.

If social conditions were not ample to secure a stable role of mobility in one's life already in the Early Modern period, nor should they be considered so today – in an age defined by a much greater degree of uncertainty and transience. What I am trying to achieve in this study is to point out the volatile status of our present approach to mobility and to reemphasize the need for compassion with those who do not possess the same privileges in this field as we do. Whereas mobility remains an attractive option for the majority in the modern western world, there are many subjects throughout Europe, as well as the rest of the world, for whom physical displacement and permanent departure from home forms an



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unavoidable condition of survival. The first step towards assisting these people in their struggles is the ability to understand their situation and sympathize with their hardships. While reading Shakespeare's plays will not by itself solve the migrant crises that Europe is currently facing, it might raise awareness of the conditions surrounding mobility in general as well as the unstable nature of our own relationship to movement.

Mobility is an issue, the significance of which in our culture has been constantly on the rise. Instead of promoting the freedom of movement for certain segments of society while denying it to others, we should interrogate the motives behind global migration and consider the fragile relationship between mobility as a privilege and as a necessity. Reading the works of the Early Modern period might prove extremely helpful in this endeavor, for it gives us different perspectives on this issue and forces us to reconsider our own standpoint. If reading is an exercise in critical thinking, as it is commonly deemed to be today, and mobility a pervasive thematic concern in literature, as it has been ever since its earliest manifestations, then approaching texts such as *The Winter's Tale* can only bear fruit. Through the analyses of the meaning and function of movement in this particular play, I have shown that the status of mobility in the lives of individuals is rather unstable. What we might learn from the overseas voyages of king Polixenes and his son is that the privilege of voluntary mobility enjoyed by the majority of the modern western world is not to be taken for granted, for all our trips might at any point turn into flights.

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Consider the Worm

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In a recent article in *The Guardian*, Adam Gabbatt writes about the Coalition of Radical Life Extension, “an organization which brings together scientists and enthusiasts interested in ‘physical immortality’”.¹ He writes about individuals and companies who have embarked on a quest to cheat death, by whatever means necessary. Some of the methods they undertake are gruesome, such as “injecting young blood into old people,”² while others seem perfectly acceptable, even laudable, such as following a healthy diet and exercise regime. But as Dr Muriel R. Gillick writes, there exists “overwhelming evidence that the potions are ineffective at best, harmful at worst – and a phenomenal waste of money overall”.³ Furthermore, these dubious treatments are only available to the fanatical few, who are most likely also white and almost certainly wealthy. Their first goal is to achieve longevity; their second is immortality. The theory is that if they manage to extend their lives long enough, someone will find a way for them to live forever. With this new, however distant possibility, a new social rift opens, further separating the rich from the poor. Luckily, for now, physical immortality remains a fantasy. However, the articles and books on the matter like to point out that to live forever is a human desire; something we all secretly want. Perhaps it is not surprising that most articles that promote the idea of physical immortality also refer to literature to prove not only that this quest is an old one, but also to give it legitimacy. While there are definitely literary texts that deal with a desire for immortality (the Epic of Gilgamesh is a popular one to mention, as is the Holy Grail), there are also those works that use death as not something to fear and shun, but as an organic part of life. These often deal with immortality projects rather than a quest for physical immortality, where characters view a symbolic extension of life as a way to “outlive” their physical deaths.

¹ Adam Gabbatt, “Is Silicon Valley’s quest for immortality a fate worse than death?”, *The Guardian*, 23 Feb 2019, 16 July 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/feb/22/silicon-valley-immortality-blood-infusion-gene-therapy>>.

² Gabbatt, “Is Silicon Valley’s quest for immortality a fate worse than death?”, *The Guardian*, 23 Feb 2019, 16 July 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2019/feb/22/silicon-valley-immortality-blood-infusion-gene-therapy>>.

³ Muriel R. Gillick, *The Denial of Aging: Perpetual Youth, Eternal Life, and Other Dangerous Fantasies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press: 2007) 3.



In this essay, I will discuss two of Shakespeare's plays, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Hamlet* in order to discover how they deal with death and immortality, and compare them to the situation today. I will argue that the advance of medical technology is creating a modern crisis that was impossible in early-modern England. This much is obvious; but contrary to what some might say, immortality projects are still being promoted as a better way of dealing with death. According to some texts, acceptance of physical death and decay of the body is a healthy way of accepting one's mortality. This is in line with how death is tackled in both *Hamlet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, and is an indication that coming to terms with dying and a strong connection to the reality of death, decomposition of corpses (including getting eaten by worms) are still existent in today's society, forming an opposition to those who seek immortality with the aid of medicine and technology. To discuss this, I will review some recent texts that take different stances on the matter and show why it might be undesirable to strive for immortality. However, as I will argue, this does not mean that anxiety about death is not present; in fact, it is an essential part of life, and the drive behind most immortality projects.

In scene V of Act II of *Antony and Cleopatra*, a messenger arrives in Egypt and brings news of Antony, who had returned to Rome on urgent matters. Cleopatra is extremely anxious to receive the news, and worried about Antony. Before the messenger is even able to speak, she already assumes that the news is bad, and worries that some horrible fate has befallen her lover, exclaiming: "Antonius dead! – If thou say so, villain, / Thou kill'st thy mistress".⁴ Two things are of significance here: firstly, Cleopatra is terrified of the possibility that Antony has perished. Considering the danger of sea journeys in the time in which the play is set, her worry is understandable: it is indicative of Antony's vulnerability. Regardless of his high social standing, Antony is as likely to suffer some horrible fate as a regular sailor, since his status and wealth would not protect him from potential shipwreck. Secondly, Cleopatra states that Antony's death would be the death of her. This might be meant metaphorically and dramatically, or refer to not actual, physical death, but rather the anguish his death would bring her; however, given how the play ends, one can assume that Cleopatra is being literal. Antony dying would mean that she too would die. But she doesn't say that she would kill herself in that case – she puts the blame of her death on the messenger. Later,

⁴ *Antony and Cleopatra* II, v, 1082-1083.



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she threatens to kill the messenger, saying “Rogue, thou hast lived too long”.⁵ Killing or shooting the messenger is a well-known metaphoric phrase dating from Plutarch; if nothing else, it shows how little human life was worth to those in power, the recipients of the news who could kill at will. Cleopatra, oscillating between wanting to shower the messenger in gold and wanting to torture and kill him, is exemplary of this.

We can see how in just those few short lines death and anxiety about death, symbolic and real death as well as precariousness of human life inform this play. One might argue that because of how different life was in Egyptian, Roman, and Shakespearian times compared to today, the relationship with death was also different. Modern medical advances sterilise our experience of death, which takes place not violently and brutally in front of our eyes, like Antony died in front of Cleopatra, but behind closed white curtains. The fragility of life in the time in which the play is set resulted in a relationship with death that was more organic, and some might say more realistic, than what we experience today. Indeed, it reaches beyond death, but how life itself was viewed by Egyptians. Randall Martin writes that Egyptians “[saw] themselves as physiologically embedded in the earth’s organic cycles of material change, rebirth, and transmutation”.⁶ Cleopatra’s suicide is not sterile: it is a return to the earth. And here enter the worms. Martin turns to the edition of *Antony and Cleopatra* that contains notes by its editor, Michael Neill. Of course, the worm the Clown speaks of is the snake in the basket he carries, but as Martin points out, in Shakespeare, this word could mean other species of similar animals. The meanings become blurred when the Clown says “Give it nothing, I pray you, for it is not worth the feeding,” and Cleopatra asks “will it eat me?”⁷ On the surface, they are talking about the snake, but Martin agrees with Neill, who notes that Cleopatra’s question refers to the maggots in the grave. By asking that, she is expressing her anxiety of being eaten by maggots and her fear of bodily decomposition. On the other hand, she calls the bite of the worm/snake “sweet as balm, as soft as air”,⁸ which indicates her acknowledgment of her physical mortality and her fate. She lets the worms bite her, and accepts the worms will eat her dead flesh.

⁵ *Antony and Cleopatra* II, v, 1144.

⁶ Randall Martin, *Shakespeare and Ecology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) 137.

⁷ *Antony and Cleopatra*, V, ii, 3725-7.

⁸ *Antony and Cleopatra*, V, ii, 3776.



But she is Cleopatra, and therefore must be aware that her reputation will not die with her – her “immortal longings”⁹ indicate as much. Cleopatra’s immortality project is her own position as queen, the fact that she has what we would now call a ‘strong brand’. She knows she will not be forgotten. In fact, considering her propensity for the dramatic, I might conjecture that if she doubted her symbolic immortality, she would not have killed herself. Of course, her suicide is also an indication of her pride, because she does not want to be paraded in the streets of Rome as Caesar’s conquest – to the Queen of Egypt, such a fate would be unacceptable, and suicide preferable. On the other hand, she presents her death as a return to Antony, her “husband”, and as a ticket to immortality. Partially, this refers to the afterlife in which she believes; partially, it’s about the memory of her on Earth. To be sure, fame after death is a privilege of the higher classes, and there is no doubt that Cleopatra is not only in the highest position in her kingdom; her position was practically that of a goddess. But in Egypt, deities also die, at least as far as their physical form is concerned, that is something that both kings and beggars have in common. Death is the great social leveller, a position which is these days being challenged by the advance of medicine and technology. Consequently, the idea that we will die, and be eaten by worms, is now shunned by many.

One might argue that even cremation is a way to sterilise death, since ashes are, after all, sterile. Embalming is another way we ward off decay; something we in fact have in common with the Egyptians, who mummified the most important members of their society. However, this is not something that is on Cleopatra’s mind: she considers the worm. The exact reason behind this would be impossible to guess, but it might be related to Shakespeare’s own ideas about death. Worms that eat flesh are after all not something unique to *Antony and Cleopatra*. In *Hamlet*, worms are referred to several times. In the scene where Claudius questions Hamlet about Polonius, Hamlet shrewdly declares that Polonius is at supper, “[n]ot where he eats, but where he is eaten. A certain convocation / of politic worms are e'en at him”.¹⁰ This, and the subsequent lines where he says “[y]our fat king and your lean beggar / is but variable service; two dishes, but to one table”¹¹ he shows no disgust at the idea of decomposition; in fact, he almost revels in it. To Hamlet, worms eating flesh are a part of the natural process of life. To be sure, he might be using the image of maggot-ridden flesh to

⁹ *Antony and Cleopatra*, V, ii, 3739.

¹⁰ *Hamlet*, IV, iii, 2731-2732.

¹¹ *Hamlet*, IV, iii, 2734-2735.



make Claudius uncomfortable, but Claudius does not seem to be bothered by Hamlet's phrasing; he is more concerned with the fact that Hamlet has committed a murder. Considering that cremation, embalming or such practices as Egyptian mummification were not available in those times, organic decomposition was much more accepted in society than it is today. That doesn't mean that it was not considered unpleasant; as Martin puts it, worms, or maggots (since worm in this case serves as an umbrella term) were "creatures exercising a trivial yet fearful agency in the world".¹² Being eaten by maggots was certainly not appetising, but was quite unavoidable.

Secondly, the answers Hamlet gives to Claudius are also political; this is clear from the use of the word 'politic'. Martin¹³ and James Calderwood¹⁴ both mention how this passage contains a reference to the Diet of Worms, the assembly at which Martin Luther responded to charges of heresy. This already invokes politics, but the political nexus does not end there: according to Martin, Hamlet's invocations of the power of the worm "dethrone humans as privileged consumers at the top of the food pyramid".¹⁵ In a talk given at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, Steven Connor makes a similar point, saying that through this statement, "Hamlet's worms enact a radically egalitarian politics of the body that dissolve the imperious authority of the body politic".¹⁶ Martin's point shows the error of perceived superiority of humans over other beings. The clever word play in the final sentence of Connor's speech links closer to politics, reminding us that decay is unavoidable for all things, even nations, states, and empires. But, as Connor is keen to point out in a different part of his talk, worms are not only agents of decomposition; they are invaluable in the circulation of organic matter, which fertilises the soil and promotes new life. In concrete terms, in the very unlikely event that immortality became possible for all humans, the planet might at some point reach full capacity, and the population would stagnate not only in keeping a stable number of individuals, but in literally keeping the very same individuals. It is unclear how that would affect our further progress as a species, but as a worst case scenario, it might result in a population that struggles with originality. From a personal perspective, I can imagine

¹² Martin, 141.

¹³ Martin, 142.

¹⁴ James L. Calderwood, *Shakespeare and the Denial of Death* (Amherst University of Massachusetts Press, 1987) 17.

¹⁵ Martin, 142.

¹⁶ Steven Connor, "A Certain Convocation of Politic Worms," talk given at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, 23 April 2010.



extreme dullness. It is only through accepting mortality and realising that death is a part of life that we can viably expect the formation of new life.

At least on the material level, there is constant recycling, death and life forming two indispensable parts of a whole. But why then do the grave-diggers, the clowns in *Hamlet*, claim the opposite? The second clown asks: “Who builds stronger than a mason, a shipwright, or a / carpenter?”¹⁷ The first clown does not know, but the second one replies: “when you are ask’d this / question next, say ‘a grave-maker.’ The houses he makes lasts / till doomsday”.¹⁸ This would seem in contrast with the previous idea, in which all things come to an end. However, the clown is not being literal; he does not believe that the grave itself will last forever. What he means is that regardless of the fact that bodies decay and all has an eventual end, death itself is eternal. Once they pass from life, the dead are dead – until the end of the world. The Christian undertones refer to a religious immortality project, by which the dead can enter new and better lands. We are also reminded of *Hamlet*’s line in his famous soliloquy, where death is that “undiscover’d country, from whose bourn / No traveller returns”.¹⁹ At first glance, the finality of death invoked in this passage might seem at odds with the idea of an immortality project. However, the opposite is true: because death is the final and unavoidable end of our physical being, and because this is something that we fear, we become motivated to preserve some other part of ourselves for posterity, a memory or legacy that serves as symbolic continuation of life.

Immortality projects are one of the primary topics of Ernest Becker’s book *The Denial of Death*, where he refers to them as *causa sui*. The book is premised on the idea that human civilisation is essentially built on the terror of death, and that one of the most important pursuits of humanity is the immortality project, which attempts to defy it. As Sam Keen lucidly puts it in his introduction,

¹⁷ *Hamlet*, V, i, 3389-3390.

¹⁸ *Hamlet*, V, i, 3397-3399.

¹⁹ *Hamlet*, III, i, 1772-1773.



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We achieve ersatz immortality by sacrificing ourselves to conquer an empire, to build a temple, to write a book, to establish a family, to accumulate a fortune, to further progress and prosperity, to create an information-society and global free market.²⁰

Becker also claims that each immortality project “is a lie that must take its toll as one tries to avoid reality”,²¹ because it is based on a fantasy, on an imagined heroism of the self that can cheat death. These premises are echoed in James Calderwood’s book *Shakespeare and the Denial of Death*, the title of which was inspired by Becker’s work and which not only builds on his ideas, but connects them to Shakespeare. About Hamlet, Calderwood writes that his immortality project was interrupted, as they often are, by the death of his father: this throws Hamlet into a spiral and “sets him off on a neurotically obsessive exploration of death in its various and most repellent forms”.²² The realisation of the lie of *causa sui* leads Hamlet to embrace and explore the more organic, tangible, gruesome truth of death: he considers the worm.

Immortality projects can change throughout a person’s life, be destroyed or replaced, but presumably we all pursue some way of dealing with the terror of mortality. However, as Calderwood puts it, “the fate of all immortality projects [is] a demystifying return to the body and death”.²³ This obvious, yet keen observation applies to the creator of the immortality project. Once dead, Cleopatra can no longer envision herself as the immortal queen of Egypt; any preservation of her person is left to those around her, who remember her ... in her specific case, to this very day. That is how we learn that immortality projects *can* be successful. They provide comfort at the thought of death, because we know that some people managed to live on symbolically. For most of us, our goals are humbler than those of Cleopatra – often, we wish to be remembered by our families, or find comfort in having children. But Cleopatra found immortality in history books and in the works of Shakespeare, who matches her in fame, and whose symbolic existence also far exceeds his mortal life. It is easier to accept the idea of decay and decomposition of our human form when we have such examples of symbolic immortality.

²⁰ Sam Keen, introduction to *The Denial of Death*, by Becker (New York: The Free Press, 1973) xiii.

²¹ Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: The Free Press, 1973) 107.

²² Calderwood, 117.

²³ Calderwood, 91.



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In her book on the subject, Dr Muriel R. Gillick also invokes Becker's idea of immortality projects, and mentions how the "knowledge of our own mortality has shaped human culture".²⁴ She advocates for the acceptance of mortality, and directly attacks the modern medical pursuit of physical immortality I mentioned in the introduction. According to Gillick, chasing immortality and trying to drastically extend life is not only ineffective, but can also have dire social consequences. She writes that it would "create grave injustice if it is not equally available to all citizens".²⁵ She instead presents the immortality project as a healthy way of dealing with the knowledge of our inevitable death. I have previously implied that physical immortality might result in decreased social productivity of the species as a whole: Gillick disagrees, instead saying that her "contention is not that it is good to be mortal because it promotes productivity, but rather that mortality is simply a reality".²⁶ In this, she echoes the telluric relationship demonstrated in *Hamlet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, of death as a part of life which we might fear, but should embrace.

On the opposite end of this spectrum is John Harris, who calls immortality "the Holy Grail".²⁷ In his chapter on the issue, he even mentions Shakespeare, saying that "Shakespeare's plays have all made such ideas familiar".²⁸ He is referring to fairies and magical creatures that feature in some of Shakespeare's plays, rather than immortality offered to humans, and he goes on to mention that many people would choose immortality if it were possible, even at cost of lower quality of life. But I would argue that the problem is not in whether we all want or do not want to live forever; it's whether or not it is ethical. Harris argues for human mental and physical enhancement through the use of gene manipulation and technology, but even though he mentions Karl Marx,²⁹ a person who most definitely concerned himself with class inequality, Harris neglects the class divide in these matters. He sees no problem with the fact that these enhancements and improvements would probably only be available to the selected and wealthy few. He even claims that justice should not enter into the picture.³⁰ For him, social inequality is the way of the world, something that

²⁴ Gillick, 223.

²⁵ Gillick, 219.

²⁶ Gillick, 224.

²⁷ John Harris, *Enhancing Evolution: The Ethical Case for Making Better People* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007) 59.

²⁸ Harris, 59.

²⁹ Harris, 186.

³⁰ Harris, 62.



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always existed and always will; so why not perpetuate it. This is an idea that many, myself included, find unappetising. In her article on the matter, Ann Leckie heavily implies that increased longevity for some but not for all is immoral. However, her argument is naïve; she believes that those who want to be immortal and have the resources to do the research are “often thinking of their own, personal lives, and the lives of those they’re surrounded by”.³¹ The truth is that they might be aware of the detrimental consequences of their actions on the underprivileged, and simply not care.

Harris certainly does not care about social equality, and does not think that creating “parallel populations of mortals and immortals”³² is immoral; in fact, he relies on literature to make his point, claiming that such populations were “envisaged in literature and mythology”.³³ However, the imaginary and magical immortals, such as fairies and elves, that do feature in literature, even Shakespeare’s plays, are not the same as immortal humans. They are otherworldly: that’s the point! Shakespeare’s humans, regardless of their social position, are not immune to death. Both Hamlet and Cleopatra are arguably among the most powerful people in their respective polities, but in the end, they both perish. Their fates are indicative of the relationship with death of people in early modern England, where the relationship with the dead and the dying was much more direct. Of course, it would be impossible to predict how people in Shakespeare’s time would feel about death if they had modern medicine at their disposal, but that is not the most important question to ask. It is whether physical immortality is even something we should be pursuing. Fear of death is natural, even evolutionary necessary, as it drives our survival instinct, but in order to achieve happiness in life we would perhaps be better off if we learned from Hamlet and Cleopatra, who did not ignore the inevitability of physical decay. Through their respective immortality projects, they learned to extend their symbolic existence. We too can learn to accept that our bodies will perish, and instead strive to improve the society in which we live for future generation, and so that they may remember us.

³¹ Ann Leckie, “Living to be 500 years old would be wonderful – but only for the rich,” *The Guardian*, 16 Mar 2015, 16 July 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/mar/16/living-500-year-would-be-wonderful-bill-maris>>

³² Harris, 71.

³³ Harris, 71.



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The fear of death is ever-present. It is most certainly true that most humans wish for some sort of immortality, some way of cheating death and prolonging life. However, chasing physical immortality is not only expensive and ineffective; it also increases social inequality that is already a problem in the modern world. The crisis of death which already significantly affects our perception of the gravely ill and disconnects us with the natural process of dying took on a new shape in the pursuit of physical immortality. While immortality would obviously mean the perpetual existence of the currently living humans, it would make no room for new life, new ideas, and perhaps even hinder further progress. If we consider the worm as not only the agent of decay, but also as the fertiliser of new life, and an agent of progress, we can more easily understand and accept that death is the physical end of an individual, but not of the species, and not of life in general.

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New Faces essay collection, Dominika Kecsov, September 2019

“And now, speak:” Emotional Manipulation in *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Winter’s Tale* and *Macbeth*

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Emotional manipulation as a form of violence, despite beginning to be widely discussed in recent years, still belongs among secondary characteristics of domestic abuse; since it is, by definition, “an interpersonal emotional construct,”¹ its lasting effects remain invisible, but often prove more damaging than physical injuries. The harm is inflicted through “symbolic acts, humiliation, and verbal threats.”² Identifying emotional manipulation and reacting to it adequately presents a complex issue even these days, despite abundant examples in literature.³ This essay shall analyse emotional manipulation within partnerships in three plays of William Shakespeare: *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Winter’s Tale* and *Macbeth*. Each of these plays falls within a different genre, which not only proves the ubiquity of such manipulation, but also reveals the underlying power structures fuelling these behaviours. Emotional manipulation is used by both male and female characters as a vehicle of power; the violence inflicted on the other partner relies entirely on language, and therefore emotional manipulation should be considered in relation to rhetoric. This becomes apparent especially within Brummett’s understanding of rhetoric as violence, in his words “an act that influences and manages the meanings victims experience through the course of their relationships, whether done through physical means or not.”⁴ The experience of the victim is thus dependent on the contrast between reality and the way it is constructed by the manipulator. These three main themes – power, rhetoric and reality – appear in all instances of emotional manipulation in *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Winter’s Tale* and *Macbeth* and provide the basis for analysing the manipulation in these plays.

The Taming of the Shrew, one of Shakespeare’s “problem plays” may not even seem like a comedy to 21st century audiences – as Elizabeth Hutcheon states, if we are reading

¹Rachel Grieve et al., “Masculinity might be more toxic than we think: The influence of gender roles on trait emotional manipulation,” *Personality and Individual Differences* 138 (2019): 158, Science Direct <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0191886918305282?via%3Dihub>> 18 July 2019.

²Josie Queen et al., “Being Emotionally Abused: A Phenomenological Study of Adult Women’s Experiences of Emotionally Abusive Intimate Partner Relationships,” *Issues in Mental Health Nursing* 30.4 (2009): 238, Taylor & Francis Online <<https://doi.org/10.1080/01612840802701257>> 21 July 2019.

³It must be noted that there is a significantly smaller number of examples in the media, though the issue is being talked about more and more.

⁴Christy Dale L. Sims, “Invisible Wounds, Invisible Abuse: The Exclusion of Emotional Abuse in Newspaper Articles,” *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, 8.4 (2008): 380, Taylor & Francis Online <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10926790802480422>> 23 July 2019.



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Katharina as “cowed into submission by Petruchio’s tactics, it is hard to participate in the comedic happiness of the play’s ending.”⁵ Before the play itself, the induction presents manipulation (or, to be more particular, gaslighting)⁶ as a device to entertain the audience; however, this very device makes it possible to consider the play in a slightly different light. As shown in the induction, the main contrast informing *The Taming of the Shrew* is reality versus illusion. This contrast then raises the question of Katharina’s shrewishness (Is the perception of her as a shrew real?) and of the success of Petruchio’s manipulation (Is she really “tamed” by the end of the play?). The text offers only partial answers, and of course, its interpretation depends on staging. Nevertheless, this demonstrates that the key to emotional manipulation is perception, and the rest of the characters in the play perceive Katharina as she seems in Hortensio’s description in Act I: “Her only fault, and that is faults enough, / Is that she is intolerable curst / And shrewd and forward” (I.ii.86-9).⁷ The rhetoric power wielded by the characters has the potential to influence reality; Petruchio begins his manipulation of Katharina by manipulating her image, as he openly states in his monologue in Act II:

I will attend her here,
 And woo her with some spirit when she comes.
 Say that she rail; why then I’ll tell her plain
 She sings as sweetly as a nightingale:
 Say that she frown, I’ll say she looks as clear
 As morning roses newly wash’d with dew:
 Say she be mute and will not speak a word;
 Then I’ll commend her volubility,
 And say she uttereth piercing eloquence:
 If she do bid me pack, I’ll give her thanks,
 As though she bid me stay by her a week:
 If she deny to wed, I’ll crave the day
 When I shall ask the banns and when be married.
 But here she comes; and now, Petruchio, speak. (II.i.167-180)

⁵ Elizabeth Hutcheon, “From Shrew to Subject: Petruchio’s Humanist Education of Katherine in *The Taming of the Shrew*,” *Comparative Drama* 45.4 (2011): 318, EBSCO <<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?authtype=shib&custid=s1240919&profile=eds>> 22 July 2019.

⁶ *The Cambridge Dictionary* defines gaslighting as “the action of tricking or controlling someone by making them believe things that are not true.” This tactic appears most prominently in *The Taming of the Shrew* and constitutes a psychological abuse. S.v. “gaslighting”, *Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary and Thesaurus* (2008) The Cambridge Dictionary Online <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/gaslighting>> 27 July 2019.

⁷ This and all following quotations are from *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, The Alexander Text* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006).



Petruchio's manipulation is based on his rhetorical ability and his goal is to convince both the audience and Katharina: the audience should stop seeing Katharina as a shrew, while she herself is supposed to change her behaviour on the basis of this rhetorical re-description, despite the fact that Katharina's shrewishness is a rhetorical construct perpetuated by other characters to begin with. Katharina, however, proves a worthy opponent in this verbal sparring, so that while her "shrewishness" is connected to her being "an inappropriate speaker,"⁸ her speeches are not as unintelligible as Elizabeth Hutcheon would have them. Hutcheon interprets Petruchio's behaviour as education in rhetoric, claiming that by the end of the play Katharina becomes a speaking subject;⁹ this education, however, is conducted through emotional manipulation. Rather than providing Katharina with rhetorical power, Petruchio intends to overturn her presentation of herself.¹⁰ Act IV consequently abounds with scenes of manipulation, as Petruchio begins his project of "taming" proper, which he envisages as a sort of guide for other husbands. To assist his manipulation, Petruchio uses physical means such as lack of food and sleep: "She eat no meat to-day, nor none shall eat; / Last night she slept not, nor to-night she shall not...This is a way to kill a wife with kindness; / And thus I'll curb her mad and headstrong humour" (IV.i.181-2, 192-3). The label of the "shrew" may at this point be attached to him as well, since he mistreats not only Katharina (though he may call it "kindness"), but also his servants:

PETRUCHIO

Enter one with water

Come, Kate, and wash, and welcome heartily.

You whoreson villain! will you let it fall?

Strikes him

KATHARINA

Patience, I pray you; 'twas a fault unwilling. (IV.i.138-140)

Katharina, on the other hand, defends the servants against Petruchio in all instances; when not constructed as a shrew, her behaviour is far from what the audience would expect if the label were true. In the following scenes Petruchio "imposes activity, mobility, dress, thoughts"¹¹ in

⁸ Hutcheon, 323.

⁹ Hutcheon, 323.

¹⁰ Hutcheon, 326.

¹¹ Queen et al., 240.



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a way that, based on a study by Josie Queen, Margaret H. Brackley, and Gail B. Williams, would constitute abuse. Despite Petruchio’s gaslighting, Katharina refuses “to enter the fictional space that Petruchio has constructed, she holds onto her experience of reality in the face of his presentation of it,”¹² insisting on her right of speech: “I am no child, no babe: / Your betters have endured me say my mind, / And if you cannot, best you stop your ears” (IV.iii.74-6). Speech is the defining element of the “shrew” label in the play and also a way to resist manipulation; no wonder then that Katharina exclaims “I will be free / Even to the uttermost, as I please, in words” (IV.iii.79-80). She is soon stripped of this as her last freedom – but through her acceptance of Petruchio’s perception of the world, the play highlights its own illusory nature. It is not important what Katharina thinks, as long as her behaviour and speech are the image of the “tamed” wife. After Petruchio gains his ends, he begins to present reality:

KATHARINA

Forward, I pray, since we have come so far,
And be it moon, or sun, or what you please:
An if you please to call it a rush-candle,
Henceforth I vow it shall be so for me.

PETRUCHIO

I say it is the moon.

KATHARINA

I know it is the moon.

PETRUCHIO

Nay, then you lie: it is the blessed sun.

KATHARINA

Then, God be bless’d, it is the blessed sun:
But sun it is not, when you say it is not;
And the moon changes even as your mind.
What you will have it named, even that it is;
And so it shall be so for Katharine. (IV.v.12-22)

The manipulation in *The Taming of the Shrew* is based on opposites and is made possible by rhetorical construction. Katharina’s final speech is the most divisive aspect of the whole play: the text presents us with what seems to be Petruchio’s rhetorical victory, even though it is greatly helped by physical effects of lack of sleep and food. Yet Katharina’s speech is

¹²Hutcheon, 327.



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curiously unconvincing in comparison with the rest of the play – the nature of her “taming” remains largely dependent on decisions of director and actors staging the play.

Unlike *The Taming of the Shrew*, the emotional manipulation in *The Winter’s Tale* is closely linked to jealousy, as Leontes, king of Sicilia, attempts to sacrifice his wife in order to achieve rest, relief and social order;¹³ the reason for his behaviour is that Leontes believes his wife, Hermione, has been unfaithful to him with his friend, Polixenes, king of Bohemia. Leontes’ manipulation places Hermione in the position of an adulteress, so that he (similarly to Petruchio) manipulates not only his wife, but also the audience and the court within the play. His jealous conviction is, however, dependent upon witnesses:

LEONTES

You, my lords,
 Look on her, mark her well; be but about
 To say ‘she is a goodly lady,’ and
 The justice of your hearts will thereto add
 ‘’Tis pity she’s not honest, honourable:’
 (...)
 Ere you can say ‘she’s honest:’ but be’t known,
 From him that has most cause to grieve it should be,
 She’s an adulteress.

HERMIONE

Should a villain say so,
 The most replenish’d villain in the world,
 He were as much more villain: you, my lord,
 Do but mistake. (II.i.64-8, 76-80)

Leontes in the rhetoric construction of his wife places, similarly to Renaissance painters, one hidden flaw in Hermione’s perfection: he formulates a complex argument in which his wife is the ideal woman, but due to a loss of honesty he cannot respect her perfection anymore. This construction of Hermione serves not only to manipulate Leontes’ audience, but also to convince himself; in fact, the amount of obsessively jealous soliloquies points to Leontes’ need to literally speak his wife’s unfaithfulness into reality. The manipulation directed towards Hermione is not as clear as Petruchio’s was, partially because Hermione refuses to

¹³ Claire Dawkins, “Gendered Narratives of Marital Dissolution in Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*,” *Women’s Studies* 46.2 (2017): 102, EBSCO
 <<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?authtype=shib&custid=s1240919&profile=eds>> 25 July 2019.



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yield – her death and resurrection can be interpreted as a kind of emotional manipulation too, conducted vicariously through Paulina. The queen’s words “How will this grieve you, / When you shall come to clearer knowledge, that / You thus have publish’d me!” (II.i.96-8) turn prophetic in the latter part of the play.

Both Leontes and Hermione manipulate the emotions of the audience using variety of tactics, including “public performance, persuasion, the strategic use of amplification of coalitions and outrage, and emotional entrepreneurship”¹⁴ all of which can be seen in Act II; however, it is Leontes who is less sure of his power. When Hermione says “The king’s will be perform’d!” (II.i.115) Leontes replies in the same line by asking “Shall I be heard?” (II.i.115). This once again reveals that at the centre of emotional manipulation is a power structure considered destabilised by one of the characters: emotional manipulation presents a means of gaining power in a relationship. Hermione’s political and personal power should not be underestimated, though it depends upon the support she has as a queen: she affirms her position through her refusal to accept Leontes’ fantastic accusations. The conflict between Leontes and Hermione is not only that of illusion and reality (in relation to Hermione’s adultery), but also a battle for power conducted through rhetoric virtuosity. Public performance of such rhetoric in court (both judicial and royal) highlights the nature of manipulation as a power-based interpersonal structure. The illusory nature of this power is articulated by Hermione in her defence in Act III:

HERMIONE

Sir,

You speak a language that I understand not:

My life stands in the level of your dreams,

Which I’ll lay down.

LEONTES

Your actions are my dreams;

You had a bastard by Polixenes,

And I but dream’d it. As you were past all shame,--

Those of your fact are so – so past all truth:

Which to deny concerns more than avails; for as

Thy brat hath been cast out, like to itself,

¹⁴ Rose McDermott., “Leadership and the Strategic Emotional Manipulation of Political Identity: An Evolutionary Perspective,” *The Leadership Quarterly* (2018): 5, ScienceDirect
<<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1048984318301310?via%3Dihub>> 20 July 2019.



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No father owning it, – which is, indeed,
 More criminal in thee than it, – so thou
 Shalt feel our justice, in whose easiest passage
 Look for no less than death. (III.ii.76-89)

After Hermione's presumed death, Paulina assumes her role as a voice of conscience; she accuses Leontes of tyranny and murder – reminded of his acts and the tragedy they lead to, Leontes repents through Paulina's manipulation. Emotional manipulation, therefore, is not necessarily only malevolent: while Leontes uses manipulation to make certain illusory perceptions seem true, Paulina's manipulation ensures the happy ending of the play.

In *Macbeth*, on the other hand, emotional manipulation leads to real death: while all the previous marriages could be described as psychosexual wars, this one is particularly striking, as lady Macbeth manipulates her husband without him being aware of it. When she argues for the murder of Duncan, she does not reference power (already attained or to be still attained) as a motivating factor to spur her husband into action; rather, she constantly mocks and devalues his manhood. Macbeth acts because he perceives a lack of power as a threat to his selfhood:

LADY MACBETH

Was the hope drunk
 Wherein you dress'd yourself? hath it slept since?
 And wakes it now, to look so green and pale
 At what it did so freely? From this time
 Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard
 To be the same in thine own act and valour
 As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
 Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
 And live a coward in thine own esteem,
 Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would,'
 Like the poor cat i' the adage?

MACBETH

Prithce, peace:
 I dare do all that may become a man;
 Who dares do more is none. (I.vii.35-47)

Lady Macbeth deliberately describes violence as valour and aggression as sexual prowess: her manipulation is highly effective, since Macbeth echoes her ideas for the rest of the play –



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when he is about to commit regicide, he does so with “Tarquin’s ravishing strides” (II.i.55), describing his act as a rape. Lady Macbeth aligns violence with masculinity and then presents it as desirable: “When you durst do it, then you were a man; / And, to be more than what you were, you would / Be so much more the man” (I.vii.49-51). To achieve this, she manipulates Macbeth’s anxiety and highlights threats to their shared identity.¹⁵ She assumes a position of masculinity: in the context of Galenic one-sex model, her call to spirits to “unsex” her is perceived as a possibility – she can become a man not only through her behaviour, but also physically. If Macbeth does not dare to act, thus forfeiting his masculinity, she will assume it (and the power related to it) for herself. In this particular marriage, masculinity is the symbol of power and Macbeth and lady Macbeth seem unable to wield it both at the same time.

The banquet scene in Act III most clearly demonstrates the way lady Macbeth uses manipulation to gain power; when Macbeth reacts to Banquo’s ghost, she mocks this reaction as unmanly, going as far as to outright ask Macbeth “Are you a man?” (III.iv.58) As in the previous plays, lady Macbeth attempts to control the way her husband sees reality, when she denies the existence of the ghost. Thus, when the ghost enters the second time, Macbeth feels compelled to repeat several times that his reaction is not due to lack of manliness and compares his behaviour to that of lady Macbeth:

You make me strange even to the disposition that I owe,
When now I think you can behold such sights
And keep the ruby of your cheeks
When mine is blanched with fear. (III.iv.112-116)

Lady Macbeth in this particular scene assumes not only his masculinity, but also Macbeth’s position as a host and a husband, rendering him practically useless. It is no surprise then that Macbeth wants to keep his wife in the dark about the other murders, so that she can be “innocent of the knowledge” (III.ii.45), until she can “applaud the deed” (III.ii.46). Lady Macbeth manipulates her husband’s fear of being perceived as less than a man so well that Macbeth continues conflating manhood with violence even after her death. He uses the same techniques towards other male characters in the play, repeatedly challenging Malcolm by calling him a “boy”. The emotional manipulation used by lady Macbeth is based on “using

¹⁵ McDermott, 2.



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cues that in other circumstances would indicate a particular emotion as an appropriate response”¹⁶ so that she can “shape emotional responses, even if those cues are false, manufactured or misrepresented.”¹⁷ As this and previous examples prove, emotional manipulation is not limited to men only, though the research suggests that “the consistent effect of masculine gender roles in the prediction of emotional manipulation for both sexes reveals that perceptions of agency and dominance are key to emotional manipulation.”¹⁸

As was demonstrated in all three plays, power is the key concept connected to emotional manipulation. The power structures informing intimate partnerships in *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Winter’s Tale* and *Macbeth* are connected with the social position of the main characters; the manipulation functions as a form of rhetoric¹⁹ and is used to realize certain constructs through speech. As Christy-Dale L. Sims states:

The destruction of the victim’s identity and sense of self may be accomplished rhetorically by the abuser through the use of displaced or symbolic violence, or any combination of some or all of the following behaviors: jokes and teasing, blaming, belittling, ridiculing, criticizing, insulting, name-calling, derogatory comments, bickering, quarreling, silence, ignoring, gestures, and threats.²⁰

The difference between literature and accounts of emotional abuse reported by the victims is relatively small: Shakespeare’s characters use gaslighting well before the term denoting this type of manipulation even existed. The techniques remain the same, even though nowadays we may evaluate emotional manipulation differently. Nevertheless, emotional abuse is still hard to identify, as the victims’ stories are excluded from newspapers, so that “their experiences are effectively marginalized and made invisible by the focus given to physical forms of violence, such as battery and sexual abuse.”²¹ In this regard the possibility to see these plays as stories of emotional manipulation allows for a recognition of such behaviours in oneself or in others; such a recognition often presents the first step in dealing

¹⁶ McDermott, 7.

¹⁷ McDermott, 7.

¹⁸ Grieve et al., 160.

¹⁹ Sims, 379.

²⁰ Sims, 381.

²¹ Sims, 377.



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with the trauma of emotional abuse. The point of this essay, however, is not to provide a solution (since the only possible solution is a deep change within society), but to point out the prevalence of emotional manipulation in relationships both real and staged, past and present, straight or queer; identification of these behaviours and articulation of the ways in which they are harmful can be conducted through literature – which is exactly what this essay attempted to do.

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