

ADAPTED BODIES, ADAPTED TEXTS: QUEER SURVIVAL VIA  
EARLY MODERN DRAMA

By

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To my parents,  
Mike and Dania,  
for making this  
all possible,  
&  
To Natalie  
and Cinthia,  
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me sane.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: SHAKESPEARE, SURVIVAL, AND ADAPTATION EMBODIED

2016 marked the 400-year anniversary of William Shakespeare's death and, by so doing, marked also a resurrection that illuminated the instability of that very death. To celebrate the milestone, The British Council launched a global program fittingly if ironically entitled "Shakespeare Lives," which sought to encourage consumption and creation of adaptational works inspired by Shakespeare around the world.<sup>1</sup> Filmic, theatrical, literary, and pedagogical projects were undertaken as a result, the archived remnants of which have been amassed at [shakespearelives.org](http://shakespearelives.org) for lively posterity to match Shakespeare's own.<sup>2</sup> The trailer announcing the campaign, posted to YouTube and featuring animations of a William Shakespeare moving in varied forms through history, closes by asserting, "Yes, he may have died 400 years ago, but: Shakespeare lives" (*Shakespeare Lives*). I open my dissertation with this initiative because it serves as a timely and succinct synthesis of the central concerns pulling my own project together: life, death, and the manner in which processes of literary adaptation work to abet both these poles. What's more, the digital archive of the project that its website provides privileges its outreach to non-white and non-straight bodies in ways unsubtle. The web page's topmost header, spanning the full width of the screen, lays up-close spotlight on a black performer with the words "Shakespeare Lives" and a description of the program situated over the close-up shot of his face.<sup>3</sup> By transposing textual indicators of Shakespeare's afterlife over the black pictured subject, the project's website suggests Shakespeare's adaptational reincarnation in bodies marginalized

and at odds with the ones typically tied to Shakespeare's form. If Shakespeare lives, he does so here, if only momentarily, in a black body.

This focus on Shakespeare's reanimated link to the bodily vulnerable is intensified as one scrolls down. The section devoted to the project's filmic adaptations comes next, signaled by a header featuring an image of Franco Zeffirelli's 1968 *Romeo and Juliet*.<sup>4</sup> As though to offset the jarring shift from a black Shakespeare to a white, heterosexual presentation of one of his most iconic works, the site quickly goes on to highlight its "Shakespeare Lives" ambassador, Sir Ian McKellen, emphasizing his global reach and, in text bold and large, his standing as a gay man. The website pulls from McKellen's introduction to the program's Russian film festival, quoting: "I'm here as an actor to promote Shakespeare and as a long-standing friend of Russia and an openly gay man" (McKellen). That the text of this quote is blocked off in a box of color and set to a type size that renders it larger than even the picture of McKellen that supplements it reveals the extent to which McKellen's specifically minority status is being privileged and foregrounded.<sup>5</sup> "Shakespeare Lives" offers, then, quite self-consciously, a project invested in the capacity of adaptation to extend Shakespeare-infused life, a life it is eager to prove holds special promise for bodies beyond the 'dead white guys' of the Western literary canon that Shakespeare stands in many ways as the central icon of.<sup>6</sup>

My own project shares similar investments, though it seeks firstly to interrogate the very terms that "Shakespeare Lives" here sets out. Transformative adaptation, as the website's project visually tells us, revives the dead in forms accessible and new – indeed, it revives the dead in *bodies* accessible and new: as I have shown, just a cursory glance at the website's beginnings offer up a black Shakespeare and a gay Shakespearean ambassador. I concur with this contention but aim to flesh out the risks, benefits, and sticky realities of that promise, considering what

precisely it is we mean when we speak of adapting and how bodies textual, human, living, and dead are specifically implicated in that process. By moving to consider how processes of adaptation work upon bodies early modern and contemporary alike, I stake the claim that all acts of adaptation are essentially acts of survival. Indeed, it may seem common sense to say that each time a Shakespeare text is adapted, it survives insofar as its lifespan of cultural relevance stretches forward. It may even seem simple to claim, as “Shakespeare Lives” does, that something of Shakespeare himself survives in that action. These survivals are no doubt crucial to my argument, but I want to shed light on a proximate survival that has gone neglected in both critical and colloquial discussions of adaptation’s survivalist potential: the survival of the adapting bodies that take on the labor of adaptational work, be they writers, directors, performers, or consumers. It is not enough to say that texts adapt and survive while neglecting the efforts and successes of the bodies that allow for that very textual thriving. In the work that follows, I consider adaptations within and without the early modern dramatic canon in order to posit adaptation as an embodied process that hinders or engenders myriad survivals, the most pressing of which involve not text or author but the adapting agents that revive them in their own bodily retelling. When Shakespeare is adapted, it is not Shakespeare’s survival that really matters, literally or otherwise. It is ours, the vulnerable who have no choice but to carve redemptive if complicated spaces for ourselves within his famously undying words.

Before I turn to the critical-theoretical fields that have shaped my methodology, I want to linger on the “Shakespeare Lives” archive in order to consider the very first adaptational work it makes available for viewing: a short film entitled *Dear Mister Shakespeare*, written by multimedia visual artist Phoebe Boswell and directed by Shola Amoo. The film sees its writer reciting a poem that takes the form of a letter to Shakespeare, reflecting on the racial violences

and redemptions in *Othello*, as well as the adaptational dangers and possibilities that emanate therefrom. I position my analysis of this film before my analysis of the field of adaptation studies because the film itself theorizes the stakes and mediums of adaptational processes in ways pertaining specifically to the early modern period and the bodies its words have heaped both pain and empowerment onto. The short film features an Othello who moves through history and finds adaptational representation in a host of different art forms: interpretive dance, poetry, charcoal drawing, photography, and the filmic medium of the meta-text itself. The bodies of Othello and Boswell-as-adapter are foregrounded throughout, the adapter and adapted transforming one another in kind. This dynamic is captured most provocatively by the charcoal that messily covers Boswell's hands as she speaks her poetic address to The Bard.<sup>7</sup> These glimpses vary in type and location but typically feature her in mid shot before a cream-colored wall, bared arms visible and covered up to the elbow in messy smears of charcoal. Charcoal in the film serves two major functions, both of which come to be synthesized on the space of Boswell's dirtied hands. It acts firstly as an adaptational medium. The short film opens with Boswell working on a charcoal portrait of Othello, who stands before her as he speaks an adapted version of Othello's lines on story and witchcraft.<sup>8</sup> Close-up shots of Boswell's hands at work on the portrait reveal the narrative reason for the dirt covering her arms and hands for the entirety of the film. Charcoal, then, serves in part as the means through which the first of Boswell's renderings of Othello is produced, an act of creation that brings the nuances of his racialized representation into her like hands. The charcoal that lingers on her body throughout the film thus acts as a through-line that reminds us of this initiary adaptational project she embarks upon, a sign of her capacity to wrestle Othello from Shakespeare's hands into her equally creative own.



Less favorably, however, is charcoal's simultaneous link to the racism of the play's language and performance history. Boswell performs a large chunk of her verse with a painted, charcoal-black Othello dancing around her, his nod to the blackface performance history that haunts the character made explicit in a shot that centers him in the frame as Boswell declares, "What is obscene to me is how recently blackface was banned in *Othello*" (Boswell).<sup>9</sup> That the similar charcoal-black of her hands is symbolically linked to this blackface past is clear every time the two share the frame, the color of his blackened skin and her blackened hands identical. In the film's final lines, Boswell asks: "So, mister Shakespeare, did you choose the dark charcoal for his I quote 'sooty' skin to make a point about race and who can, who does, and who should fit in" (Boswell)? Her hands are thus covered throughout in this soot that demonstrates both her creative capacity to redeem Othello and, more perilously, the way this very medium reproduces the racist original, a reproduction that leaves visible bodily harm on both her Othello and herself as his creator. Her adaptational reworking of Othello's form cannot help but to bear the palpable trace of the originary violence she seeks to expel, charcoal reforming him in ways inescapably complicit with the very history being lambasted. Especially telling is the fact that this accidental reification has consequences for her own person as well, her blackened hands visually aligning her body with that of the blackface Othello she both exorcizes and summons anew. Boswell's act of adapting Othello is fraught with contradiction, the motion of it enabling embodied black resistance even as it runs the risk of giving new life to racist ideologies in ways that have consequences for writerly, performing, and spectating black bodies alike.

Lest *Dear Mister Shakespeare* imply that it's merely the medium of charcoal that opens Othello up to adaptational violence, it is careful to illustrate the hazard similarly inherent to all representational modes that he may be reworked within. The midway point of the film sees

Othello getting his photograph taken, a tilted black picture frame before him and a white backdrop behind. Two blonde white women snap his picture as a seated white man watches the whole scene, the objectifying force of this artistic gaze revealed by Boswell's voiceover as the scene transpires, in which she quotes directly examples of the racist language of *Othello*: "You create characters that speak race at an astounding level, they describe Othello as 'devil,' 'lascivious moor, 'black ram,' you evoke prejudice at every turn" (Boswell). This adaptational moment is as complex in its signification as Boswell's own charcoal art, however, as the filmic camera slowly zooms in on Othello's face until the frame that traps him is erased, the seeming passivity of his pose vanishing with it. So too do the white photographer-artists and their white male audience fade from the shot, the black frame that marks their authorly *mise en scène* leaving the field of our vision and thereby subverting theirs. As both the in-text audience and we as viewers of the film are stared back at, Boswell interrupts her own critique of the play's racist phrasing to note that even its textual form is threaded through with compensatory resistances. She recites, "But, hello, you then subvert the whole thing with the poise and the grace you give to Othello, / He stares state straight in the face and says: 'I only told her stories of the places I've been...'" (Boswell). Even white-penned renderings of Othello come to hold some potential, violent frameworks capable of being undercut by the black voices and black bodies tasked with performance. Every act of adapting Othello, the film thus suggests, is rife with risk and benefit alike, the continuing survival of the text a vessel for the simultaneous survival and denigration of the bodies implicated within and by it.

If "Shakespeare Lives" works to posit Shakespearean adaptation as a means through which different types of bodies may diversify the playwright's continuing life, then *Dear Mister Shakespeare* both validates and destabilizes this utopic notion. The film suggests that the

empowerment of adaptational endeavors is by no means easily or even successfully achieved, putting forth its own theory of adaptation that attends to the inescapable violences and accidental self-destructions that occur when marginalized bodies take on Shakespeare. By posing adaptation as a process ambivalent in its relationship to vulnerable bodies, the film challenges both the feel-good promise of the “Shakespeare Lives” project and the recurring idea in adaptation studies more generally that adaptation engenders anything like a simple, joyous survival. That Shakespeare thrives on in part through the very bodies his texts disenfranchise becomes a reality as worthy of fear as it is of hope. Boswell’s filmic letter forces us to consider the possibility that facilitating Shakespeare’s survival may come at the heavy cost of the survival of bodies like Othello’s and her own, capable of being wounded by his words, texts, and undying ubiquity.

That adaptation functions as a mechanism of survival where texts are concerned has been of central interest to select adaptation theorists, who pull from scientific writings on evolutionary adaptation to sharpen its definition in a literary, filmic context. As Robert Stam writes, “...If mutation is the means by which the evolutionary process advances, then we can also see filmic adaptation as ‘mutations’ that help their source novel ‘survive...’ Do not adaptations ‘adapt to’ changing environments and changing tastes...” (Stam 3)? Indeed, even biologist Gary R. Bortolotti has written on the homology between biological and literary adaptation, positing both as processes of replication in tandem with adaptation theorist Linda Hutcheon. Together they write, “Cultural selection, like natural selection, involves differential survival through a process of replication into future generations” (Bortolotti, Hutcheon 448). This conceptualization of adaptation is in keeping with the one “Shakespeare Lives” poses: adaptation is a process through which source-texts change to meet new cultural, historical environments and thereby ensure their survival, their relevance and canonization kept afloat through these adaptive alterations. Survival

here is aggressively centered on the text. It is Shakespeare that lives, the source-text that mutates and survives. Despite an interest in adaptation's biological beginnings being thus central to contemporary adaptation studies, no attention has been paid to the bodies that take on and see through this adaptational work. After all, no text, Shakespeare or otherwise, adapts itself. With no human bodies to alter them and to alter themselves in accordance, adaptations of texts wouldn't even exist to be discussed at all. I contend that bodies adapt texts not only to abet the survival of the text at hand, but also, and more crucially, to abet their own survival in ways varied and contingent upon the text at hand. The value of adaptation is at its most present when it is human bodies that are deploying textual reworkings as a means of ensuring their own thriving. Shakespeare lives because of adaptation, to be sure, but that adaptation has been brought into being because it has been, in ways complicated and contradictory, mutually beneficial for the human lives and bodies that put in the replicating work.

Considerations of literary adaptation alongside biological adaptation were launched largely by Spike Jonze's 2002 *Adaptation.*, a postmodern film that sees Charlie Kaufman (played by Nicolas Cage) struggling to write a screenplay that adapts a book entitled *The Orchid Thief*, a nonfiction study of a plant poacher named La Roche (played by Chris Cooper). The film's title is multiply applicable to its content, a meta-narrative about the process of adapting a book to film, and specifically about adapting a book about *biological* adaptation to film. Of the many writer-characters that turn up, even Charles Darwin makes an appearance, depicted at work on *The Origin of Species*, the scientific text that founded contemporary notions of evolutionary adaptation and natural selection. Despite Darwin's literal presence in the film, however, it is a quote by the film's orchid thief La Roche that has inspired the most critical, biology-concerned attention: "Adaptation is a profound process," La Roche declares, "Means you figure out how to

thrive in the world” (*Adaptation.*). Indeed, this line of dialogue acts as the epigraph to the formative article in which Bortolotti and Hutcheon first brought attention to literary adaptation’s relationship to biological adaptation. Interestingly, the context of this filmic moment has gone ignored in considerations of its significance, however, and it is that context I want to turn to now because it reveals an investment in specifically human adaptation that has not been critically broached. I am especially eager to attend to the response that La Roche’s assertion elicits from Meryl Streep’s Susan Orlean: “Yeah, but it’s easier for plants,” she replies, “I mean, they have no memory. With a person, though, adaptation’s almost shameful” (*Adaptation.*).<sup>10</sup> Despite the enthusiasm with which La Roche’s half of this exchange has inspired discourse on literary adaptation as akin to biological adaptation, it is immediately met in the film by a response that both explicitly brings humans to the fore in ways this discourse neglects to and that expresses skepticism at this very biological analogy. As Susan here reminds us, adaptation is perhaps a simple process for plants, lacking consciousness and memory as they do. So, too, we might say, is it easy for texts, even more lacking in the kind of sentience that enables the feeling of anything like shame. Where adaptation becomes difficult, indeed, even shameful, is when humans come in, memories and bodies making adaptation no less profound a process but undoubtedly a harder one, in which survival doesn’t necessarily tend toward the perfection of La Roche’s plants.<sup>11</sup>

My central aim in this project is to push adaptation studies toward a consideration of the human and the embodied, decentering its current focus on the survival of texts and bringing bodily human survival to the fore. Essential for my purposes is a focus specifically on the survival of bodies vulnerable or ostracized, such as the black bodies enmeshed in *Othello* or the queer bodies that “Shakespeare Lives” aimed to appeal to with its prominent inclusion of Sir Ian McKellen as its openly gay ambassador. The shame and struggle of adaptational processes that

*Adaptation.*'s Susan Orlean posits is, I argue, never more present or pressing than when bodies put adaptational labor into texts that have the power to harm them. In adapting source-texts to allow resistant and identificatory room for newer, more 'diverse' bodies, these vulnerable adapters work to pave new entryways into canonical texts that allow them to resonate in ways redemptive for bodies beyond the white, straight, and male. This process engenders the survival that comes with representation, allowing the marginalized to see likenesses of their corporeal selves in the media they consume. That such an act of crafted representation is nothing less than a survival strategy is an idea that has been famously conveyed by Junot Díaz, who spoke in 2009 of the urgent necessity of such representational efforts:

You know how vampires have no reflections in the mirror? If you want to make a human being a monster, deny them, at the cultural level, any reflection of themselves. Growing up, I felt like a monster in some ways. I was like, 'Yo, is something wrong with me?' That the whole society seems to think people like me don't exist? And part of what inspired me was this deep desire, that before I died, I would make a couple of mirrors. That I would make some mirrors, so that kids like me might see themselves reflected back and might not feel so monstrous for it. (Díaz)

Díaz, a writer of original fiction, speaks here not of adaptation specifically but expresses a sentiment all the more relevant for the dissemination of seminal, ubiquitous texts. Adaptation, as I am interested in defining it, is a process that allows for this kind of mirror-making in texts not original but already, inescapably, in circulation. The peril is higher here, since it demands the risky engagement of words, narratives, and performance histories that can and have hurt, with no guarantee of ameliorating those essential wounding capacities. I want to suggest also, however,

that the survivalist benefit of such a task is higher, too, allowing representational overhaul of texts already proven to have lifespans near-immortal. There is little chance, after all, that after 400 years of thriving, *Othello*'s cultural survival will be coming to an end any time soon. The need for adaptational reworkings that move us further away from its murky blackface past is thus essential, if painful. *Othello*-the-text, then, like *Adaptation.*'s plants, may have no memory, but we the people who must engage it again and again in varied forms do. This irrepressible remembrance of its racist past is what makes the task of adapting it so dangerous, even as it acts also as the impelling force that demands the task be undertaken in traumatic repetition.

I have established the necessity of reconsidering the kinds of survival abetted by adaptational processes. It is necessary also, however, to take a step back and deliberate: what can even be said to count as an adaptation in the first place? I seek not only to broaden critical understanding of what adaptation's inspired survival looks like, but also to offer a reworking of the term itself that treats that very survival as essential. I am by no means the first thinker to call for a clear definition of the term. Ever since George Bluestone published *Novels Into Film* in 1957, critics interested in the art of retelling literary stories on film have posed queries and assertions about the value of adaptational work and how the relationship between literary and cinematic mediums may be understood and defined.<sup>12</sup> Much of this work has grappled with an imagined hierarchy of literature over film and an accompanying preoccupation with the faithfulness an adapted film grants its source-text (a line of discourse I will be returning to later). More recently, however, just as much of it has moved to question the definition of the word and concept itself. Thomas Leitch opens his seminal work *Film Adaptation and its Discontents* by defining the entire field of adaptation theory, quite simply, as "the systematic study of films based on literary sources" (Leitch 2).<sup>13</sup> In taking the term *adaptation* on its own, however, Leitch

expands upon a critical history of breaking the term up and across a wide and complex range of taxonomic categories. Geoffrey Wagner, the first to undertake such a feat, proposed three basic categories for the adaptational transition of fiction into film: *transposition*, in which a source-text is adapted with as little alteration as humanly possible, *commentary*, in which the source-text is adapted faithfully enough to retain easy recognition but nonetheless deploys discernible deviations, and, finally, *analogy*, in which major adaptational departures are put into place in order to create an entirely new text.<sup>14</sup> Since Wagner, Dudley Andrew,<sup>15</sup> Kamilla Elliott,<sup>16</sup> and Gérard Genette<sup>17</sup> have proposed adaptational and intertextual taxonomies of their own. The desire on the part of critics to create systems of classification that make discussing adaptation more manageable is noted by Leitch, even as he proposes several sub-categories of his own: adaptation as compression, expansion, correction, update, superimposition, colonization, analogue, or parody.<sup>18</sup> Leitch goes on to close this proposal, however, with a self-defeating acknowledgement that it is in many respects a failed one, observing that most if not all adapted products straddle several of the categories listed. Leitch determines, “The slippery slope between adaptation and allusion cannot be divided into discrete stages because it really is slippery... There is no normative model for adaptation” (Leitch 126-127). Leitch closes his taxonomical exercise by encouraging that adaptation theorists learn to surrender to this very slipperiness, suggesting that the ever-going search for categorical distinctions distracts from the real work at hand.

Still, the desire to set clear limits on how adaptation may be applied and understood has persisted, with Linda Hutcheon’s proposed definition holding lasting sway over the field:

In short, adaptation can be described as the following:

- An acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works
- A creative and an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging



- An extended and intertextual engagement with the adapted work.

(Hutcheon 8)

This definition no doubt allows for reasonable omissions of what may be considered an adaptation while also offering a description slippery enough to allow focus on the adaptational work itself rather than where on a grid of categorization it may or may not fall. My own definition of adaptation thus takes Hutcheon's as a point of departure, but I identify the starkest difference between our two formulations in one of the modes of adapted work she refuses to read as adaptation: Hutcheon explicitly notes that the exclusions her definition allow mean that fan-created works such as fanfiction do not fall under the adaptation umbrella. Fanfiction, written fiction posted to the Internet<sup>19</sup> and focused on the exploration of characters, settings, and/or plotlines from a preexisting piece of media, serves as a hugely popular medium through which adaptational endeavors may be undertaken. Most essential for us is the tendency of fanfiction to privilege bodies marginalized, a phenomenon Lev Grossman discusses in his article on *Harry Potter* fanfiction (and beyond) "The Boy Who Lived Forever":

Diversity: the fan-fiction scene is hyperdiverse. You'll find every race, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, age, and sexual orientation represented there, both as writers and as characters. For people who don't recognize themselves in the media they watch, it's a way of taking those media into their own hands and correcting the picture. "For me, fanfic is partly a political act," says 'XT.' "MGM is too cowardly to put a gay man in one of their multimillion-dollar blockbusters? And somehow want me to be content with the occasional subtext crumble from the table? Why should I? (Grossman)

This fannish drive toward transformative creation that brings underrepresented bodies into the pre-existing media fold is, in my estimation, adaptation at its most vital, functioning like Phoebe Boswell's address to Shakespeare as a reworking that abets myriad survivals that are both catalyzed by pain and at risk of catalyzing more.<sup>20</sup> It is in light of this crucial distinction between my understanding of adaptation and Hutcheon's that I posit my own definition, which functions to rework the term at its broadest and most capacious while also posing a central specification that keeps it from becoming vacated of all meaning entirely. Despite some critical interest in adaptation's etymological link to survival, no critics have suggested survival as a defining factor for what makes an adaptation an adaptation (*Adaptation.*'s La Roche comes the closest, offering an explicit definition of it as a process through which things thrive in the world). I thus put forward a description of adaptation that figures it as a process of retelling that is essentially concerned with the embodied labor that enables it and that allows a thriving or surviving for those bodies in question. Like Hutcheon, I am largely unconcerned with the levels of faithfulness or modes of citation that mark something as a 'proper' adaptation as opposed to a mere appropriation or allusion, but I aim to present a definition that highlights the work and struggles of the bodies that make any adapted product possible. To know that something has adapted is to know it has done so to survive, and so my concept of adaptation aims to interrogate and shed light on the pains and victories of this essentially survivalist undertaking.

I focus my theory of adaptation in the early modern period for several reasons. The first and most obvious involves Shakespeare, whose works have been adapted with more frequency, popularity, and acclaim than perhaps any other single writer in the Western canon.<sup>21</sup> As a result, most general adaptation theorists have discussed Shakespeare in some form, and there exists a long critical tradition in the early modern field specifically that is devoted to analyzing

Shakespeare on film, television, and other media. What is lacking is any work that seeks to synthesize the queries of both these linked yet separate scholarly discourses, a gap that I aim to fill by approaching the early modern period as one in which adaptation is already being theorized in the embodied, survivalist terms I have here set out. Of course, the act of re-forming pre-existing literary sources predates the early modern period.<sup>22</sup> However, I argue that the antitheatricalist tracts that were launched against early modern theatrical productions revealed an anxiety about the embodied capacity of such adaptational work to allow for the thriving of bodies otherwise hidden or condemned. In other words, the writings of antitheatrical thinkers of the early modern period illuminate the fact that they, like myself, were keenly attuned to the ability of adaptation to inspire radical transformations for bodies lacking traditional representation. I thereby want to engage the writings of antitheatricalists such as Stephen Gosson and William Prynne as some of the earliest theorists of adaptation, theorists more explicitly concerned with adaptation's power to implicate human bodies than any of our contemporary thinkers. By reading the antitheatricalists as theorists of bodily and literary adaptation, my hope is to demonstrate that my concept of adaptation is a process with historical roots as well as contemporary ones. Where most Shakespeare-based adaptation study grounds itself largely in modern-day offshoots of Shakespeare's play-texts, I work to show that adaptation was at survivalist work before the birth of cinema, its embodied labor visible not just on film but in the words of the plays and its surrounding discourses alike.

The bulk of adaptation studies that take Shakespeare as their central point of focus grapple with a question now familiar to us: what counts as a Shakespearean adaptation in the first place? It is a question that has inspired heated debate, as well as plenty of skepticism regarding the value of analyzing anything that isn't a stringently faithful adaptation. As James M. Welsh

polemically suggests, “Derivative adaptations that ignore Shakespeare’s language while exploiting his plots and characters should be considered misguided and corrupt” (Welsh 105). Though Welsh positions himself in firm opposition to the study of Shakespearean retelling, the sentiment he expresses here is one actually found in implicit form throughout the field. The recurring concern over what acts as adaptation versus derivative appropriation has led to a tendency to taxonomize Shakespeare-inspired media into sub-categories, sub-categories not unlike the ones general adaptation theory has tried and failed to sustain. Shakespeare adaptation studies have proposed “Shake/spinoffs” (Keller, Stratyner 3), that cite Shakespeare in noticeable ways without being adaptations proper, “Shlockspeare”’s (Burt 8) and “Shakesploitation”’s (Burt 205) that similarly signify instances of perceived loose adaptational engagement, and “Small-Time Shakespeare”’s (Desmet 2) that refer to micro-moments of adaptation within larger, non-Shakespearean works, just to name a few. This compulsion to categorize has had the consequence of locating all analytic-theoretical considerations within contemporary media, Shakespeare’s texts mere comparative objects used to evaluate the modern-day re-takes at hand. It has the curious effect of reducing the complexities inherent to the play-texts even as it exalts them as the central means by which an adaptation should be categorized and considered. It has also allowed the term *adaptation* to take on stagnant meaning, referring only to filmic texts that adapt Shakespeare while retaining reverent fidelity to his language. By the logic of this critical stance, works such as Phoebe Boswell’s *Dear Mister Shakespeare* aren’t to be considered adaptations at all, straying too far from the originary language to count. Of concern to me is the way in which this dominant approach sucks the theory out of adaptation, rendering it little more than faithful translation of early modern text to contemporary film. In response to this concern, I present adaptation as a process of text-linked survival (rather than one of linear, faithful

translation) in order to posit an adaptational praxis that is both inclusive and not unique to the contemporary moment, already functioning within and around early modern play-texts.

That the early modern antitheatricalists were fixated on the adaptational faculty of the theatre is demonstrated by the way their anxiety is specifically centered on the impact performance had on participating bodies, actorly and spectatorly alike. Indeed, the matter was no less than one of life and death to them. Stephen Gosson's *Schoole of Abuse* (1579) famously equates the theatre with "Adders that sting with pleasure and kill with pain" and to the "Basilisks of the world, that poison" (Gosson 33).<sup>23</sup> Gosson even goes so far as to suggest that players would be better off referring to themselves explicitly as killers: "Better they might say themselves to be murderers" (Gosson 33). Phillip Stubbes, in *The Anatomie of Abuses* (1583), makes a similar claim about the murderous character of theatrical productions. Referring to how plays draw people away from goodly performances such as sermons, Stubbes writes, "The reason is, for that the number of Christ his elect is but few, and the number of the reprobate is many: the way that leadeth to life is narrow, and few tread that path: the way that leadeth to death is broad, and many find it" (Stubbes 203). Even an archived story about a performance of Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine Part II* suggests the (in this case literal) death that was imagined to plague the theatre.<sup>24</sup> The anecdote, about a 'play' bullet that went astray and killed a child and a woman, closes with the suggestion that "There never comes more hurt than comes of fooling" (Gawdy qtd. by Chambers, 135). When plays are adapted onstage, the tracts make clear, survival itself is on the line (and it is precisely because survival is so privileged that I refer to these plays as *adapted* rather than *performed*).<sup>25</sup> What I want to illuminate is the manner in which the hindered survival the antitheatricalists so worry about is indicative of a series of counter-survivals for bodies different from their own. It is the very fact that the theatre opened

up the possibility for newer kinds of bodies to thrive that acts as the threat to the livelihood of the antitheatricalist writers and their seeming heteromasculine bodies. I turn now to the theoretical and oft-contradictory writings of these thinkers in order to demonstrate that they saw adaptation's ability to engender the survival of queer bodies as an assault on their own: in the process of fretting about this representational threat, they reveal the fragility of their bodies and the texts that have determined their embodied practices. This reveal, in its radical destabilization of notions of coherent self, gender, and text, prophesizes the same anxieties regarding faithfulness and self-same-ness that launched adaptation studies into being and continue to plague it to this day. This approach will, I hope, bolster my assertion of adaptation as a process signaled primarily by an investment in embodied survival and as a process that has shaped moments of textual retelling long before film emerged as a medium. Adaptation's intrinsic grounding in the body reveals it as a mechanism not fettered to any one medium, level of faithfulness, or historical moment. For as long as there have been bodies beholden to texts, there has been adaptation, and the early modern anti-theatre discourses begin to show us the ways in which it has been key to survivalist workings for the past several hundred years at least.

Phillip Stubbes reveals the extent to which his concern with adaptation is attributed in part to the way in which it allows for a faithless and corrupted staging of originary texts. Stubbes opens his examination of "Stage-plays and Interludes, with their wickedness" (Stubbes 198) by asserting that even plays with divine subject matter are to be condemned. In fact, he suggests that they may even be more worthy of condemnation because they explicitly sully the word of God in ways non-religious plays do only implicitly. Stubbes writes:

If they be of divine matter, then are they most intolerable, or rather sacrilegious, for that the blessed word of God, is to be handled reverently, gravely, and sagely,

with veneration to the glorious Majesty of God, which shineth therein... In the first of John we are taught, that the word is God, and God is the word. Wherefore, whosoever abuseth this word of our God on Stages, in Plays and Interludes, abuseth the Majesty of God in the same, maketh a mocking stock of him, and purchaseth to himself eternal damnation. (Stubbes 199)

That the word of God is so vividly pictured here as something subject to adaptational abuse sounds very much like the way in which adaptations have been critically discussed since the dawn of adaptation studies. As I have already suggested, the habit of scholarship on Shakespearean film to erect categorical subdivisions beneath and outside of the adaptational umbrella reveals a present-day fixation on the sanctity of the word of an Author-God. It is a fixation by no means exclusive to the realm of Shakespeare, recurrent enough in adaptation theory more generally that there is a term for the kind of critical work that preoccupies itself with this kind of faithful translation: *fidelity discourse*.<sup>26</sup> Robert Stam notes the violent and moralistic language that adaptation discourse oft adopts when discussing pieces of cinema that it believes have inflicted harm upon its literary source-text(s). Of the varied expressions that have been launched against adaptational work, Stam writes, “‘Infidelity’ carries overtones of Victorian prudishness; ‘betrayal’ evokes ethical perfidy; ‘bastardization’ connotes illegitimacy; ‘deformation’ implies aesthetic disgust and monstrosity... and ‘desecration’ intimates religious sacrilege and blasphemy” (Stam 3). Fidelity discourse is founded upon the idea that texts have immutable essences capable of perfect translation to another medium, thus figuring adaptations that offer deviation from their sources as doing wicked work (or abusive work, as Stubbes might say).<sup>27</sup> It is a contention that echoes Stubbes in ways surprisingly explicit, who is careful to assert that it is not *all* performance of God’s words he takes issue with, merely the performances that

pervert them. Lectures and sermons he asserts as godly, indeed the sole paths to a survival of God's Word and the bodies that are beholden to them alike. So too does adaptation theory (Shakespeare-centric and generalized alike) cling to the dream of an adaptation holy in its affirmation of a translated, uncorrupted core of meaning that shines within (to borrow Stubbes' language again). The antitheatricalists of the early modern period, in their devotion to textual and godly faith, engage a fidelity discourse concerning the theatre that we have since seen re-emerge with the cinema. I point out these similarities in rhetoric to show that adaptation's ability to fragment meaning that is otherwise seen as essential and self-same did not come into new being with filmic adaptation. Concern with the types of survival that textual alteration flouted and potentialized was of high interest to the likes of Stubbes and Gosson. It is for this reason that I propose they be approached as among the first theorists of adaptation, theorists who reveal to us that adaptation as an act of textual-bodily survival has a history longer and more varied via medium than we have assumed thus far.

While a concern with textual fidelity was clearly present for the antitheatricalists, their most frenzied attacks on the adapted theatre were centered on the body, specifically the male body and the way in which adaptational practices revealed and/or created new possibilities for its articulation. As we have seen, the antitheatricalists viewed the theatre as murderous, endangering survival if not flat out making it impossible. For the antitheatricalists, seeing actions bodily performed onstage engendered a transformation in the spectator's body, compulsively influencing them to mimic or fully mirror what they saw enacted before them. In Gosson's *Playes Confuted in Five Actions* (1582), he writes of a how a performance of *Bacchus and Ariadne* led to just this kind of embodied reaction and manipulations in its audience:



At this the beholders began to shout. When Bacchus rose up, tenderly lifting Ariadne from her seat, no small store of curtsy passing between them, the beholders rose up, every man stood on tip toe, and seemed to hover over the play. When they sware, the company sware, when they departed to bed, the company presently was set on fire, they that were married posted home to their wives; they that were single, vowed very solemnly, to be wedded. (Gosson 193-194)

Gosson illustrates here a coercion of spectatorly bodies, a coercion he anchors very explicitly in embodied motion, desire, and alteration. Audiences stand, shout, and swear in accordance with what the bodies onstage before them do. The bodies onstage and off become adaptational mediums in their own right, the words of the play finding new form in the bodies of the actors that bring it to flesh, then newer form still in the audience members that watch and compulsively mirror. Though Gosson's example here speaks to a desire troubling even in its heterosexual endgame, the truer terror for the anti-theatre thinkers at large was the impact this coercive bodily sway would have on formations of gender and sexuality. Indeed, they are especially troubled by the unthinkable endgames the theatre might elicit in the bodies of its audiences, unthinkable precisely in the extent to which they lend themselves to queer eroticism. John Rainoldes's *The Overthrow of Stage-Plays* (1600) suggests the unfathomable embodied transformation the theatre led to, calling for the end of performed plays because they act as "the means and occasions whereby men are transformed into dogs...to that beastly filthiness, or rather more than beastly" (Rainoldes 11). In a more widely-quoted piece of antitheatrical writing, Stubbes infamously and similarly declares, "Then their goodly pageants being ended, every mate sorts to his mate, and in their secret conclaves (covertly) they play the sodomites, or worse" (Stubbes 204). Bryan Reynolds notes of this ambiguous 'or worse' the embodied possibility it foretells, writing, "It in

effect signifies one or more possible practices or identities alternative to those identifiable and nameable” (Reynolds 144). The problem with theatrical adaptation, then, was not merely that it could lead to the heterosexual wedding that Gosson speaks of in *Plays Confuted*, but that it would lead from there to sexual dynamics exceeding the boundaries of even deviant male-female coupling, the results of which were not yet knowable yet being breathed into new life.

We have seen, then, that the antitheatricalists discussed the theatre in terms intimately tied to adaptation, as it relates both to textual infidelity and the survival of bodies so effaced by the texts in cultural circulation that they are literally unnamable. Even more pressing for us, however, is the way in which these two fixations meld into one, textual infidelity and the thriving of invisible bodies both linked to the adaptation of the most ultimately privileged of source-texts: the word of God. Stubbes, we have seen, exalted sermons and the bodily practices they catalyzed as the only acceptable form of adaptation for God’s word, the only form through which the text and the bodies shaped by it could survive in unsullied build. Gosson’s own considerations of God’s word go further, noting that the cross-dressing the theatre enabled itself acts as a botched adaptation not just of the play-texts at hand but of the word of God writ large. Gosson writes:

The law of God very straightly forbids men to put on women’s garments,  
garments are set down for signs distinctive between sex and sex, to take unto us  
those garments that are manifest signs of another sex, is to falsify, to forge and  
adulterate, contrary to the express rule of the words of God. (Gosson 177)

Gosson, here citing the Deuteronomic code, makes clear that biblical texts are always among the sources being adapted when a play is put on. In fact, the mere act of bringing bodies into the equation renders God’s words inescapably on the adaptational line. These gender-constructing words of God, Gosson suggests, have been bodily adapted straightly up until the adaptation of

dramatic texts rendered God's gender code newly pliable and up for transformative grabs. Adapting plays newly engendered the adaptation of words that crafted how bodies could and had been lawfully articulated. The theatre, then, was a critical space wherein multiple adaptations found embodiment, with play-texts, bodies, and the word of God itself adapting, changing, and surviving with life-or-death stakes. When bodies queered by way of gender-bending dress and extra-sodomitical play are represented onstage, they change the bodies that gaze upon them and by so doing threaten the stability of maleness and heterosexuality as embodied concepts. As Laura Levine writes of the antitheatricalists in *Men in Women's Clothing*, "...They have no way of knowing they are men except in the re-enactment, the relentless re-enactment, of their own masculinity" (Levine 7). By worrying so obsessively about the effeminization of the male body that the theatre made possible, the antitheatricalists reveal how dependent their embodied practices are on a text that is subject to adaptational change, and by so doing reveal also the essential fragility of their textual-law-abiding bodies. If those involved in the staging of plays really could be said to be murderers, as Gosson insisted, then what they murdered was the fiction of maleness itself. With this murder came the imagined birth of new queer embodied identities and practices, the seeming death of impenetrable maleness giving way to the approaching nameability of bodies that fell outside its God-mandated boundaries. Adaptation, then, as the antitheatricalists perceived and newly rendered it, was even here a process of by which bodies could meet pathways toward survival, or, indeed, pathways toward survival's opposite. It may well be that the survivals of some bodies will always come at the cost of death for others, a reality that here comes to work in the favor of the marginalized, if only fleetingly.

Though this introductory chapter has tended toward a generalized language of vulnerable bodies, the larger project takes its cue from the antitheatricalists and focuses specifically on the

survival of bodies that are marked in some way by queerness. The queer is, of course, tricky (indeed impossible) to define, and its meaning will shift accordingly throughout my work, with each chapter operating within a modality of queerness unique to the texts at hand. That being said, I am indebted to many thinkers in the field of queer theory who have grappled with the capaciousness and the boundaries of the term. To begin, David Halperin's clarification of the queer as that which is "at odds with the normal, the legitimate, [and] the dominant" (Halperin 62) marks a useful definition for my purposes, capturing the term's flexibility while offering also a means of approaching it as fixated on the non-normative. More useful still is Carla Freccero's outlining of the term in her own project *Queer/Early/Modern*. Freccero writes, "Ultimately, if this book can be said to have a position on *queer*, it would be to urge resistance to its hypostatization, reification into nominal status as designating an entity, an identity, a thing, and to allow it to continue its outlaw work as a verb and sometimes an adjective" (Freccero 5). I similarly aim to treat queerness as something itself inherently adaptational, its theoretical thriving contingent upon the textual and historical context it finds itself within, endlessly subject to re-figurations even as it maintains its insistence on that which exceeds the bounds of normativity. If I were tasked, however, with setting out a single definition that came closest to encapsulating the term's movement within my larger project, it is perhaps a phrase within the antitheatricalist Phillip Stubbes's earlier quoted condemnation of the theatre's impact that offers the most potent articulation for my purposes: "In their secret conclaves (covertly) they play the sodomites, *or worse*" (emphasis mine, Stubbes 204). The open possibility of that "or worse," which is linked to the bodily sodomitical and yet in some inarticulable way surpasses it, is the very terrain of the queer futurity my project takes as its driving force: an anticipated embodiment

that is still yet to come, an embodiment that survives by way of its very adaptability and unknowability.<sup>28</sup>

My postulation of queerness as and alongside adaptational survival locates my project somewhere between José Muñoz's claim that "the future is queerness's domain" (Muñoz 1) and Lee Edelman's insistence that "the future stop here" (Edelman 31). As my tentative definition of the queer makes clear, I do find useful traction in a looking toward the future, and my own theory of adaptation necessarily relies upon a bodily possibility that is still yet to come. My own investment in futurity, however, veers away from any idea of utopia, as the very concept of survival will remain a fraught one for me and for the figures I consider. Though my theory of adaptation posits it as a process through which queer bodies may survive, I am not operating under the assumption that survival is in any way synonymous with utopia. As I have already begun to gesture toward here, survival will be approached throughout this dissertation as a process inevitably threaded through with failures and sufferings. Additionally, the textual and historical moments in which even achieved survivals prove themselves to be undesirable or unsurvivable will be among the most significant for my project. This reality brings me to an added layer of how queerness will move through my argument, invested as I am in not just bodies that are queer, but also in a *survival* that is itself queer in its resistance of anything like a tidy thriving. The "queer survival" that my dissertation title announces, then, functions doubly as a means of referring to the survival of queer bodies that adaptational processes facilitate, and as a means of referring to the odd, aslant, and ultimately self-destructive nature of that very survival.

Structurally, the remainder of this project will be composed of three chapters. Though my project is tracing something like an adaptational history starting in the early modern period, I want to avoid making any teleological claims. I aim instead to consider early modern source-

texts, early modern adaptations, and contemporary ones as collaborative rather than organizationally linear. As such, each of my chapters engage early modern source-texts, theatre, and film in some way, rather than dividing those categories up into separate chapters. Though I have posited a definition of adaptation that is not medium-specific, it is nonetheless true that the bulk of the primary texts I examine alongside early modern play-texts are filmic or televisual ones. This was a decision made not out of a desire to privilege filmic mediums above other forms of adaptational output, but rather in the interest of accessibility. Because my work is so concerned with the opportunities for representation and survival that come with the transformed circulation of already-circulating texts, films that are widely accessible and streaming on the Internet felt the most immediately urgent to me. As Linda Hutcheon notes in a discussion of the commercial benefit of different forms of adaptation, “A successful Broadway play will be seen by 1 to 8 million people; but a movie or television adaptation will find an audience of many million more” (Hutcheon 5). Though I would like in later stages of this project to expand to a consideration of more obscure and non-filmic adaptational work, it made the most sense to me to begin by looking to texts that have the highest amount of cultural reach. Texts that, in other words, are being readily and steadily consumed in ways that less easily-archivable adaptations are not. This is also a reason for the prominence of Shakespeare in what I am otherwise calling an early modern project. Work on non-Shakespearean early modern adaptation is lacking, for, as Roland Wymer suggests, there exists “no real tradition of filming non-Shakespearean Renaissance plays” (Wymer 147). Like Pascale Aebischer in her book *Screening Early Modern Drama Beyond Shakespeare*, I disagree in some ways with this contention, though I do concede that there exists a much wider and richer archive of Shakespearean adaptations.<sup>29</sup> In an effort to begin to combat the Shakespeare-obsessed exclusivity of early modern adaptational study, I open

the body of this project with a chapter on Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*. It is my hope that this can act as a first step to broadening the scope of the project and early modern adaptation studies at large, a hope that I also locate in this introduction's consideration of the early modern antitheatricalists as theorists of adaptational labor.

My first chapter, "'Let Me Forget Myself:' Names and the King's Many Bodies in Christopher Marlowe's and Derek Jarman's *Edward II*," challenges the concept of survival for the project at large. In this chapter, I argue that Christopher Marlowe's chronicle play *Edward II* presents a theory of the name that imagines it as the locus of bodily survival. I take as a point of departure a moment in which Edward, while coming to terms with the inevitability of his unkinging and death, consoles himself with the following thought: "Edward's name survive, though Edward dies." I demonstrate that Edward here unveils a survivalist logic contingent on the fact that, as a character in a play-text that is awaiting repeat performance, Edward will live on in embodied form through the queer legacy of actors who will come to take on his name and his person after his death. In considering the material praxis of this logic that the play sets out, I turn to a contemporary, queer filmic adaptation of Marlowe's play, Derek Jarman's 1991 *Edward II*, which alters the play's ending by letting Edward live. Through a close reading of the film's cyclical temporality and the insights of its published screenplay, I posit that the film depicts Edward's adaptational survival here as a cruelty upon him, letting him live only to then show him repeating the events of the play again in hellish, static cycle. Edward's survival in both Marlowe and Jarman's texts proves a sticky and thus multiply queer one, both riddled with the promised propagation of queer, named bodies and, as an inescapable drawback, the gruesome violation that Edward II's historical person is known for.

My second chapter, “‘Let Not Your Sorrow Die’: Adapting to Revenge in William Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*,” considers how my project’s definitions of survival and adaptation are put into question by the play’s revenge tragedy genre and its compulsion toward cycles of death. This chapter diverges from the structure of the first by shifting the analytic balance of its makeup largely toward Shakespeare’s ‘originary’ play-text, arguing that it offers us a theory of adaptation aggressively unique to its form. Here, I posit the play’s central antagonist Aaron the Moor as the play’s most prominent revenger, a character for whom revenge, embodiment, and processes of adaptation are intimately and bloodily linked. Of central concern to me is the status of survival in the play-text, because so few characters leave it alive and because fewer still seem concerned with their own survival in the first place. I argue that *Titus Andronicus* shows us a textual world in which enforced survival becomes its own revenge, proliferating an embodied sorrow that can only find relief in death. This chapter diverges also from the others in this project in the way it handles queerness. Though I am primarily invested in queer bodies, neither Shakespeare’s play-text nor the adaptations of it I look to share such an investment. Indeed, that there seems something aggressively straight about the play is captured in a quotation from Terrence McNally’s play *Love! Valour! Compassion!*: “Every character Shakespeare wrote was gay. Except for Titus Andronicus. Titus was straight. Go figure” (McNally 14). Though bodies are central to this chapter, its queerness emerges more around the temporalities and counter-intuitions of its rendering of survival than in the gendered or sexualized persons in the text.

My third and final chapter, “‘You Made Me Love You’: Consent and Technologies of Haunting in William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* and Alan Brown’s *Private Romeo*,” takes endings as its central theme. Looking to Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, I posit that the play’s



famous prologue attempts to act as a prophetic promise that concretizes the play's trajectory from beginning to end. However, as the language of the prologue unwittingly reveals, it can't help but draw attention to the way in which it is lacking in its capacity to definitively lay down such narrative law. In attempting to solidify the play's ending while acknowledging its own inability to wholly do so, the prologue opens up disidentificatory fissures that call into question the inevitability of the ending it prophesizes. In this chapter, I look to several adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* that take advantage of this vulnerability by allowing their title characters to flout the deaths they are so known for. Of particular interest will be Alan Brown's 2011 film *Private Romeo*, which sees its Romeo and Juliet fall in love in the setting of an all-male military academy. I show that their survival at the film's end is engendered by the fact that they are presented as already socially dead from the film's very opening adaptation of the play's prologue. Central to this chapter is the way in which the Romeo and Juliet text, inescapable and seemingly heteronormative as it is, exists itself as a tool of violence, a text that must be survived by the queer bodies forced to inhabit it even as they propagate its continued violent survival through that very inhabitation.

Ultimately, my dissertation carves out a new imagining of the dynamic between bodies that are bound to texts and texts that are bound to bodies, offering adaptation as a means of renegotiating the violences inherent to these text-body relationships. By redefining adaptation as a process that is as much bodily as it is literary, we might come to understand adaptation as a survivalist mechanism with a history lengthier and more fluid than our current conceptions of it allow for. It is my belief that the process of adapting canonical texts is a process that comes with high stakes for bodies either not represented within them or bodies that are represented poorly. What I offer here is a reimagining of adaptation that makes it newly portable to different

mediums, time periods, bodies, and texts. My own archive of consideration is in some ways limited, incapable of fully filling in the ample shape my definition of adaptation otherwise engenders. As with the texts, bodies, and adaptations I interrogate throughout this dissertation, it is my hope that these shortcomings in my own project are the cost of ensuring its victories in arguing for the ultimate indispensability of adaptational work. I work to assign neither positive nor negative value to the processes this project throws into discussion, looking instead to point to textual and cultural instances that render them inescapable, compulsory, and thus in urgent need of our attention. The drawbacks and paradoxical self-destructions that come with adaptation are of the utmost importance to my ongoing analysis, but I aim also to posit adaptation as a mechanism made all the more necessary by this very inevitability of failure. We adapt because we must, because we have no other choice, and because every moment of adaptational violence doubles as a moment of future adaptational possibility. The pages that follow are littered with survivals that throw into doubt the very value of survival at all, but that throw into doubt also the fantasy that we can ever do anything *but* adapt despite that grim reality.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Formally announced in October 2015 and referred also to as “Shakespeare Lives in 2016,” The British Council relied upon a wide host of creative partnerships to make adapted Shakespeare content available both digitally and in-person around the world. The program lasted all year long, and one of the major cornerstones of its production was an online international film festival in April of 2016 that made several adaptations accessible via streaming technology on the BBC website.

<sup>2</sup> Available on the website are a short film collection, photos and descriptions of theatrical and interpretive dance productions, a digital platform named “Mix the Play” that allows users to direct their own scene from *Romeo and Juliet*, a recorded poetry archive of poems inspired by Shakespeare’s sonnets, classroom resources, and results of social media campaigns on Twitter and Instagram.

<sup>3</sup> Visit ShakespeareLives.org for visual reference.

<sup>4</sup> The film was digitally remastered and screened in a touring package of Shakespeare British film adaptation.

<sup>5</sup> As before, visit ShakespeareLives.org for visual reference.

<sup>6</sup> As Jay Stevenson has argued, “In the postmodern period...traditional literature has been found to have been written by ‘dead white males’ to serve the ideological aims of a conservative and repressive Anglo hegemony...In an array of reactions against the race, gender, and class biases found to be woven into the tradition of Anglo lit, multicultural writers and political literary theorists have sought to expose, resist, and redress injustices and prejudices” (Stevenson 9-10).

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<sup>7</sup> For visual reference, the short film may be found on ShakespeareLives.org or on YouTube at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d55GytFubzE> (a YouTube search for “Dear Mister Shakespeare – inspired by Othello” will also bring the video up from the British Council’s YouTube channel).

<sup>8</sup> Boswell’s Othello speaks the lines, “I only told her my stories of the places I’ve been, / Of the trauma, the drama, the things that I’ve seen, / The faraway the exotic, they all seeped into her heart, / That’s the only voodoo I do, you can’t keep us apart” (Boswell). The lines adapt Othello’s assertion in Act 1, Scene 3 that stories were his only magic: “She loved me for the dangers I had pass’d, / And I loved her that she did pity them, / This is the only witchcraft I have used” (1.3.513-515).

<sup>9</sup> The shot in question takes place 4 minutes and 10 seconds into the film, starting off as a wide shot of the blackface Othello’s body that moves into a close-up before the entire screen goes black.

<sup>10</sup> And indeed, shame is a recurring theme of the film, especially where its central character, adapting screenplay writer Charlie Kaufman, is concerned. It is a shame grounded for him in both his body and his inability to successfully adapt the story he’s been tasked with adapting, failures synthesized by the opening two lines of the film: “Do I have an original thought in my head? My bald head” (*Adaptation.*)?

<sup>11</sup> The language of an adaptational trajectory toward perfection originates in Darwin’s *The Origin of Species*, which is heard in the film *Adaptation.* as La Roche listens to an audiobook of the text. Darwin writes, “As natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress toward perfection” (Darwin 360).

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<sup>12</sup> The most formative of these studies in adaptation include Thomas Leitch's 1997 *Film Adaptation and its Discontents*, Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo's 2004 essay collection *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film*, and Linda Hutcheon's 2006 *A Theory of Adaptation*. Most published work on adaptation theory appears in the form of essay collections, rendering the field an aggressively multivocal space but also one in which it can be difficult to find terminological footing. While many have considered the terms and boundaries of adaptation, few have done so in an extended, book-length manner, which leaves most considerations feeling experimental rather than fully fleshed out. One of my hopes in this project is to offer an extended consideration of adaptation that gives it something like a tangible if ever-shifting and capacious shape.

<sup>13</sup> Indeed, whether explicitly stated or not, the bulk of adaptation studies treats it as necessarily linked to the cinema. See, for example, Rebecca Housel's 2006 *From Camera Lens to Critical Lens: a Collection of Best Essays on Film Adaptation*, Liam Burke's 2015 *The Comic Book Film Adaptation: Exploring Modern Hollywood's Leading Genre*, Costas Constandinides's 2010 *From Film Adaptation to Post-Celluloid Adaptation: Rethinking the Transition of Popular Narratives and Characters Across Old and New Media*, Jack Boozer's 2008 *Authorship in Film Adaptation*, John Desmond's 2006 *Adaptation: Studying Film and Literature*, among others.

<sup>14</sup> See: Wagner's *The Novel and the Cinema*, pgs. 222-227.

<sup>15</sup> Andrew proposed in *Concepts in Film Theory* three modes of his own: *borrowing*, *intersecting*, and *transforming*. In borrowing, "the artist employs, more or less extensively, the material, idea, or form of an earlier, generally successful text" (Andrew 98), intersecting sees "the uniqueness of the original text...preserved to such an extent that it is deliberately left

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unassimilated in adaptation” (Andrew 99), and transforming “raises questions about the specificity of these two signifying systems” (Andrew 100).

<sup>16</sup> Elliott offers six adaptation terms in *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate*: the psychic concept (Elliott 133), the ventriloquist concept (Elliott 143), the genetic concept (Elliott 150), the de-re-composing concept (Elliott 157), the incarnational concept (Elliott 161), and the trumping concept (Elliott 173).

<sup>17</sup> Genette proposes in *Palimpsests*: intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, hypertextuality, and architextuality (Genette 1-5).

<sup>18</sup> See pages 99 through 103 of *Film Adaptation and its Discontents*.

<sup>19</sup> For an academic take on fanfiction’s transformative potential, see Lev Grossman’s *Fic: Why Fanfiction is Taking Over the World*. In it, Grossman writes, “Fanfiction asserts the rights of storytellers to take possession of characters and settings from other people’s narratives and tell their own tales about them – to expand and build upon the original, and, when they deem it necessary, to tweak it and optimize it for their own purposes (Grossman 2-3).

<sup>20</sup> Indeed, fandom seems to operate within a modality Lauren Berlant calls *cruel optimism*. Berlant writes, “A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing” (Berlant 1). The capacity of fandom to propagate the success of a piece media capable of hurting them was most recently and visibly seen in the backlash and media attention the CW television sci-fi series *The 100* received after killing off its lesbian character. The series, critically successful but low in viewer numbers, was kept afloat thanks in large part to the fandom’s enthusiastic support of its central lesbian couple, which included promoting it on social media, writing fanfiction, etc. When one half of the pairing was killed off, fans revolted to express betrayal and disappointment. See: Bethonie Butler’s “TV Keeps Killing

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Off Lesbian Characters, The Fans of One Show Have Revolted” (in *The Washington Post*) and Maureen Ryan’s “What TV Can Learn from ‘The 100’ Mess” (in *Variety*).

<sup>21</sup> As the “Shakespeare Lives” 2016 trailer opens by declaring, “Here’s a thought: if there was a prize for ‘most screenwriting credits,’ we’d have one of those ‘unfortunately, he can’t be here with us tonight’ moments. That’s because the winner, with over 1,000, is William Shakespeare.”

<sup>22</sup> So too does the impulse to condemn theatrical performance predate the early modern period. See, for example, Jonas Barish’s *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* and Clifford Davidson’s “The Medieval Stage and the Antitheatrical Prejudice.” It is not my intention to suggest that anything I am identifying is either unique to or originating in the early modern period. Rather, I argue that the early modern period provides an especially fruitful place to begin considerations of adaptation’s pre-cinematic history.

<sup>23</sup> For the sake of clarity, I have modernized the spelling of the quotations I pull from the antitheatricalist tracts.

<sup>24</sup> At least, this is the play it is assumed to have been about. It is possible also it happened at the production of an unidentifiable play that has been lost to history.

<sup>25</sup> On the slipperiness between performance and adaptation, Linda Hutcheon writes, “In a very real sense, every live staging of a printed play could theoretically be considered an adaptation in its performance. The text of a play does not necessarily tell an actor about such matters as the gestures, expressions, and tones of voice to use in converting words on a page into a convincing performance; it is up to the director and actors to actualize the text and to interpret and then recreate it, thereby in a sense adapting it for the stage” (Hutcheon 39). Michelle MacArthur, Lydia Wilkinson, and Keren Zaiontz concur, additionally noting that the act of

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spectatorship in performance acts as adaptation, too: “These live adaptations are received by spectators who interpret what they see and hear – who dialogue with and co-create the performance before them. Indeed, the act of reception constitutes its own kind of adaptation. When watching, reading, or receiving any text (performance, literary, or visual) we are involved in a constant personal process of adaptation” (MacArthur, Wilkinson, Zaiontz xviii).

<sup>26</sup> See *True to the Spirit: Film Adaptation and the Question of Fidelity*, edited by Colin MacCabe, Kathleen Murray, and Rick Warner, for a volume of essays that concern themselves with this very question.

<sup>27</sup> To be sure, recent adaptation theory has rallied against fidelity discourse, urging for an approach that treats all texts as intertextual heteroglots threaded through with Derridean *différance*. As Frederic Jameson has asserted, the only fidelity that adaptation discourse should be concerning itself with is a faithfulness to fidelity’s very impossibility. Jameson writes, “The scarecrow of fidelity is then a reminder to keep faith with some Lacanian gap or rift within this equally split subject which is the object of adaptation studies; it stages a well-nigh Derridean vigilance to the multiple forms difference takes in the object of such studies and insists on fidelity to that difference rather than to this or that ideology of the original” (Jameson 215). Despite this, however, the specter of fidelity discourse has lingered in subtle ways, especially in Shakespeare-film studies.

<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Stubbes’s articulation here echoes the words of contemporary theorist Lee Edelman, who writes in “Queer Theory: Unstating Desire”: “Queer theory might better remind us that we are inhabited always by states of desire that exceed our capacity to name them. Every name gives those desires – conflictual, contradictory, inconsistent, undefined – a fictive border, a



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definition that falsifies precisely insofar as the name always takes us back to the family as our culture's exemplary site of naming and allegiance to the name" (Edelman 348).

<sup>29</sup> Aebischer provides a list of surviving filmic non-Shakespearean early modern adaptations in the appendices to *Screening Early Modern Drama Beyond Shakespeare*, pgs. 225-226. It is a brief list, to be sure, but does provide an archive for the adapted work that does exist in a more avant-garde tradition than Shakespeare's filmic history.

## CHAPTER II

### ‘LET ME FORGET MYSELF’: NAMES AND THE KING’S MANY BODIES IN CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE’S AND DEREK JARMAN’S *EDWARD II*

If the aim of this project is to consider the ways in which adaptation facilitates the survival of queer bodies, then this chapter is about the pitfalls and costs of that survival. Indeed, it is about what it might mean to suggest that adaptation impels a survival that is itself unsurvivable. I turn to Christopher Marlowe’s chronicle play *Edward II* (registered 1593)<sup>1</sup> because it offers us a plea for survival that locates that survivability outside of the body, with its titular character wishing that his name might survive where his body dies (5.1.48). For Edward, it is the name that becomes the locus of survival, privileged above and beyond the space of his breathing body. Of interest to me is that this seeming dismissal of the body’s role in achieving survival actually brings a new idea of the body to the fore, one linked to processes of adaptation and, as I will show, to the queer legacy there allowed. I, like Edward II, am invested in the capacity of queer bodies to survive, a survival that is undeniably entrenched within the adaptational potentialities of a future to come. This investment in futurity, however, veers away from the utopic, insisting on an idea of survival that takes into account the ways in which it enacts its own violences and that ultimately calls into question the desirability of that survival at all.

Marlowe’s *Edward II* adapts the historical life of its kingly title character, opening with the return of Edward’s exiled lover Gaveston to England and documenting Edward’s murder by hot spit.<sup>2</sup> The dual fact of Edward’s male lover and his ensuing murder via anal rape has

predictably catalyzed intense critical interest in the play's renderings of same-sex desire and sodomy. Following a long wave of critical interpretation that depoliticized the nature of Edward's sexual-romantic desires and eventual murder,<sup>3</sup> virtually all of the work written on *Edward II* in the past decade has taken the sodomitical as its central point of focus.<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Goldberg, David Stymeist, Jon Surgal, Christopher Shirley, and Jonathan Crewe (among others) have all recently discussed the status of sodomy in the play in different, politicized nuance.<sup>5</sup> I am indebted to the attention they have paid the play's gendered and sexualized bodies, but aim to focus my own analysis away from the specifically sodomitical toward the more capaciously queer. The sodomy-laced traumas and touches of Edward's body matter no less for me here than they do for the critics who focus on the embodied practice of his sexuality, but I locate the queer across an expanse of bodies who come to take his name. Edward is not, in other words, merely a body that engages in sodomy, he is a name beholden to bodies preceding and following any one iteration. The singularly sodomitical body of the king gives way to the sodomitical *bodies* of the king, and it is this embodied multiplicity that renders him endlessly, newly queer.

An intersecting interest in queerness, survival, and adaptational processes will bring me to one adaptational project in particular: Derek Jarman's 1991 film *Edward II* and its accompanying screenplay, differently titled *Queer Edward II*. Jarman, a self-identified queer director and activist, was committed to the development of independent queer film until his death of AIDS-related illnesses in 1994. His *Edward II* was a foundational text in the New Queer Cinema movement of the 1980s and 1990s, defined by David M. Jones and JoAnne C. Juett as "a movement of defiance, seeking to defy a homophobic cultural past, to openly defy cinematic convention, and, in the wake of the dreadful specter of AIDS, to defy death itself" (Jones, Juett x).<sup>6</sup> This defiance of death is made explicitly manifest in Jarman's *Edward II*, as Jarman offers a

provocative but mostly faithful adaptation that presents one lofty difference: the film's ending imagines a sequence of events that does not end with Edward's grisly rape and murder. Edward survives his historically mandated attack and his visible onscreen arc comes to a seemingly happy end when he shares a kiss with his would-be, assigned assassin. That this ending can manage only seeming happiness reveals the stakes and consequences of the adaptational trajectory I am tracing: with each new performative adaptation comes a new body to inhabit Edward's surviving name, and with each new body comes the possibility that this will be the one to flout its destined endpoint. This flouting comes with its own costs however, as the film's sinisterly cyclical temporality will come to reveal. In what follows, I will begin by interrogating the theory of name-facilitated survival that Marlowe's Edward posits before examining the peculiar mode of linear embodiment that it anticipates. I will argue that Edward's dream of a surviving name promises dual legacies, different insofar as one is normative and the other queer, but similar in that both find their survivalist traction through bodies. Ultimately, I will consider the myriad potentialities that this procession of adapted bodies opens up, narrowing my focus on the specific example of Jarman's film and screenplay in order to point to a survival that is always in embodied process, and always itself as much a risk as it is a hope.

The inspiration for this chapter began with a single line of Marlowe's play-text, uttered by our titular character Edward II as he awaits his dethronement in Act 5, Scene 1. The line appears in the context of a larger speech that contains several complex ideas, but I want to begin by considering it in the truncated form that first spoke to me before moving to a more thorough consideration of its contextual placement. Edward, coming to terms with the inevitability of his unseating and death, consoles himself with the following thought: "Edward's name survive, though Edward dies" (5.1.48). This sentiment, with its ghostly assertion of a posthumous life

located somewhere beyond the living, breathing body, made me pause. My interest has largely been in the adaptational survival of early modern queer bodies, and here I was faced with one such figure invested in a survival that he saw manifesting itself elsewhere. Edward's hope for a survival of his name divorced from his body raises a new set of questions regarding the life that adaptation makes possible, for what does it mean to be invested in a survival that is abstracted above and beyond embodiment? If adaptation is a bodily process, how does a name unaccompanied by a living body hope to adapt and survive? What would the survival Edward here envisions look like, and could it even be considered survival at all? These questions tentatively began to resolve themselves for me when I realized that the fantasy of survival that Edward here purports is not actually divorced from the body at all. In fact, it propels a theory of name-linked embodiment that moves beyond the space of any single body to consider a whole procession of them. It is a survival that explicitly and implicitly demands a line of bodies, for when Edward imagines the survival of his name he imagines also its renewed and changed embodiment. When Edward dies, his body lost and perished, the ongoing existence of Edward's name will allow for a revivification grounding itself in a bodily legacy that is both normatively reproductive and unnaturally queer. Though the queer thread of this survivalist legacy will be the one I am most interested in, I will consider both in order to stake the claim that *Edward II* imagines the relationship between names and bodies as one of adaptationally embodied legacy.

Edward's assertion of the surviving quality of his name is rendered in terms much more specific than the above shortened quotation reveals. It appears in the larger context of a gruesome fantasy that imagines Mortimer, Edward's supplanter, himself dead when Edward's crown comes to rest upon his head:

But, if proud Mortimer do wear this crown,

Heavens turn it to a blaze of quenchless fire!

Or, like the snaky wreath of Tisiphon,

Engirt the temples of his hateful head!

So shall not England's vine be perished,

But Edward's name survive, though Edward dies. (5.1.43-48)

Here, Edward reasons that Mortimer's death will allow the crown to rightfully sit atop his son's head instead, and it is in this way that his name's survival is made possible. This textual moment has gone largely uninterrogated in critical work on *Edward II*, perhaps because Edward's logic here seems obvious in its fantasy of linear legacy. The embodiment inherent to this normative legacy has relevance for my argument, but there are multiple conflicting logics at play here in need of interrogation. Survival is potentialized by name, but Edward and readers of the play alike have failed to consider the revealing contingency of this rationale. There are two major points about Edward's philosophy in the above quotation that I would like to emphasize. Firstly, that the name survives through perishing bodies rather than despite them, and, secondly, that the name itself bears the quality of a body in its capacity to be harmed, killed, and rendered unseeable. Edward's seeming dismissal of his own body in favor of his name in fact brings embodiment ever more urgently to the fore, speaking to the play's larger interest in the material fragility of names and bodies alike. The survival that here seems so certain because of its distance from the decaying body becomes, upon closer inspection, itself embodied, and multiply so: it perseveres only by moving onto new bodies to come, and it lives even then in constant peril of mangling and death.

Edward here imagines his child, the soon-to-be Edward III, as the major medium through which his name will be remembered, and by so doing implicitly considers the body even while

he explicitly rejects it. The most obvious way in which the body figures in here is through the speech's echo of ideas of monarchical continuity postulated by The King's Two Bodies, defined by Plowden and Ernst Kantorowicz as the splitting of the kingly body into "a Body natural" and "a Body politic" (Kantorowicz 7). The body politic is not subject to the vulnerabilities of the body natural, and is in effect indestructible: "His Body natural is a Body mortal, subject to all Infirmities that come by Nature or Accident...But his Body politic is a Body that cannot be seen or handled... this Body is utterly void of Infancy, and Old Age, and other natural Defects and Imbecilities which the Body natural is subject to" (Kantorowicz 7). The deathless body of the body politic is perhaps exactly what Edward has in mind when he presents the concept of the non-perishing name: it is what will outlive and come to matter more than his soon-to-be-lost body natural. The question that emerges for us here, then: what makes the body politic a body at all, for what is a body if not a vulnerably changeable entity subject to a loss of its parts? I assert that Edward here reveals the truth that validates the body politics' body-based title: a kingly name and the imagined immortality that comes with it is radically contingent on a process of embodiment that is every bit as vulnerable to mutilation as the body natural. This vulnerability is illustrated here through Edward's fixation on the crown and the body that it will come to rest on. Picking up on the implicit logic of the King's Two Bodies at work in this speech, Marie Rutkoski writes, "The presentation of another, miniature Edward suggests that the king will not simply die but be reincarnated in the body of his son as England's next monarch" (Rutkoski 288). The notion of a succeeding child that bears Edward's kingly name and thus offers survivalist comfort points to a normativity at the heart of the theory of the King's Two Bodies, a normativity that Lee Edelman might call *reproductive futurism*, in which the sacred image of the child offers the all-encompassing hope of a future redeemed. It points also, however, and perhaps unwittingly, to

a fragility underpinning this normative absolute: if the body politic persists immortally in part through monarchical continuity, its persistence is embodied by way of bodies natural, with all the mortality and peril they are prone to. Edward highlights this reality when he gestures toward Edward III as more than mere utopic image. Kingliness is aggressively embodied, emerging at the moment in which the crown touches a head. When Edward wishes for the graphic destruction of Mortimer's own, Edward III comes to matter as something more than an abstracted extension of this metaphorical vine. He too becomes a body, and specifically the body through which something of the perished Edward II will find manifestation.

Edward, then, imagines the survival of his name as a survival embodied in part through kingly and reproductive legacy. In a notable caveat, however, he makes it clear that this survival is contingent on the kinging of his son, a dependency that holds implications for the vulnerability of his name. Survival is not facilitated by his son's mere existence, despite the fact that their name is a shared one regardless; Edward will remain Edward no matter where the crown ends up. And yet Edward is insistent that Mortimer's appropriation of the title of king that marks half of Edward's name would be detrimental to this endurance he imagines. Indeed, his simultaneous preoccupation with the location of his crown and the perseverance of his name conflates the two seemingly disparate concepts. It is not merely the bare name of 'Edward' that he wants to live on, but the name kept intact alongside its accompanying title. If his son is crowned king, Edward's name will indeed survive in its most complete form, for his son will become not merely Edward, but *King* Edward. This brings us to a second theory of the name that the play-text presents: the name not only allows for an embodied chronicle of familial survival, it also bears the qualities of a body itself in its ability to be dismembered and thereby rendered unrecognizable. Like a body, the name is vulnerable to excision and assault, and the mangling of



a name threatens an unrecognizability that has ramifications for its corresponding body. Survival for Edward necessitates recognizability: he is recognized by name, and that name is recognized by an intactness that is ever in peril of being pulled apart.

The consequences of a name dismembered are made clear in Act Four of the play, which contains a telling exchange between Edward's son and the Earl of Kent. The scene sees Kent asking the queen what her plans for the newly fallen Edward II are. However, he refers to the king while refusing to name him as such, asking only, "How will you deal with Edward in his fall" (4.6.31)? Prince Edward, witnessing the conversation, interrupts and asks: "Tell me, good uncle, what Edward do you mean" (4.6.32)? "Nephew, your father," Kent clarifies, "I dare not call him king" (4.6.33). Edward's name bare of its title becomes an ambiguous signifier, severed from its bodily point of reference. The excising of "King" from "Edward" elicits an unrecognizability that threatens erasure, for, what Prince Edward could just as well be asking is, 'Tell me, good uncle, what *body* do you mean'? With the cutting-up of King Edward's name comes bodily confusion: if neither Edward nor his son bear the title of king, then neither of them can hope to live on through a name emptied of corporeal distinction. As we will later see, this corporeal spillover has benefits for the specifically queer capacity of the monarchical line, but what both Edwards II and III here identify is the way in which names resemble bodies in addition to demanding embodiment. It is not simply that the name carries the body politic, we see also that the name is itself a third body in this dynamic, the connecting hinge between a body politic and a body natural that threatens the destruction of all three.

The link between torn names and bodily unrecognizability is one that Edward himself fantasizes about when he gets his hands on the decree for his imprisonment signed by Mortimer Sr.: "By Mortimer, whose name is written here! Well may I rent his name who rends my heart,"

Edward cries, as he tears the written name before him, “This poor revenge hath something eas’d my mind: so may his limbs be torn as is this paper” (5.1.140-142). Edward reacts to an imagined tearing of a part of his body with a tearing in kind: he dismembers Mortimer’s name and hopes that this action will enact a similar ending for his body. Ineffectual revenge though it is, Edward nonetheless finds solace in the action. This solace is acquired through the link between name and body that Edward himself will soon become all the more painfully aware of once his own name has been on the receiving end of a symbolic tearing that has ramifications far more dire. Towards the close of the play, Edward, unkinged and partially unnamed, finds himself in a perceived state of possible limblessness: “My mind’s distemper’d, and my body’s numb’d,” he laments, “And whether I have limbs or no I know not” (5.5.63-64). This newfound incapacity of his once-kingly body is furthered when he hands his final jewel to Lightborn just a few lines later. “One jewel I have left; receive thou this” (5.5.83), Edward offers, seeking to remind Lightborn of the status he once held through a surrender of the final physical signifier of it. His former bodily capacity is temporarily revived, limbs embodied back into his consciousness as he hands over the jewel. And yet he feels his renewed joints ache and begin again to fail him as he does so. This intensified disintegration of his body seems mysterious to him, as he fails to realize that this final assertion of his kingliness is in fact also a finalizing vacating of it: “Still fear I, and I know not what’s the cause, / But every joint shakes as I give it thee” (5.5.84-85). The enormity of this bodily and namely loss is shortly made clear to him, and he wonders aloud how his inevitable death has not already come to pass: “Know that I am a king,” he asserts for the last time, “O, at that name / I feel a hell of grief! Where is my crown? / Gone, gone! And do I remain alive” (5.5.88-90)? That torn names are symbolically and literally tied to torn bodies further

exemplifies that Edward's desire for the endurance of his name is a desire also for the endurance of an approximation of his body.

The name in *Edward II*, then, is intimately linked with the body, facilitating a survival that is mobilized through kingly chronology and that acts in recognizable relation to a bodily referent. Edward imagines a future in which some part of him lives on through the name King Edward, a survival that demands a kingly body connected to his own by way of reproductive legacy. Although Edward explicitly has his son in mind, I want to consider how the sentiment is complicated by its existence in a play-text that anticipates performance. As Martin Meisel notes of drama as a medium, "Like the musical score, the printed play exists as a manual for performance...it exists as a manual *and* as a representation, in its own right, of that which is to be performed" (Meisel 1-2).<sup>7</sup> When Edward utters, "Edward's name survive, though Edward dies," and imagines his name and title living on through the body of his son, a curious phenomenon thus emerges, unbeknownst to him: the line exists anticipatorily, awaiting performance, and with this comes the promise of new bodies to bear his name. The familial chronology of Edward's dream of survival here is complicated by the fact that the line awaits multiple utterances that will be made manifest in the actorly bodies of the performers who take on and newly embody this role and this name. Any performance of this play will see the line spoken by a new, different body, one that recognizes itself and is recognized by its onlookers as Edward II. That the actorly performance of historical figures onstage was imagined as an embodied resurrection is a notion expressed by early modern playwrights John Webster and Thomas Heywood in their respective writings on actors.<sup>8</sup> "For what we see him personate, we thinke truely done before vs...the Ghosts of our ancient *Heroes* walk't again" (Webster 42), Webster writes, echoing Heywood's idea that the bodies of onstage performance appear to us "as

if the Personater were the man Personated” (Heywood 32). Thus, the renewed embodiment of a speaking Edward II who is not the ‘original’ Edward II and yet bears his name and person all the same elicits a legacy of the name that spins forward on bodies that are unconnected by blood and connected instead by the mobile life of the theatricalized name itself.

If Edward’s surety that something of him will live on in the kinged name and body of his son reveals a logic of reproductive futurism in keeping with the idea of *The King’s Two Bodies*, then the implicitly metatheatrical logic that emerges in his unwitting anticipation of newer, non-familial bodies reveals something queerer. Edward’s son ceases to be the only possible candidate for his namely and bodily revivification, and so the two bodies promised to him as king here become many bodies. A second embodied line, linked through a chronology that is performative and adaptational rather than reproductively hereditary, accompanies the normative ancestral lineage potentialized by Edward III. I want to suggest that this second lurking legacy offers its own non-perishing vine (to borrow Edward’s dramatic language), a genealogy that exemplifies what Kath Weston might call queer kinship.<sup>9</sup> This survival, opened out and away from a procreative bloodline, allows Edward a multiply embodied posthumous existence that widens the scope of how he may be newly figured. Differently gendered, differently abled, or differently racialized bodies may come to take on his name, and his survival may be one day concretized by a body capable of either living through the assault that marks his death or by a body that evades it entirely. Indeed, the vast bodily potentialities opened up by this queer line of kin allow for the hope of something like utopia, for the adapted performance that will rescue Edward from the homophobic violence he is destined to fatally fall prey to.

As the opening to this chapter made clear, this project is decidedly not a utopic one. However, I take seriously José Muñoz’s claim that a queer project without at least an idea of

utopia is not one worth considering,<sup>10</sup> and so I would like to linger momentarily on the utopic potentiality that this adaptational kinship can conceivably offer before turning to focus on a particular example of its concrete failing. Jill Dolan details the utopia that performance perhaps makes possible, identifying it as the moments in which “performance provides a place where people come together, embodied and passionate, to share experiences of meaning making and imagination that can describe or capture fleeting intimations of a better world” (Dolan 1). Edward’s implicit acknowledgement of his adaptationally facilitated chronological survival is perhaps one such moment, but I would like to turn to the play’s opening scene, which sees Gaveston receiving the letter from Edward that calls him back to England. Gaveston spends the duration of the scene fantasizing about what he will do with Edward when he arrives, and the scene ends with a soliloquy in which Gaveston plans aloud the theatrical spectacle he wants to put on for his beloved. He sensuously envisions “a lovely boy in Dian’s shape” (1.1.60) who will be caught bathing by “one like Actaeon” (1.1.66), before Actaeon is transformed into a hart and pulled apart by his hounds as punishment for his peeping transgression. The adaptation of Ovid’s Actaeon-Diana story that Gaveston here outlines<sup>11</sup> does not immediately appear to itself envision the better, utopic world that Jill Dolan hopes for, but I posit that its metatheatricality functions as a means of illustrating the bodily possibility that Edward envisions when he dreams of his own surviving name. Gaveston’s theatrical fantasy here is one that anticipates onstage embodiment, and what he imagines is precisely the kind of bodily alteration and possibility that the adapting of surviving names makes possible. As Bent Sunesen notes, Diana here becomes the means through which homoerotic desire is channeled: “this is the ‘divine huntress chaste and fair’ engaged in something very much like strip-tease” (Sunesen 244). Gaveston’s explicit gender swap summons a radically new body to bear her name, and in so doing he unwittingly constructs a moment of

metatheatres that emphasize his own standing as a figure similarly and anticipatorily multiply embodied. The fleeting better world that Dolan hopes for is not here actualized, but it is potentialized in the process of embodiment here performed. If Ovid's Diana can be re-embodied in differently gendered, differently sexualized form, then the same becomes true of Diana's onstage adapter: Gaveston, embodied here by way of a name that has survived (as Diana's has, and as Edward's will), becomes implicitly subject to the very kind of bodily adaptation he deploys. It becomes fleetingly possible to imagine Gavestons with differing bodily arrangements; it becomes, in fact, possible to imagine a Gaveston who may even survive his death to come.

This potentializing of eventual survival is perhaps utopic only in abstraction, however. Its realization poses questions about what it might mean to want queer characters to survive the violations heaped upon them. It poses the possibility that survival is itself a new violation, another cruelty to be borne. This is in fact what Derek Jarman's 1991 adaptation *Edward II* reveals to us. As previously mentioned, here is an adaptational project that seems to take the play's survivalist logic to its most utopic possible end: it imagines an embodied telling of history in which Edward II does not die. His fate cannot be fully evaded, as the murder he is known for is nonetheless experienced as a premonition, and we are met with that which should be impossible: an Edward II who bodily experiences his own murderous assault, but lives through it anyway. Of this altered ending, the film's ghost director Ken Butler writes, "Then this scene, the surprise, the 'happy ending...' Marlowe is lucky to have us: we have rescued the play" (Butler qtd. in Jarman, 162)! This fantasy of a rescued ending is echoed by critic Colin MacCabe, who argues that, with this changed close, "a whole new history becomes possible" (MacCabe 153). This dual notion of a saved ending and a rescued history leaves us with a sense of utopic potentiality fulfilled. At last we have arrived at the bodily iteration that thrives on; at last that

long line of adaptationally named Edwards has reached consummation; finally, we get an Edward II who lives on in name and in singular body, a radically altered history giving way to an improved present and a salvaged future. Indeed, there is something restorative about watching Edward's arc end with a kiss rather than a hot poker. It is a restoration that comes at a heavy cost, however, and it is that cost that I draw attention to. The film's screenplay opens with a note from Derek Jarman that explicates the film's genesis and intentionality:

How to make a film of a gay love affair and get it commissioned. Find a dusty old play and violate it.

It is difficult enough to be queer, but to be a queer in the cinema is almost impossible. Heterosexuals have fucked up the screen so completely that there's hardly room for us to kiss there. Marlowe outs the past – why don't we out the present? That's really the only message this play has. Fuck poetry. The best lines in Marlowe sound like pop songs and the worst, well, we've tried to spare you them... (Jarman)

That the film is here imagined as a violation of the play speaks to the ambivalence of its 'rescuing' project. Despite Jarman's own assertions elsewhere that Edward's end is a happy one, he renders the relationship between source-text and adaptation as one simultaneously antagonistic and in sync. The film and screenplay violate Marlowe's play-text, and yet they also embark on its same project: to 'out.' Thus, we must wonder: what does Edward's surviving body 'out'? How are the imagined rescuing of the play and the imagined violation of it synonymous projects? I look to Jarman's film and screenplay in order to posit that what is outed is nothing less than the necessity of Edward's death. As I will demonstrate, the film's cyclical temporality

ultimately presents its seeming utopia as static hell. Edward II survives, and in that survival a horrifying truth is revealed, one that violates even as it seemingly rescues: Edward's adaptation can never facilitate a survival that is anything but doomed.

The screenplay presents an opening scene that is omitted from the finalized film itself. There are two things about this scene that I want to reflect on: firstly, the way in which it speaks back to its source-text by presenting the name as the gateway through which bodily legacies are potentialized, and, secondly, the way in which the scene's excision is necessitated by the fact of Edward's eventual survival. The simultaneous existence and erasure of this scene reveals a curious logic: it acknowledges the survivalist potentiality of the name while demonstrating also that the literal realization of such a survival renders that same potentiality obsolete. The scene makes its appearance at the very beginning of the *Queer Edward II* screenplay, following Jarman's previously quoted introductory note. It sets up the graphic structure for every sequence that follows. The screenplay is laid out in 82 sequences; each allotted two pages that combine OutRage! slogans,<sup>12</sup> the dialogue and directions of the scene, director's notes,<sup>13</sup> and one image from the scene at hand. The screenplay's opening scene is represented through a black-and-white photo of a dying Edward I in a suit of armor juxtaposed alongside the text of the scene and a large text header that reads an OutRage! catchphrase and quote made famous by Oscar Wilde: "the love the dare not speak its name" (Jarman 1).<sup>14</sup> Even a cursory glance at the two-page sequence shows how dramatically the scene foregrounds the question of the name. The OutRage!-Wilde quote takes up the bulk of the first page, matching the photo in size and far outstripping the text of the dialogue and stage directions. Superficially, the Wilde quotation clearly sets up the obvious 'outing' that the film takes as one of its projects: the nature of Edward II's love will be clearly named in the text that follows, a naming that director Jarman sets up in



the notes he offers on this first page. Jarman writes, “By many historians [Edward] isn’t even allowed his sexuality,” before immediately remedying this archival omission with a declarative naming that stands as its own sentence: “Queer Edward II” (Jarman 1). Queerness is named and history is thus outed, silence filled and an erasure written over.

On the one hand, then, the issue of naming that the Douglas-Wilde-OutRage! quotation opens up is an issue resolved when Edward is officially baptized “queer” in the scene notes and, indeed, in the title of the screenplay. However, a look to the content of the scene itself unveils a second naming venture. The scene sees Edward’s father Edward I dying, clad in his armor and supported by crutches. He is described as having a heart attack, thrashing violently around the room. “Edward, Edward” (Jarman 1), the dying Edward I utters, and the scene ends with blood pouring out of his armor. Though the screenplay specifies that his grandson, the future Edward III, is present in the scene, no other dialogue appears. We have, then, an OutRage! slogan that takes an unutterable name as its subject accompanied by a scene in which a name is uttered. Because a doubly repeated “Edward” is all the dying king has to offer, it is unclear whom exactly he is referring to, and unclear also what intentionality lies behind this final utterance. However, the sight of a dying King Edward clinging to the name he shares with his succeeding bloodline calls to mind a similar moment in Marlowe’s play-text. I think here specifically of the comfort that Marlowe’s dying Edward II clings to when faced with his own coming death: “Edward’s name survive, though Edward dies” (5.1.48). We see here, then, an extension and foreshadowing of that survivalist logic, in which impending death is accompanied by a figuring of the name that facilitates something like bodily endurance. Edward I dies, and the very next scene introduces us to the body of his son, as if it has been summoned by Edward I’s dying declaration. Edward I, like his son after him, survives in embodied form through this forward-spinning legacy that

ensures his name survive not merely in abstraction but on the person of his procreative progeny. Like Marlowe's Edward II, Jarman's Edward I has that most normative of persevering comforts: the promise of a legacy manifest in name and in inheriting bodies.

The queerer actorly legacy that Marlowe's Edward unwittingly purports in his assurance of the surviving name is less present here, insofar as it has already come to flesh. Already we see and react to embodied Edwards whose names and titles have been passed down to them by non-reproductive means. Edward, his father, and his son are already manifest in queer bodies, bodies that have come to queerly matter through a legacy of adaptational kinship rather than familial succession. Jarman's film is not content to find provocative satisfaction through this bodily reality alone, however, and as such it strives to queer its presentation of even procreative lineage, that straightest of straight lines. The omitted Sequence One features one of Jarman's lengthier side notes, which I have already partially attended to. Before Jarman names his Edward "Queer Edward II," as previously discussed, he names Edward's father first: "Straight Edward I," the note begins (Jarman 1). Jarman names Edward I, names Edward II, and then jumps back to Edward I, shifting focus in this transition away from his violent heterosexuality and towards the vulnerabilities of his body. The naming of Edward II's queerness allows for the alteration of even his father's embodied presence, and the "Straight, obstinate and very cruel" (Jarman 1) Edward I gives way to a figure made malleable; indeed, made queer. Edward I in fact becomes the major bodily medium through which Jarman finds an approximation of his own queer body, an identification that trumps his embodied connection to the figure he has more explicitly shared queer name with:

Straight Edward I.

[...]

Queer Edward II.

Edward I died on 7 July 1307. His account books list many exotic medicines prescribed for ill health: a cordial made from amber, jacynth, musk, pearls and gold.

My chemical life sputters on. Each morning I swallow, with increasing difficulty: a cordial of Ritafer, Fansidar, AZT, Pirodoxin, one Calcium Folate (to counteract the Ritafer) and two Carbamazepine to stop any fits my damaged brain might bring! (Jarman 1)

It is as if the line from Straight Edward I to Queer Edward II has been disrupted in the simple act of naming the queerness of just one of them. Edward I accrues a queer signification that is potentialized by way of the outing of his son and consequently realized through the ailing of his body. With this ailment comes the surety of his death, the surety of his son's reign, and thus the surety that the survival of his name is a survival also of this queer potentiality of both their bodies. Legacy, even in its most normative and reproductive of forms, hinges on something that is itself already at risk for queerness: the body is inevitably marked for death, and this marking catalyzes a desire for continuance that renders one eternally subject to the offbeat successor that queers the whole line. "Edward, Edward" (Jarman 1), the dying Edward I here mutters as his grandson, the future Edward III, looks on. A question that this third Edward does not here ask, but that he has asked before and will ask again comes to mind: "What Edward do you mean" (4.6.32)? A bodily legacy grounded in the mobile survival of a name threatens such confusion, and the corporeal spillover between bodies renders the seemingly straight line of procreative chronology askew. Edward I is queered by the actorly body that stands in for him,

queered by the adapting director that reads his own death in the failing of his body, and ultimately queered by the succeeding line that spills back over and into him.

Because this sequence demonstrates the unique survival that a name attached to a line of perishing bodies makes possible, it is necessary to consider also what its omission from the finalized film then reveals. The completed film opens with the screenplay's Sequence Two, which sees Edward II sending off the letter to Gaveston that urges his return to England. The death and queer embodiment that the screenplay's opening scene sets up is lost, existing only in the ghostly printed form the published script makes accessible. That a scene so ripe with visual and thematic provocation ends up on the cutting room floor seems a surprising editing decision, but I aim now to elaborate on my earlier claim that the film's altered ending in fact necessitates this removal. If the excised Sequence One allows us a fleeting glimpse of a multiply embodied survival that takes death as its impetus, then Edward II's evasion of death at the film's close undercuts this brimming potentiality. Edward does not die, and so his name cannot move. It remains stagnant, trapped in the space of his singular body. The film belabors this reality precisely through the unsticking of its own temporal structure that the deletion of the originary Sequence One permits. The removal of the scene allows for the film to more efficiently thematize its content via negativa: the exclusion of Edward I's onscreen death destabilizes the clean chronology that would see him die so that his son may take his place. Perhaps more significantly, the exclusion of his death also creates a fruitful narrative confusion in which the Edward II of the film's end and the Edward II of the film's opening are bodily and contextually indistinguishable from one another. The film's beginning and its ending fuse together with no clear indication of where we or Edward can temporally locate ourselves, and so we lose the promise of death-facilitated namely and bodily mobility that Edward I's death scene allows us.

What's more, we lose also the hope that this mobile survival is an optimistic promise at all. The radical loss of temporal coherence the film offers is undeniably, radically queer in its refusal of any kind of linearity, and yet it presents an idea of queerness bereft of the utopic fulfillment one would expect Edward II's impossible survival to victoriously open up. Edward's body survives, but finds that it has nowhere left to go. Thus it must be pulled right back to the beginning that intimates its destined, grisly close, survival making way only for a literal re-living of the historical tragedy Edward is tied to. The literal survival of a single body here depicted reveals something too about the multiply embodied endurance that a less literal survival potentializes, for both necessitate a recurrent suffering. This, then, is what the film reveals about the adaptation that Edward's surviving name and legacy demand: every adaptational resurrection is a reach for survival that ultimately outs the fact of that survival's un-survivability.

This reading of the film's temporal structure is itself an intervention in the critical dialogue surrounding Jarman's *Edward II*. The question of temporality has been critically overlooked, with most of the work focusing on the general queer polemic of the film<sup>15</sup> or the gendered complexity of Tilda Swinton's performance as Queen Isabella.<sup>16</sup> Bert Cardullo comes closest to considering the queer placement of the film's opening, determining that "the whole of the film is constructed as a flashback" (Cardullo 88).<sup>17</sup> I posit that the relationship between the Edward of the play's opening and the Edward of the scenes that follow is not so simple. The opening scene is not a means to present the events of the film through Edward's retrospective memory, it exists much more complexly in a paradoxical space in which the events of Marlowe's play have both already happened and not yet occurred. This is made evident in the film's opening shot, which rests on Edward II, lying prostrate on the ground with a postcard visibly clutched in his hand. The temporal complexity of the scene's placement is marked on the space

of his body. As per the screenplay's description, he lays "motionless" and "gaunt" (Jarman 4), looking dead or close to it, the burden of all that the play-text (and the film) puts him through already discernible on his person. Indeed, when the film first shows Edward, we see him lying on the ground, cloaked in shadow, eyes closed and skin dirtied. Edward lies brokenly in the dungeon that marks his historically mandated death place,<sup>18</sup> and it does momentarily appear as though the film is beginning at the end and introducing a narrative structure in which flashbacks and ensuing jumps back to the present will organize the flow of events to come. Indeed, the second shot, which reveals Lightborn (Edward's jailor and eventual assassin), sustains this illusion of temporal coherence: by all appearances, these opening moments lead us to believe that we are being simply introduced to Edward just before his inevitable death to come. This expectation is quickly subverted, however, when we see Lightborn move towards Edward to remove the postcard of London in his unconscious grip. Lightborn reads its inscription aloud, and we realize that what Edward here clutches is the letter to Gaveston that opens Marlowe's play and launches its narrative trajectory into action: "My father is deceased; come, Gaveston" (Jarman, Marlowe 4),<sup>19</sup> Lightborn reads. At the sound of his voice, Edward startles awake, snatches the postcard back, and recites it aloud, "from memory" (Jarman 4): "My father is deceased; come Gaveston, and share the Kingdom with thy dearest friend" (Jarman, Marlowe 4). Edward's recitation is weary, and again we might be tempted to imagine that he has somehow retained the letter through the duration of the events preceding his murder, thereby allowing the scene to continue to act as the narrative medium through which flashback will conventionally commence. However, this temptation is dashed by the cut to the title credits that follow, which last onscreen for over a minute and disrupt the would-be natural transition from the present of the letter to its concretely-situated past. The extended duration of the credits instead gives the effect

of a nondescript passing of time that suggests the letter is in fact making its way to Gaveston, who is thus presented as presently embodied rather than as posthumous flashback. Gaveston reads the opening lines of Edward's letter aloud, and the action of the play-text begins. I closely outline this sequence of events in order to demonstrate that it does not adhere to the flashback structure it initially appears to set out, and that the audience is faced instead with a baffling reality: Edward's body exists here simultaneously at the play-text's beginning and ending, bearing both the signs of the torments he faces following Gaveston's death and the postcard that summons the still-living Gaveston to him in the first place. Edward exists in this moment both before *and* after the events of Marlowe's play-text, a temporal incomprehensibility that makes the project of locating a clear beginning an impossible one.

The beginning and ending of the film are made inextricable from the other through this impossible placement of Edward's body, and so I move now to the film's close. Edward, who has flickeringly spent the duration of the film in Lightborn's dungeon, finally reaches (or perhaps re-reaches) the endpoint destined for him by history and by the play-text he adapts. Jarman's film and screenplay render the depiction of Edward's rape and murder as a nightmarish premonition (Jarman 160) before he awakens to a 'happy' ending that sees Lightborn tossing out the murder weapon and moving to kiss Edward instead. Pascale Aebischer and Rowland Wymer have contested the tendency to read this ending as a wholly redemptive one, each suggesting that the fact that we see both the murder and the survival grants both scenes equal weight. The happy scene thus, by this reading, fails to subsume the one that ends in the expected death. Wymer writes, "The climactic anal rape and murder of Edward lasts longer and has considerably more impact than the brief loving kiss which displaces it" (Wymer 149), and Aebischer similarly contends that "the second, happy, conclusion of this scene does not supplant the first, tragic

conclusion; rather, each alternative is readable as a dream from the point of view of its other, each equally offered to the viewer as both ‘true’ and impossible” (Aebischer 52). I agree with Wymer and Aebischer insofar as I too read the film’s ending as less utopically restorative than Colin MacCabe and, indeed, than the director(s),<sup>20</sup> but I deviate from the claim that both endings are presented by the film as equally viable. The ‘happier’ (to borrow Jarman’s scare quotes) of the two endings is in fact cinematically rendered as the version of events that is actualized and sustained beyond the space of a dream. In what follows, I will demonstrate that the film offers Edward’s murder as a hallucinatory vision that is ‘real’ only in the bodily experienced trauma it inflicts on the otherwise unharmed Edward. It is Edward’s unambiguous survival that carves the way for an ending that spills back to the film’s beginning and allows for the temporal impossibility already discussed.

Jarman’s film presents Edward’s murder as an imagined vision that nonetheless acts as a violation of Edward’s mind and body. Aebischer’s consideration of the sequence focuses largely on sound, noting that the action of the scene is mute but for a choir of children singing ‘*risurrexit*,’ meaning ‘he is risen’ (Aebischer 52). Aebischer is interested principally in the way in which Edward’s scream cuts through the singing choir, a rupture that breaks the boundary between audience and spectacle and forces the viewer to viscerally feel his pain.<sup>21</sup> Aebischer does not make note, however, of the other filmic rupture the poker’s insertion opens up: a rupture in the dreamscape of the scene itself. Edward’s scream is accompanied not just by a close-up of his agonized face, as Aebischer notes, but also with two quick cuts to his reposed form, alone and seemingly unassaulted on the dungeon floor. Twice the camera cuts away from Edward’s drawn-out death to reveal him experiencing it non-literally through dream or vision. The shots of Edward experiencing the dream-murder that we know to be historically accurate are



overwhelmed by bright red lighting. In contrast, the shots of his body alone and unassaulted are drenched in black shadow, so much so that he is barely visible. The unnaturally bright and hellish red that bathes the murder scene vanishes into the abyssal shadow of Edward's dungeon floor, empty but for him. The stark contrast between the bold red of the imagined murder and the bold black of the cut to reality marks the filmic break that unveils the action of the murder as illusory. When the vision has passed and faded, we see Edward lying on the dungeon floor. The darkness he is cloaked within is in keeping with the shadowy shots that ruptured his grisly vision, establishing a continuity that clearly presents Edward's solitary and physically unharmed body as the through-line of reality grounding the two contrasting scenes. Edward rises when Lightborn enters the dungeon, a flood of light fittingly accompanying him as he opens the entrance door. The opening of the second scenario thus follows logically from the glimpses of reality offered us during the murder nightmare, and the soft, natural light that this second version of events bestows upon Edward juxtaposes the artificially infernal red that flooded the premonition. The natural lighting of Lightborn's kiss renders it truer to reality than the synthetic light that accompanies his act of murder, and so we are invited to read the kiss as the realer of the two possible endings. Edward and Lightborn's shared kiss does not feature any jarring cuts back to the murder scene, or, in fact, to anything at all. It is presented in an ongoing, uninterrupted take, almost conventional in its coherence. The self-proclaimed 'happy ending' boasted by the film's creators is actualized here in the gentle realism of Edward's final onscreen moments, the horrific end that he is known for flouted by way of a hallucinatory sequence that adapts his murder without allowing it to actually happen in the narrative of the film itself. Despite the desire on the part of some critics to read the juxtaposed endings as equally plausible and equally

real, the film makes deliberate cinematic efforts to privilege the actuality of Edward's survival over his historically promised end.

I point to the unambiguity of Edward's survival not to suddenly suggest that the film's ending is thus effective in its rescuing function – it is not. Of interest to me is how the seeming triumph of an unambiguous survival in fact works to create an ending grimmer than the play's own. The survival Edward is here allowed elicits its own horror, as his evasion of death is neither an evasion of the trauma that comes with it nor a gateway to a revisionist history in which he lives on in any meaningful or redemptive manner. I therefore want to linger on the murder vision that the ending teases. Though I diverge from a reading that treats both endings as equivalently valid realities, I nonetheless insist upon the necessity of attending to the bodily devastation that the murderous dream sequence inflicts upon Edward. Aebischer notes of Edward's scream that the agonizing violation this scene depicts grounds itself in the bodies of we as spectators. Edward screams, and it is principally we as witnesses who are viscerally affected. Such a reading is in keeping with what Paul Elliott notes is the major focal point of contemporary film theory. Elliott writes, "it should be stressed that the body that film theory of the postmodern scopic regime is interested in is the body of the spectator and not the body on or of the screen" (Elliott 19). Given my own interest in a survival that is specifically bodily, I return now to the moment of his illusory murder in order to shift the focus back to that onscreen body and to the further damage it inflicts upon the fantasy of survivalist utopia. The two cuts back to the Edward of reality accomplish more than merely establishing the illusory nature of the murder onscreen. They function also to denote the way in which Edward evades his trauma only technically: it is nonetheless bodily experienced, and he becomes himself a spectator, met with the impossible task of both feeling and witnessing the violation of his own body.

The contrast between the Edward of dream and reality is multiply pronounced through lighting, color filtering, and, as I would like to look to now, picture composition. The wide shot of the dream encompasses Edward, the raised surface he is forcibly pinned down against, and the five men doing the pinning. The close up shot of Edward's reality focuses alternatively only on his face, and a fragmented rendering of it at that: only his forehead, nose, and hand are partially visible, dramatic shadow obscuring all the rest of him and obscuring also all the places where these visible parts connect. It is as if his 'real' body, the one that is not physically undergoing the duress of the dream, is nonetheless itself disintegrating in its hallucinatory experience of the murder. This body becomes temporarily inaccessible, its shadowy omission filled in by the dream body we can see in connected whole. Though the Edward draped in shadow is clearly marked as the Edward who is *not* dreaming, the body presented in the dream is the one that literally, cinematically matters, its experience supplementing and filling in for the vanishing body of Edward's reality. In this way, the dream body that undergoes the murder is foregrounded as the only body Edward is allowed in this sequence. The film takes pains to remind its audience that the murder is but a dream, but it takes pains also to clarify that this fact makes it no less bodily devastating. The Edward that sits solitary in the dungeon writhes with the felt agony of it, and brings his hands up to cover his ears as though to protect himself from the sound of his own screams. The scream, then, ruptures not just the boundary between audience and subject nor just the dreamscape of the scene. It fissures also the barrier between the bodily dreamscape and bodily reality, forcing Edward to be simultaneously cognizant of both. He experiences the violation as it happens to his body and must also experience it as a witness. The film itself illustrates the cost of witnessing when one of the men acting as accomplice to the murder receives a close up shot that conveys something like pain on his face. The visceral affect we as

viewers feel, combined with the demonstrated ache that witnessing inflicts upon two of the scene's onscreen bodies, raises questions about the so-called happiness of the ending's postulation of survival.

Because film theory (and, indeed, criticism on Jarman's film) has thus far neglected the body on the screen, I want to consider what it means when the body on the screen is also a body of the spectator, and what kinds of obligations that opens up for both the witnessing body onscreen and the witnessing body offscreen. I do not intend to suggest that Edward's experience of witnessing his own assault is in any way akin to our experience of witnessing his assault. Rather, I am interested in what this shared witnessing both closes off and facilitates. That we can witness Edward's witnessing, and thus in a sense share it with him, hinges on the survival of Edward as the violated party. We witness his assault, he witnesses his assault, and, moreover, we witness him witnessing it. If witnessing comes with a promise or an obligation,<sup>22</sup> what, then, are the obligations of witnessing a witnessing? I argue that that this peculiar mode of witnessing facilitates an intimacy between Edward and we as spectators that allows for the direct address that closes the film. Edward has survived, we have seen him survive, seen him see that survival, and it now falls to *someone* to bear the burden that has been left to him. Edward, by enduring that which should have killed him and thus living on as a witnessing party, is able to compose a plea to his audience. Though critics such as Colin MacCabe intimate that Edward's survival opens up something like a whole new history, the reality is smaller and significantly more pained: what is left to Edward is little more than a desperate plea to forget his own survival. Gone from the film is Edward III's closing imperative that the audience witness for him,<sup>23</sup> and instead Edward II, as murdered, surviving, and witnessing party, speaks directly to us through

ghostly voiceover. These final words come from a synthesizing of two separate pieces of dialogue Edward offers in Marlowe's play-text, here combined to deliberate effect:

But what are Kings, when regiment is gone,  
But perfect shadows in a sunshine day?  
I know not, but of this I am assured,  
That death ends all, and I can die but once.  
Come death, and with thy fingers close my eyes,  
Or if I live let me forget myself. (Jarman, Marlowe 168)

The comfort Edward finds in death is not only in its general capacity to end all, but also in its promise to close his eyes. Thus Edward imagines a perished version of his body that is capable only of acting as witness *to* his life rather than as witness *of* it. In his fantasy of death here proclaimed, ceasing to live means ceasing to see, a radical form of forgetting that he goes on to hope he may accomplish even if he does survive (as we know he has). This, then, is the future Edward's survival opens up, our 'happy' ending: a plea to either die or to forget, and the hope that with death will come a body to bear his name and the trauma it inescapably carries.

When Marlowe's Edward II yearns for a survival mobilized through the endurance of his intact name, he both consciously and unwittingly spawns legacies that thrive on in embodied form.

These dual legacies may follow straight lines, queer lines, and, perilously, no lines at all: the potential for perseverance that his logic lays out ultimately leads to a bodily iteration that flouts death and, in so doing, flouts also the very survivalist promise that the mobile name offers.

Derek Jarman's presentation of an Edward II who does not die curiously evades the seeming utopia that such an adapting of history should open up. Jarman's Edward lives through the simultaneous feeling and witnessing of the trauma that by all accounts should have killed him,

and this survivalist feat dooms him far more than it frees him. Edward survives his horrific murder only to loop right back to the opening of the narrative that impels his coming ruin afresh, name and body suspended in Sisyphean stasis. “Edward’s name survive, though Edward dies” (5.1.48), Edward hopes for, and with the closing and re-opening of this film he loses the existence of both. His body persists and so no new one, reproductively produced, queerly produced, or otherwise, can rise to meet the name he so eagerly anticipates the fortitude of. In the end, he is met with a survival that he longs only to shake off, and he appeals to death and his witnessing audience to unburden him of his cyclical trauma by allowing him to forget. The Edward of Marlowe’s play-text posits a survival that is grounded in the future and opens up avenues of bodily potentiality that seem to guide us toward a queer, lively utopia, and yet the most literal realization of this ability to survive reveals the problem of survival for bodies subject to unspeakable violations. In watching Edward live, we are met with the harrowing realization that the truer utopia may be the world in which we let him die.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> For a historical consideration of *Edward II*'s writerly and performative genesis, see Roslyn L. Knutson's "Marlowe, Company Ownership, and the Role of Edward II."

<sup>2</sup> Raphael Holinshed's historical chronicle of Edward II (1587) is the major source for Marlowe's play, and its account of his murder the most explicit: "They came suddenlie one night into the chamber where he laie in bed fast asleepe, and with heaue featherbeds or a table (as some write) being cast upon him, they kept him down and withall put into his fundament an horne, and through the same they thrust up into his bodie an hot spit, or (as others have) through the pipe of a trumpet a plumbers instrument of iron made verie hot, the which passing up into his intrailles, and being rolled to and fro, burnt the same, but so as no appearance of any wound or hurt outwardlie might be once perceived" (Holinshed 341).

<sup>3</sup> This depoliticization was enabled in part by appeals to Michel Foucault's assertion in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* that homosexuality as a term and a concept was only invented in the nineteenth century. It was supported also by the oft-quoted words of Mortimer Sr. in the play itself: "...Seeing his mind so dotes on Gaveston, / Let him without controlment have his will. / The mightiest kings have had their minions: / Great Alexander loved Hephæstion, / The conquering Hercules for Hylas wept, / And for Patroclus stern Achilles drooped. / And not kings only, but the wisest men: / The Roman Tully loved Octavius, / Grave Socrates, wild Alcibiades. / Then let his Grace, whose youth is flexible, / Freely enjoy that vain, light-headed earl, / For riper years will wean him from such toys" (1.4.388-400).

<sup>4</sup> Notable exceptions include Meg Pearson's consideration of forgiveness and infamy in the play in "Die with fame": Forgiving Infamy in Marlowe's *Edward II*" (2009), Roland Knowles' focus on medieval political structures in "The Political Contexts of Deposition and Election in

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Edward II” (2001), and C.K. Preedy’s brief analysis of the crown as tradable object in “(De)Valuing the Crown in Tamburlaine, Dido Queen of Carthage, and Edward II” (2014).

<sup>5</sup> In “The Transvestite Stage: More on the Case of Christopher Marlowe” (2010), Goldberg advances his book-long consideration of sodomy by looking to instances of cross-dressing theatricality in the play. Stymeist argues in “Status, Sodomy, and the Theater in Marlowe’s Edward II” (2004) that Marlowe’s illustration of sodomy in the text is intensely ambivalent, offering neither condemnation of the act nor support. Surgal’s “The Rebel and the Red-Hot Spit: Marlowe’s Edward II as Anal-Sadistic Prototype” (2004) uses Freud to read rebellion alongside the anal nature of Edward’s suggested sexual life and eventual murder. Shirley points to the ambiguous omission of stage direction to argue that the play scorns Edward’s assassins but that nonetheless does not present the murder as a hate crime in “Sodomy and Stage Directions in Christopher Marlowe’s Edward II” (2014), and, finally, Crewe in “Disorderly Love: Sodomy Revisited in Marlowe’s Edward II” (2009) borrows a phrase from Edmund Spenser’s *Shepherd’s Calendar* to offer a sharper definition of sodomy in the play as one entrenched in anxieties about pederasty.

<sup>6</sup> B. Ruby Rich coined the term “New Queer Cinema” in 1992, right off the heels of *Edward II*’s release. In addition to Jarman, the independent film movement included filmmakers such as Gregg Araki (*The Living End*), Jennie Livingston (*Paris is Burning*), and Todd Haynes (*Poison*).

<sup>7</sup> Meisel elaborates that this is the case whether the play ever goes on to be performed or not – the nature of the medium is in its hope for performance.



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<sup>8</sup> Thomas Heywood's *Apology for Actors* (1612) was a rebuttal to the writings of antitheatrical thinkers such as Stephen Gosson and Phillip Stubbes, and John Webster's "An Excellent Actor" (1615) is presented as a short "Character" a la Thomas Overbury.

<sup>9</sup> I refer here to Weston's landmark study on non-straight families, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (1991). Weston elaborates on David Schneider's 1968 study that divides kinship into two major groups: the order of nature and the order of law. Weston considers how lesbian and gay relationships elide these categories: "Familial ties between persons of the same sex that may be erotic but are not grounded in biology or procreation do not fit any tidy division of kinship into relations of blood and marriage" (Weston 3). Weston goes on to outline an imagining of queer kinship that is grounded in choice rather than blood. Though 'choice' is not so much present for Edward's accidental imagining of a line of performative kin, the fact that he carves out a succeeding lineage unconnected to him through blood or marriage nonetheless qualifies him.

<sup>10</sup> *Cruising Utopia*'s introduction includes an epigraph quoting Oscar Wilde: "A map of the world that does not include utopia is not worth glancing at" (Wilde, qtd. by Muñoz 1).

<sup>11</sup> The Actaeon-Diana allusion here has been well discussed by critics. Bent Sunesen claims that the imagined scene sets up and reflects the dramatic structure of the entire play. From there, Sara Munson Deats and other critics have sought to read Edward as an Actaeon figure. Most recently, Christopher Wessman shifted the focus from Actaeon to consider Diana's presence in the soliloquy, provocatively arguing that Edward is as much a Diana as he is an Actaeon.

<sup>12</sup> OutRage! is a queer activist organization that deploys confrontational and provocative tactics to combat homophobia. For more on Jarman's involvement with OutRage!, see Tony Peake's *Derek Jarman: A Biography*.

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<sup>13</sup> The screenplay also occasionally includes notes from ghost director Ken Butler and actress Tilda Swinton.

<sup>14</sup> The phrase originates in Lord Alfred Douglas's poem "Two Loves" (1894), though it was made famous when Oscar Wilde quoted it at his gross indecency trial in 1895.

<sup>15</sup> Michael D. Friedman problematically writes on the film's "anti-heterosexuality" (Friedman 579) and argues that Jarman's directorial reputation is parodied in Ian McKellen's *Richard III*: "McKellen...portrays the king as a monstrous version of 'the queer activist,' whose refusal to curb his sexual promiscuity despite his AIDS status threatens the health of society" (Friedman 575). Bette Talvacchia discusses how "the film diagrams Marlowe's words in order to disclose the presence of systematic and institutionalized repression of homosexual desire through English history, and to demonstrate its continuation into the present day" (Talavicchia 112). For more in this vein, see Deborah Willis's "Marlowe Our Contemporary: Edward II on Stage and Screen" and J. Horger's "Derek Jarman's Film Adaptation of Marlowe's Edward II."

<sup>16</sup> See Niall Richardson's "The Queer Performance of Tilda Swinton in Derek Jarman's *Edward II*: Gay Male Misogyny Reconsidered," Kate Chedgoy's "'The past is our mirror': Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jarman" in *Shakespeare's Queer Children*, Niall Richardson's *The Queer Cinema of Derek Jarman*, and Roberta Barker's *Early Modern Tragedy, Gender, and Performance, 1984-2000*.

<sup>17</sup> Cardullo's larger piece argues that Jarman's cinematic aesthetic reveals him to be more in keeping with Marlowe's theatrical politics than Jarman seems to realize.

<sup>18</sup> The screenplay's description of the setting: "The dungeon is set deep in the earth; a somber coal cellar. A stagnant pool, the surface of which gleams like beaten lead. Near the edge of the pool, set in the rock, fire issues from the furnace doors" (Jarman 4).

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<sup>19</sup> For the purposes of clarity and easy distinction, I will be citing both Jarman and Marlowe's names when referring to the film's dialogue. Quotations of scene descriptions and directions, in contrast, will be credited to Jarman only. Page numbers for both instances of citation will refer to Jarman's screenplay.

<sup>20</sup> Though the fact that Jarman puts quotations around both his assertions of a happy ending may suggest that he too is aware of its sinister underpinnings: "Then this, the surprise, the 'happy ending...'" (Jarman 162); "...so this is why we have a 'happier' ending" (Jarman 118).

<sup>21</sup> Aebischer writes, "The rupture in the soundtrack reproduces the physical assault and provokes the type of visceral response in the viewer advocated by Artaud" (Aebischer 52). Aebischer here references Artaud's creation of *The Theatre of Cruelty*, which entailed an assault on the senses of the audience.

<sup>22</sup> I borrow here Jacques Derrida's definition of what it means to bear witness. Derrida writes, "I bear witness" – that means: "I affirm (rightly or wrongly, but in all good faith, sincerely) that that was or is present to me, in space and time (thus, sense-perceptible), and although you do not have access to it, not the same access, you, my addressees, *you have to believe me*, because I engage myself to tell you the truth, I am already engaged in it, I tell you that I am telling the truth. Believe me. You have to believe me" (Derrida 76). Bearing witnesses impels a retelling that takes the form of a promise.

<sup>23</sup> Marlowe's play ends on Edward III, who repeatedly refers to the act of witnessing as he strives to avenge the wrong done to his father. Meg F. Pearson writes persuasively in "Audience as Witness in *Edward II*" on the way in which the language of the final act metatheatrically calls the audience to witness.

## CHAPTER III

### ‘LET NOT YOUR SORROW DIE’: ADAPTING TO REVENGE IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE’S *TITUS ANDRONICUS*

It may well be that no play in the Shakespearean dramatic canon better demonstrates the capacity of adaptation to abet textual survival than *Titus Andronicus* (1594). Famously reviled by critics and called everything from “one of the stupidest and most uninspired plays ever written” (Eliot 67) to “a poetic atrocity” (Bloom 77), it is not a text that was ever expected to meaningfully survive as a revered piece of Shakespeare’s corpus. Even putting disputes about its authorship aside, it was often positioned as a weak play destined for obscurity: as J.C. Maxwell’s 1953 introduction to the Arden edition incorrectly predicted, “Titus is neither a play with a complicated staging nor one which will ever be widely read” (Maxwell xvii). And yet, owing in part to this notoriety that so incensed critics, as of 2017 it seems to safe to say that the play *has* survived, adapted with increasing frequency as the years wear on and taken tremendously seriously by readers and scholars alike. That *Titus Andronicus* has thrived against all odds demonstrates the capacity of adaptational processes to bring renewed liveliness to texts otherwise vulnerable to effacement. The play has been performed both with utmost fidelity<sup>1</sup> and, alternatively, as everything from a heroic tale of Aaron the Moor<sup>2</sup> to a *South Park* episode.<sup>3</sup> If these adapted mutations have kept the play in ongoing circulation, they have also invited us to consider the role adaptation has to play within the text itself. *Titus Andronicus*, fixated as it is on the allusion to and performance of classical source-texts, has much to suggest about the relationship between processes of adaptation and the texts and bodies they shape. *Titus* has

survived, owing in part to the adaptational work it has inspired, and so, too, did it itself aid the lifespan of the texts it cites. In this chapter, I posit that the capacity of adaptation to abet survival is rendered in terms complicated by the play's deployment of the revenge tragedy form. When *Titus*'s characters adapt, they do so not merely to survive but also to revenge. Adapting to revenge takes the form of a survival, to be sure, but not a survival on the part of the adapting agent. What they strive to persevere is the literal livelihood of their enemies, a livelihood ensured only so that sorrow may be embodied upon it. In adapting to revenge, then, *Titus Andronicus*'s bodies adapt to die, fostering cruel survivals in the hopes of at last shuffling off their own.

Though much has been written on the function of allusion in the play, little attention has been paid to adaptation as it appears within and as a result of it.<sup>4</sup> Central to all discussions of the play's allusive form is, of course, Lavinia, a theatricalized Philomela established as such by several named references to Ovid's story and the fact that the *Metamorphoses* makes its literal way onstage in the shape of a book prop. By moving to consider Lavinia's arc as one shaped by adaptation rather than mere allusion, I shift the focus from abstracted citation to the material, bodily consequences I assert as essential to any act of adaptation. For my purposes, adaptation surpasses textual allusion by taking the body as its medium, an embodied process implicit in the term itself and the telos of survival undergirding it.<sup>5</sup> I insist that the alterations, survivals, and embodied mediums composing *Titus*'s engagement with Ovid's *Metamorphoses* render its status as adaptation palpable. Central to this argument is the presence of an in-text adapting agent, or, indeed, of several. I locate the play's paramount adapter and, by extension, paramount theorist of revenge in its antagonist, Aaron the Moor, proposing that Aaron's confession in the play's fifth act reveals him as a figure devoted to a specific type of revenge that characterizes its larger operation in the text: the vengeful art of creating, proliferating, and prolonging sorrow. This

explicitly-named sorrow is figured here as an embodied state corporealized most prominently through Lavinia. Lavinia becomes the medium through which sorrow-laden revenge emerges as a direct consequence of adaptational processes, an act of adaptation that is simultaneously an act of revenge. Sorrow, revenge, and adaptation are embodied and made synonymous on her person, the horror of which abets new and extended stagings of further adaptation that work similarly not toward a survival of any involved bodies but rather of sorrow itself. Aaron adapts Ovid on and through Lavinia's flesh, and by so doing facilitates a survival of Ovid's text, her body, and his own, a survival undesirable in the horrors and sorrow it subjects its on- and offstage spectators to.

Before I turn to consider Aaron as adaptational revenger, I would like to linger on the forms through which Lavinia's violation render her a Philomela *adaptation* rather than a Philomela *allusion*. Aaron first introduces the adaptation planned by naming it explicitly to Tamora: "This is the day of doom for Bassianus / His Philomel must lose her tongue today" (2.3.42-43). Already the embodied dimension key to this act is concretized, Lavinia transformed into Philomela by the loss of tongue and "pillage of her chastity" (2.3.44) soon to come. Indeed, that Lavinia's body becomes literary medium is obvious, given the play's obsessive fixation on limbs and maidenhead lost. Her body is adapted, quite literally, in keeping with Ovid's story. What's more, however, is that her body is adapted in ways that both line up with and surpass that of Philomela's; not only does she lose her tongue and her chastity, but she loses her hands, too, as Philomela before her did not. If to adapt entails mutation with a drive toward survival, then this matching and outmatching of Ovid's story meets that definition by being shot through with multiple and conflicting survivals. The loss of her hands becomes the radical adaptational moment, replicating and re-embodiment but with marked difference that Chiron and Demetrius

hope will protect them from the deathly end their Ovidian counterpart suffers. The pair, by Aaron's instruction, ensure that they will live on, then, but ensure also that Lavinia will live on in an act of intended cruelty. As they jeer at her: "And 'twere my cause I should go hang myself / If thou hadst hands to help thee knit the cord" (2.4.9-10). Adaptation-abetted survival as victory and loss are both at play here, reminding us of the complex bodily stakes inherent to adaptational processes. To read this corporeal mutilation as literary allusion alone runs the risk of de-emphasizing the the adaptational, survivalist role of the body throughout the play's altered Ovid arc and all the implication that role holds for adaptation both in the play and without.

Lavinia, then, stands as a figure illustrating the way in which the characters enact literary adaptation in order to allow and/or force bodily survival. She stands also, however, as the embodied synthesis of that adaptational endgame with the act of revenge. Aaron adapts Ovid onto Lavinia not merely for adaptation's sake, nor even just for survival's sake. It is an act of bodily violence that serves a specifically vengeful end, indeed, even the survival it allows for itself a strand of vengeance. If there is one point on which all readers of *Titus Andronicus* are agreed, it is that it is a play centrally about revenge. Though its moments of black comedy have elicited argument about its appropriate genre categorization,<sup>6</sup> its compulsive fixation on revenge is a narrative reality that has inspired little debate. It is not the point of my intervention here to claim that revenge is an inessential or absent quality in *Titus Andronicus*. Rather, it is the play's specific philosophy of revenge that I would like to reconsider, pushing beyond blanket definitions in order to interrogate how its ethos is constructed throughout the text. As I have already suggested, that construction is orchestrated largely in part by the figure I am identifying as the play's theorist and adapter of revenge, Aaron. In what follows, I consider the literal and symbolic presences of revenge in the text in order to demonstrate how each is threaded through

with Aaron's machinations, machinations that efface themselves and remain largely unseen until Aaron takes credit for them toward play's end. Each vengeful occurrence is threaded through, then, by Aaron's willful absence, an absence that only further establishes the craft and aim of his adaptational art.

There is a surface level at which revenge is never more present in the text than when its personified embodiment appears in the final act. The scene in question sees Tamora made up like Revenge, accompanied by her sons Chiron and Demetrius, playing Rape and Murder respectively. The three appear to Titus as he sits in seclusion, hoping to prey upon his perceived madness. We here see articulations of revenge verbalized and revenge named explicitly: "I am Revenge," Tamora tells Titus, "Sent from th'infernal kingdom / To ease the gnawing vulture of thy mind / By working wreakful vengeance on thy foes" (5.2.30-32). To turn to this moment as an explication of the play's characterization of revenge, however, is a fraught attempt given the meaninglessness that shapes Tamora's language here. Jonathan Bate stresses the tautology of Tamora's asserted "wreakful vengeance" when he notes that 'wreakful' means 'vengeful',<sup>7</sup> thereby showing that what Revenge here promises is vengeful vengeance. The tautology, however, extends beyond the two-word phrase to envelop the full sentence: Tamora presents herself as Revenge, ready to enact vengeful vengeance. In other words, Tamora presents herself as revenge, ready to enact revenging revenge. Revenge's syntactical hollowness is further reified some lines later, this time by Chiron (Rape) and Demetrius (Murder) as well, who assert, quite hollowly, that they are in service of vague revenge as well. Chiron urges Titus, "Show me a villain that hath done a rape, / And I am sent to be revenged on him" (5.2.94-95), and Demetrius asks that he point to a murderer so he may "deal with him" (5.2.93). Again, we see revenge blankly presented as nothing beyond its anticipation of a more specific definition. Tamora's



embodiment of Revenge works to undermine the concept by illustrating the difficulty of reading revenge as a stable concept that means clearly or absolutely. Capital-R revenge as Tamora presents it is a series of questions, the possibility of its existence contingent on the performing body it comes into contact with. So woeful is Tamora's attempted personification, in fact, that it fails to even momentarily convince its audience of its authenticity, with Titus being no more fooled by the spectacle than the offstage audience that is privy to the plot from its inception. It is in fact only after Tamora-as-Revenge has left the stage that anything resembling actual vengeful action takes place, as Titus then kills Chiron and Demetrius and begins preparing their bodies for the feast at play's close. Revenge, then, is presented as phony tautology in need of decisive intervention, and it is only when Revenge is physically absent that any real vengeance is verbalized and put into motion. Revenge's overt presence effaces its own possibility, and it is in its absence and the absences that permeate its brief presence that the surer portrait of revenge is revealed.

Titus draws particular attention to one such absence when he notes that Revenge is identical to the empress Tamora with the exception that Revenge has no Aaron: "How like the empress and her sons you are! / Well are you fitted, had you but a Moor, / Could not all hell afford you such a devil" (5.2.84-86)? This mention of Aaron's lack is not particularly needed, as the scene directly previous showcased his current whereabouts through his memorable confession at the hands of Lucius. Titus's observation functions, however, to let Aaron loom all the more heavily over this performance of revenge, a presence already ensured noticeable by the fact that he has just given his own performance of it, successful where Tamora, Chiron, and Demetrius's is botched. That the two scenes speak back to one another is made clear in this devilish imagery Titus uses to describe the absent Aaron, words consciously echoing the last that

Aaron himself spoke: “If there be devils, would I were a devil, / ...So I might have company in hell / But to torment you with my bitter tongue” (5.1.147-150). Aaron, responding here to Lucius, who has just deemed him a “devil” (5.1.145), displays both his tendency to willfully inhabit the slurs aimed at him and his investment in a breed of villainy that seeks enduring pain as its prize (“everlasting fire” [5.1.148]). As I will show, the traits synthesized in these four lines characterize also the specific manifestation of revenge that has propelled the whole play forward. Titus, by mentioning Aaron to Tamora in terms that echo this very quality of his character, forces consideration of Aaron’s role in the failed spectacle of Revenge defined before him. His role is to have no role at all, and noticeably so – the absence of the play’s subtlest but most effective revenger makes Tamora’s failure here all the more visible. Revenge is named and embodied onstage only to reveal the hopelessness of such a form for it, and it is only that which evades this personified presence that demonstrates revenge’s truer shape.

This shape is articulated and performed by Aaron most explicitly in his confession scene, situated as it is just before Tamora’s revenge show. Aaron, as one of Shakespeare’s very few Moorish characters, has excited and frustrated reader-spectators in equal measure. Criticism regarding Aaron has focused largely on the racial dynamics he brings to the text and the larger early modern dramatic canon,<sup>8</sup> a dialogue necessitated by the self-conscious problematics of the character. His unrepentant villainy has led to a host of attacks on the racism inherent to his construction, best summed up by Ania Loomba’s assertion that Aaron is “a textbook illustration for early modern stereotypes of blackness” (Loomba 75). He is often read alongside and in contrast to Othello, imagined as something of an unrefined origin for the character, a demonization of blackness that comes to be redemptively worked through in Shakespeare’s later work. Though the love Aaron is shown to have for his child has been commonly read as a

humanizing flicker for the character, the general consensus is that his undignified and punishing end renders the redemptive power of this turn moot.<sup>9</sup> I want to be clear that my own reading makes no attempt to redeem this critically established stereotyping of the character, and nor does it aim to redeem the horror of his narrative actions. Rather, I urge the necessity of considering the impact this racialized villainy has for the play's construction of revenge, a construction that I contend is of Aaron's own making. To read Aaron as the play's central theorist of revenge is to open up questions about the offenses that have inspired his own vengeance, offenses that have gone largely uninterrogated. Indeed, Aaron's motives have proven enigmatic to readers of the play, who tend to read him as a villain delighting in villainy for its own sake. As Eldred Jones has argued, "His whole life is devoted to the execution of vengeance the cause of which is never clear" (Jones 178), and even those who, like Ayanna Thompson, have considered revenge's relationship to race in the play, have determined that "Aaron is extraneous to the revenge tragedy plot of *Titus Andronicus* – he is neither a revenger nor directly involved in exacting revenge" (Thompson 326). I diverge from these dismissals of Aaron's role in the play's articulation of revenge by definitively positing him as essential to the revenge plot and in fact a central revenger for whom race-based grievances are his primary claim to vengeance. Ultimately, Aaron acts as an agent of adaptation for whom adaptation and revenge are concurrent, overlapping endeavors. Aaron adapts in order to revenge, and by so doing creates the climate of revenge all the other characters must themselves adapt and adapt to. Aaron's adaptational revenge takes bodies as its medium, bodies that experience, catalyze, and prolong states of sorrow. This process of creating embodied sorrow draws implicit focus to the space and surface of Aaron's own body, the outsider perceptions of which act as revenge's origin and emulative model in *Titus Andronicus*.

To adapt to ensure the survival of sorrow, as Aaron does and as others attempt to do in reaction, is to embark on an adaptational endeavor for which the only solace is death.

Though Aaron is typically imagined as a character with no discernible motive, attempts to locate his intentionality always look to his introductory soliloquy (2.1.1-25). Emily Bartels writes, “Aaron’s motives...are as slippery and obscure as are his chances of realizing a change in status...In his opening soliloquy, he entertains hyperbolic illusions of gaining power” (Bartels 445). The soliloquy’s imagery of ascension has lent critics one means of comprehending the actions on his part that follow. He anticipates Tamora’s rise to political power (“Now climbeth Tamora Olympus’ top” [2.1.1]) and imagines himself rising with her even as he inadvertently acknowledges the impossibility of his ever managing to do so. As Bartels and Ania Loomba both note, he cannot help but to imagine himself in subjugated terms beneath her: “I will be bright, and shine in pearl and gold, / To wait upon this new made empress” (2.1.19-20), a prophesized marginalization that he quickly catches in the following line when he pauses to ask, “To wait, said I” (2.1.21)? A desire to rise to power, then, and resentment at the unlikelihood of such a rise is understood to offer a loose insight into the *why* of Aaron’s actions.<sup>10</sup> I do not disagree with either of these points, but insist that such a reading of his opening lines can find enrichment when considered alongside his (already partially discussed) confession at play’s end. This scene sees his opening soliloquy’s imagery of ascension re-emerge, this time on the physical stage. Aaron goes from an articulation of his desire for ascension to its literal achievement, a culmination that supports readings of his opening soliloquy as motive-revealing even as it unsettles them.

If it is indeed ascension that Aaron yearns for, he sees it literally if not metaphorically achieved in Act Five’s opening scene. Confessing before Lucius and his army of Goths, he is

made to climb in order to reach the noose he is to be hanged on, in Elizabethan execution style. The command that sets the stage for this literal climbing, “Get me a ladder” (5.1.53), is most commonly assigned to Lucius, though the line is spoken by Aaron in the first quarto and is occasionally performed and printed as such.<sup>11</sup> Whether or not the line is attributed to Aaron, the triumph of the words spoken as he rises aloft lends his physical height something of the reign he speaks desirously of in his verbal introduction. That the source of this compelled climb is ambiguous and potentially at Aaron’s own request only strengthens the sense of paradoxical victory that Aaron postures here. Though Julie Taymor’s 1999 film *Titus* gives the ladder line to Lucius, the filmic illustration of Aaron’s climb exudes unambiguous triumph and links itself to the film’s spoken introduction of Aaron’s character, taken as it is with the play’s same interest in “Olympus’ top” (2.1.1). The potentiality of reading an arc that begins and then finds culmination in these two sequences is visually realized by Taymor’s directorial eye. The film takes its cue from the play-text and leaves Aaron a silent, lurking presence through the beginning until his opening lines approximately forty minutes in, in which his soliloquy becomes an aside addressed to we the viewers. The sequence opens with Aaron speaking his lines in voiceover as Tamora ascends palace stairs, before cutting to Aaron, situated on a palace balcony as he looks out over the city. That Aaron’s description of a rising Tamora is intended to implicate his own desired position and ambition is conveyed in the composition of these opening shots, both medium close ups with the subject sitting at the center-right of the frame. Of course, the compositional similarity here only heightens the differential gulf between the two, with Aaron’s turned back and outstretched arm positioning him as yearning spectator rather than in-tandem accomplice. Aaron gazes from on high, but with none of the associated power his words depict, advanced physically atop the palace but not “above pale envy’s threatening reach” (2.1.4).<sup>12</sup>

The sequence, by way of its negative paralleling of Aaron to Tamora and its emphasis on Aaron's race- and status-placed resentment, brings to flesh the reveals implicit to the play-text's soliloquy. It also, however, expounds upon the visual and thematic link it shares with Aaron's confession in Act Five. As in the play-text, a physical climb is central, presented now in visual terms that have seen significant development since Aaron's intro. We see Aaron at the top of the scaffold bearing a noose, the camera positioned far enough beneath him that the clear blue sky above makes up the bulk of his backdrop. Where height was only hollowly experienced and presented before, here we see a staging of ascension in which its physical articulation matches the empowered height it traditionally symbolizes. The extreme low angle of is present for the duration of Aaron's speech, and we the out-of-text audience look up at him as his in-text audience of Lucius and his Goths must. Aaron's climb speaks back to the words and imagery of his opening sequence, power achieved in triumphant full, and he now appears as a fixture in the sky rather than a yearning onlooker. As his confession progresses, the larger and more central he looms in the frame, until the only remaining sign of his physical context is a fragment of the noose that is to act as his death, hanging over his head like a crown. The prophesized fantasy of his opening soliloquy, then, is realized in transfigured terms and independent of Tamora's reach. Taymor's Aaron, who moves finally to place the noose around his own neck with a bloodied, victorious smile, might not speak the "get me a ladder" (5.1.53) command but he also does not need to, the *mise en scène* speaking it for him. Aaron stands high above his dual audiences as if by his own doing, sitting at Olympus' top (2.1.1) like Tamora before him on a journey now uniquely his own.

The identification of an arc between Aaron's presence in Act 2, Scene 1 and Act 5, Scene 1 does nothing so simple as unambiguously give Aaron a motive. Nor does it offer anything like

a clean victory.<sup>13</sup> As a closer look at the actual speech of Act 5's opening scene will show, the victory is a fraught one, run through with the ambiguities and boundary collapses that permeate the rest of the text. What this arc *does* reveal to us is Aaron's role as architect of revenge for the play, and the accompanying cost of what victory must look like within the vengeful cycle he has constructed. That Aaron declares his confessed deeds "witness of [his] worth" (5.1.103) demonstrates his comprehension of revenge as connected to victory and his ascension here. By his own understanding, his revenge is what has rendered him worthy of the reigning spot he has acquired for himself, and he is sure to remind Lucius and the spectating audiences that he is to be thanked for all of the play's woes: "And what not done, that thou hast cause to rue, / Wherein I had no stroke of mischief in it" (5.1.109-110)? He exceeds the necessitated bounds of his confession, continuing on even after he has detailed his crimes against the Andronici, painting a portrait of the vengeful philosophy that drives him. He apologizes only for the villainies left unachieved, admitting that there may in fact not be any of those given his daily schedule of murder and ravishing (5.1.125-129). Murder and rape, however, are not the true endgame of his breed of revenge, and are depicted instead as a means to foster a more lasting and cyclical sorrow upon the people he ensnares. The anecdote that marks his confession's climax, inciting Lucius to demand that he be brought back down to ground, both mirrors his orchestrated mutilation of Lavinia and encapsulates the larger desire that fuels all his careful plots:

Oft have I digged up dead men from their graves  
And set them upright at their dear friends' door,  
Even when their sorrows almost was forgot;  
And on their skins, as on the bark of trees,  
Have with my knife carved in Roman letters,

‘Let not your sorrow die though I am dead.’ (5.1.135-140)

Carolyn Sale makes much of this textual moment, reading it as indicative of the ways in which Aaron reacts to the literary fallout of Roman imperialism. Sale considers how literary allusion (Aeneas in particular) and Aaron’s act of writing upon bodies serves to illustrate the vengeful and ‘barbarous’ aesthetic of both Aaron’s character and the play at large. Sale writes, “The play’s allusions to, and engagement with, the myth of Dido and Aeneas suggests that the centrality of this myth lies in the suppression of all associations of letters and their origins with Africa and Africans. Aaron’s violence, which includes carving ‘Roman letters’ (5.1.139) into dead men, is revenge for this suppression” (Sale 26). I follow Sale in reading Aaron as a revenger who uses bodies as his central medium, and in reading the cause of this vengeance in the racist violences charged against him as a Moor in Rome. I diverge by drawing focus to his emphasis on embodied sorrow, and in the way this specifically sorrowful revenge lends itself to adaptational processes in order that it may thrive and ultimately self-destruct. Aaron acts for my purposes as more than mere revenger; he is in fact the play-text’s constructor of the contours and endgames of revenge. By setting revenge’s stage firstly through Lavinia and finally by way of his retrospective confession, Aaron acts as an adapting revenger who strives to ensure the survival of embodied sorrow.

As the above extended quotation reveals, Aaron is invested in the remembrance of sorrow, a word and concept that he deploys two times in just four lines (5.1.137; 5.1.140). That he imagines sorrow as an embodied process is made explicit through the literal carving of the word onto the body intended to inflict it. The body becomes both the sorrowful object and that which enforces sorrow on those who look upon it. Aaron consistently depicts reaction to the witnessing of sorrow-mutilated bodies in embodied terms themselves, emphasizing not just the



emotional affect they inspire but the bodily manipulations these affects create. As per Aaron's own remembered example, the sight of Titus's newly dismembered body in Act 3 catalyzed uncontrollable laughter in him, the reactionary outburst of Aaron's body resembling Titus's own (who, we will remember, also famously laughs "Ha, ha, ha" [3.1.265] at this very moment in the play-text). Aaron describes how his heart nearly breaks with the force of his laughter (5.1.113) as he beholds the sight of Titus, handless and before the dismembered heads of his two sons: "I...Beheld his tears and laughed so heartily / That both mine eyes were rainy like to his" (5.1.114-117).<sup>14</sup> Embodied sorrow and the embodied reaction it coerces is key for Aaron's vengeful action. Aaron will not react to white sorrow appropriately, and this refusal is itself a vengeance. This vengeance finds its plot-essential amplification in his insistence that others involuntarily react as he can or will not, in appropriate ways that hurt, a reality gleefully acknowledged when he continues to admit how he "Set fire on barns and haystacks in the night / And bid the owners quench them with their tears" (5.1.133-134). Compelled scenes of sorrow, made manifest and cyclically proliferated by bodies mutilated and bodies that uncontrollably weep, are Aaron's aim and purchase. Aaron's revenge lies in this ability to force sorrow onto bodies while he may voluntarily choose his own reactions. That he performs this confession in a position above his onlookers is perhaps the ultimate concretization of this body-influencing power: Aaron revels in his ability to make bodies perform actions as his dual audiences are forced to look up at him. The command "get me a ladder" (5.1.51), attributed to Aaron in Q1 in what many imagine to be an error, may very well be his line, in keeping with the tone and commanding power he holds throughout the entirety of the scene.

In its linking of sorrow and embodiment, Aaron's revenge posits sorrow as an entity as capable of death as the perished body its letter is inscribed upon. The collapse of life and death

that Aaron makes manifest on his dug-up corpses offers a thesis of revenge that is gruesomely unique to his hand and yet reminiscent of the form that vengeance arcs can take in the larger revenge tragedy genre. As Bowers notes of revenge tragedy convention, “‘Revenge tragedy’ customarily (but by no means necessarily) portrays the ghosts of the murdered urging revenge” (Bowers 64). To be sure, plays such as *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Hamlet*, and *The Duchess of Malfi* render spectral figures a common staple of revenge plays. Of course, there are no ghosts in *Titus Andronicus*, but I argue that Aaron’s corpses and bodies serve a similar, if inversely perverted, function. Like the ghosts that litter revenge tragedies, it is closure that Aaron denies. Where death and burial can act as bringers of a peace that rests on the bliss of forgetting, ghosts and above-ground corpses demand a remembrance that ensures the dead are not sanitized by being forgotten. These ghosts offer their respective plays what Carla Freccero might call a queer spectrality, wherein allowing one’s self to be haunted opens up an ethics that takes both past and future into consideration.<sup>15</sup> It goes without saying that Aaron’s own forced spectrality is utterly without an ethic, and is in fact not technically a spectrality at all, and yet his aim stems from the same place as a haunting ghost’s: to demand remembrance and a posthumous life that incites action, refusing the clean end of a burial. Aaron’s corpses are not ghosts, their fleshiness foregrounded by carved mutilation and their subjectivity no longer their own. Unlike, say, Hamlet’s ghost, these bodies have no lines but the ones forced literally onto their skin, able only to speak and incite the sorrow inscribed onto their long-dead persons. This is the survival that interests Aaron, a survival bereft of voice that can “utter” only the malignant words he scripts for and on them. These sorrow-inscribed corpses act like the ghost in their ability to incite action but unlike the ghost in their inability to incite anything willfully from within themselves at all. In

speaking, creating, and surviving sorrow, these un-spectral corpses facilitate an anti-ethnic in which embodied woe is the privileged, and indeed only, outcome.

Though Aaron does, I think, understand himself as a revenger, he is in some respects an unconscious one. As I have discussed, the enigmatic cause of his vengeance is revealed largely through the way he cites racist idioms and makes willful effort to form himself to their suspicions and violences. The black dog, a black soul, a devil – Aaron’s revenge is in making these fears about his external person manifest. Indeed, we could say that Aaron’s revenge lies in the way in which he performs and horrifically adapts the narratives already ascribed to him. The performative willfulness of this is rendered clearly throughout, perhaps most significantly in his assertion that “Aaron will have his soul black like his face” (3.1.204). Aaron depicts this moral blackness as a state of being that is strategically adaptational, a deliberate surpassal of the role he has been assigned regardless. Every act of villainy he commits is in service of this cause, and in this sense all his crimes may be understood as revenge against these simple, looming realities. And yet the play-text goes further, lending him cause even when he is not present onstage to be aware of it. This is true of another oft-quoted moment of his confession: “I have done a thousand dreadful things / As willingly as one would kill a fly” (5.1.141-142). This image of the murdered fly has been read as an easy means of contrasting Aaron to Titus, as a result of a scene in Act Three<sup>16</sup> wherein Marcus kills a fly and Titus protests with the empathetic question: “How if that fly had a father and a mother” (3.2.61)? Because Titus here shows he is not in fact a willing killer of flies, it becomes possible to read Aaron’s remark as indicative of his unparalleled villainy. Where Aaron may do a thousand dreadful things Titus cannot even kill the fly that Aaron dismisses as expendable to all. This reading is complicated, however, by the exchange that follows, in which Marcus is quick to defend his action by assuring Titus that it was “a black,

ill-favoured fly, / Like to the empress' Moor" (3.2.67-68). Titus apologizes for his criticism in light of this development, taking it upon himself to take up the knife and add a few stab wounds even in its death (3.2.70-75). He continues by remarking, "Yet I think we are not brought so low / But that between us we can kill a fly / That comes in likeness of a coal-black Moor" (3.2.77-79). The thoughtlessly killed fly that Aaron imagines in Act Five has thus already been depicted onstage, its slaughter and continued stabbing justified through the addition of adjectives speaking specifically to its color, coal-black. Though Aaron was not present for this exchange and most likely does not intend it as anything more than a throwaway comparison, Act Three's scene imbues it with a racial dynamic that implicitly establishes Aaron as a character working toward revenge. It is not merely that Aaron enacts atrocities with the unrepentant ease with which one kills a fly. It is that he is capable of this very ease by the implicit justification the example provides for him. Because one can kill a coal-black fly without empathy, Aaron can do the same to anyone. Unbeknownst to him, even this mention of a murdered fly reveals the textual landscape that has constructed him as perpetual revenger, a landscape that he both validates and combats through his extra-faithful adaptation of the pathways it allows his Othered body.

This unconscious but textually validated cause for vengeance emerges also just before the attack of Lavinia in Act Two. Of Lavinia's centrality to Aaron's doings, Sale writes, "The play wrests from the figure of the handless and tongueless Lavinia Aaron's obscene masterpiece" (Sale 45). That Aaron's masterpiece is an act of revenge that doubles as an explicit act of adaptation brings me to the central crux of my argument, focused as it is on Aaron's orchestrating role as a revenger for whom adaptation is key to the survival of sorrow he privileges so highly. Lavinia has long been imagined an innocent pawn in a revenge scheme centered solely on her father. To be sure, I do not intend to suggest that the text offers anything

like justification for Lavinia's horrific violation. It does, however, render Lavinia a participant in the racist ideologies I have argued catalyze Aaron's every act of revenge. Just before Lavinia's attack, the play sees her and Bassianus stumble upon Aaron and Tamora trysting in the woods. Both characters go on to chastise Tamora for her adultery, resorting, like the other Roman characters of the play, to racist rhetoric that renders Aaron's skin as much a cause for criticism as Tamora's infidelity. Indeed, Bassianus links her blemished virtue specifically to Aaron's skin color: "Believe my Queen, your swart Cimmerian / Doth make your honor of his body's hue, / Spotted, detested, and abominable" (2.2.72-74). Lavinia continues this thread of attack, urging an exit so that Tamora may "joy her raven-coloured love" (2.2.83). Before this exit can come to pass, Chiron and Demetrius enter the scene and begin to carry out Aaron's plot. Aaron speaks explicitly of vengeance before Lavinia and Bassianus take the stage here, speaking specifically of "vengeance in [his] heart" and "blood and revenge...hammering in [his] head" (2.2.38-39), but the racism of the just-discussed exchange that immediately follows grants the words retrospective added meaning. Despite claims that Aaron has no real place in the play's revenge plot, then, the exchanges leading up to Lavinia's violation position him as personal revenger, both unconsciously and otherwise. I point out this vengeful dynamic in order to stake the claim that Aaron is very much invested in the play's specific revenge plot, not merely the abstracted theorist of revenge for the text but also its agent of influential praxis. Lavinia is, in fact, the perfected product of his revengeful philosophy, so accomplished that it is she who brings sorrow, cyclical and self-destructive, to the text more than anything else. Through Lavinia, Aaron adapts a myriad of source-texts as his means of exacting a revenge made textually personal by the linguistic abuse she participates in. This horrific Ovidian adaptation shows Aaron adapting toward a survival that doesn't signify in any traditional sense. He adapts in order to revenge, a

process for which survival is essential but only as it extends to to sorrow. Similar to how his dug-up corpses explicitly call for the persisting livelihood of sorrow by recalling the lives of its bodily hosts once possessed, Lavinia becomes for Aaron's purposes mere matter upon which sorrow and illusory survival are inscribed and enacted. In what follows, I move to consider Lavinia as the play-text's central representation of the stakes and potentialities of adapting to revenge, looking both at her existence as adapted product and, ultimately, as adapting agent who adapts both to the revenge she bodily inhabits and in order that she may enact new revenges and new sorrows.

The word "sorrow" appears in *Titus Andronicus* some 29 times, its emphasis falling most obviously during Aaron's confession, in which it appears twice in just four lines (5.1.137; 5.1.140). This marks the only instance in which the word is deployed twice in the same sentence, such repetition palpable at no other point. Though the word's presence is most amplified by way of this textual instance of repetition, it is not the first appearance of the word in the play. "Sorrow" is first uttered toward the play's middle, at the very end of Act Two, by Marcus as he looks upon the newly violated Lavinia for the first time:

Shall I speak for thee? Shall I say 'tis so?

O that I knew thy heart, and knew the beast,

That I might rail at him to ease my mind!

*Sorrow* concealed, like an oven stopped,

Doth burn the heart to cinders where it is. (emphasis mine, 2.3.33-37)

Marcus's longer speech at the moment has been the source of much critical dialogue, its poetic excess and blazoning of Lavinia's dismembered body read as troublingly inappropriate, even a second violation. I would like to suggest that the reason for this linguistic violence is revealed in

the excerpt quoted above, and the ties its attention to sorrow draws between the reveal of Lavinia's form and Aaron's Act Five confession. That Marcus feels compelled to speak where Lavinia cannot likens her to the quiet corpses capable only of signifying the words etched onto them by Aaron's hand; capable indeed only of signifying sorrow. Just as Aaron's voice becomes the voice of the corpses he digs up, so here does Marcus attempt to speak for what he perceives as the mute object before him. And if Aaron's definition of revenge imagines it as enforced and undying sorrow, then it is Marcus who here defines sorrow for we the audience: that which cannot be contained or concealed and that necessitates reactionary action, lest the heart that bears it be burnt to cinders (2.3.37). Marcus's inability to immediately revenge himself upon Lavinia's inaccessible attackers propels the poetic violence of his speech here, a displacement he implicitly acknowledges through his transition from speaking for Lavinia to wishing he could "rail at" (2.3.35) the offender responsible. Inaction is an impossibility in the moment of this sorrowful reveal, and so his sorrow takes the form of this blazon, its critically established violence rendering it a poor substitute for the violence he wants but cannot commit. Sorrow, then, enters the play through Lavinia's mutilated body but finds its definition in the mouth of Marcus, who attempts simultaneously to speak for her and unleash the violent words he yearns to turn on her assailant. This speech becomes a second violation precisely because it is an act of displaced revenge, a revenge uncontainable because of the effusive properties of the sorrow that offsets it. Aaron's corpse-penned command that the sorrow of onlookers never die is present in less explicit but still more impactful terms here, the sorrowful sight of Lavinia begetting a sorrow that takes confused, violent form even in its attempts to bring comfort. Sorrow, when confronted and experienced, begets further sorrow, which need be outletted lest it burn the host from the inside out.

Though I posit Lavinia as a perfected extension of the same vengeful logic that drives Aaron to defile and display corpses, I do not intend to suggest that Lavinia has only all the agency of a dead body. On the contrary, I think her success as a subject-object of revenge is in her very ability to exert the motion necessary to enact revenges of her own, proliferating the cycles of sorrow that comprise Aaron's theory of revenge, as well as the theory of revenge for the play-text at large. Stripped of her voice and hands, Lavinia illustrates the ways in which bodies may adapt, physically and literarily all at once. As I have argued, Lavinia's role as the play's ideal embodiment of revenge is enabled by the sorrow she brings to the text (literally, it is the sight of her that catalyzes the first use of the word, which goes on to be liberally repeated throughout from there). Lavinia's adaptational capacity has been acknowledged by critics. Caroline Lamb, using the word adaptation to refer exclusively to the way in which Lavinia adapts her body to its newly dismembered condition, considers how Shakespeare endows the play's disabled figures with newfound adapting ability. Lamb writes, "In *Titus Andronicus*, physical trauma does not represent or engender an immutably disabled condition, but rather becomes the condition by which bodies strategically adjust and adapt, allowing ability to flourish" (Lamb 42). Where Lavinia is concerned, Lamb is especially invested in the moment where Lavinia overcomes her lack of tongue and hand to communicate the names of her assailants. Lynn Enterline notes how Lavinia bodily recalls Philomela's ending when Marcus first encounters her post-ravishment with the opening line, "Who is this – my niece, who flies away so fast" (2.3.11)? Enterline writes, "Marcus' demand...chillingly recalls Philomela's final flight, as a bird, to escape Tereus' angry break" (Enterline 8). The analyses of Lamb and Enterline bring me to a different textual moment that synthesizes these considerations of bodily adaptability and literary adaptability. The scene at Act Four's beginning that sees the



*Metamorphoses* book brought onstage reveals Lavinia as a bodily-literary adapter who pushes these conflated adaptational processes toward the project of revenge. The flight of Act Two that heightens her arc-long likeness to Philomela is itself re-adapted the moment Lavinia catches sight of the physical book that has been symbolically written onto the space of her body. This time, Lavinia becomes the pursuer rather than the pursued, exceeding Philomela once more as she speeds after Young Lucius and forces him to emulate her as he tries to outrun her, fearful and confused. Once stopped, Young Lucius describes her frightful pursuit, rendered in the terms of a soaring chase: “[Lavinia] made me down to throw my books and *fly*” (emphasis mine, 4.1.25). Adapting Philomela’s flight through the frenzied adaptation of her own remaining body parts, Lavinia succeeds in drawing attention to Ovid’s book through this flying chase, rushing toward it once Young Lucius drops it so that she may flip the pages to the Philomela story and, through this embodied quotation, communicate what happened to her for the first time. This action sets the play’s culminating act of revenge in motion, as Titus and Lavinia kill, dismember, and bake the outed Chiron and Demetrius into a pie to be consumed by their mother Tamora. Tamora’s cannibalism of her sons recalls precisely what becomes of Tereus and his own son, the Philomela story coming full circle. Lavinia thus adapts to the revenge carved onto her person by adjusting and adapting first to her new body, and, even more significantly, by deploying this adaptability in the service of a collaborative completion of the tale she has been forced to star in.<sup>17</sup>

Lavinia, in adapting her body in order to adaptationally orchestrate the Ovid-determined end of her attackers, becomes a vengeful collaborate of Aaron’s adaptational project as he conceived it in Act Two. Titus, in carrying out Lavinia’s willed and unwilled end, crafts a performance of revenge that comes in the form of a moment of alternative adaptation. Titus, feeding Chiron and Demetrius to Tamora in a highly performative scene complete with its own

audience, acts as the agent of completion who allows Lavinia the retributive justice that Philomela finds in the *Metamorphoses*. This adaptational closure makes its successful way into Tamora's body and falls in line with the rendering of revenge that Aaron has created and perfected – again, we see it here focused on the body and the sorrow that comes to be heaped upon and/or within it. In itself, Titus's cannibalistic meal is a perfect adaptation to and adaptation of the revenge Aaron sets into motion. However, Titus is not content to merely adapt to the text and sorrow forced upon him. Titus brings a new textual adaptation to the play in his final scene, and by so doing enacts an adaptational process that seeks to undo the particular vengeful horror of Aaron's own. Titus adapts Aaron's revenge, only to effectively un-adapt it through an adaptational method that, if not uniquely his own, is at least not Aaron's. This new adaptational un-adapting happens when Titus turns to Saturninus just before he reveals the truth of the food they are dining on. The exchange has been of high interest to critics invested in allusion and emulation in the play, for in it Titus cites the tale of Virginius as justification for his soon-to-come slaying of Lavinia. So too is it of interest to me, with the adaptational break from the *Metamorphoses* it offers and the ensuing release from sorrow its performance allows. Titus asks of Saturninus, “Was it well done of rash Virginius / To slay his daughter with his own right hand, / Because she was enforced, stained, and deflowered” (5.3.36-38)? Saturninus replies that it was well done, and clarifies further when Titus presses him for his rationale: “Because the girl should not survive her shame, / And by her presence still renew his sorrows” (5.3.40-41). Titus takes this answer at face value, deeming it “A pattern, precedent, and lively warrant / For me, most wretched, to perform the like” (5.3.43-44). And perform the like he does: “Die, die, Lavinia, and thy shame with thee, / And why thy shame thy father's sorrow die” (5.3.45-46). I quote this exchange at length because it draws many of the same links between adaptation, sorrow, and

survival that I have argued form the play's central thesis on revenge. Sorrow arises here once more, linked again to adaptational performance. Though Saturninus does not know it, his interpretation of the source-text Titus cites puts multiple survivals in his hands (so to speak). Lavinia's survival is the most obvious and most pressing, but he too speaks to the play's larger Aaron-penned investment in imagining sorrow as an entity capable of survival or decay. Another survival here at stake is the survival of the particular brand of revenge the play has thus far maintained and escalated. Saturninus, by determining that Virginius was right to kill his raped daughter, endorses a fictional murder that leads to a real one before him, a murder that takes Lavinia's survival, sorrow's survival, and even revenge's survival with it.

Titus's adapted 'undoing' of Aaron's vengeful adaptational praxis takes destructive form in more than one way. On the one hand, by here citing Virginius and by so doing moving away from Ovid, Titus seeks to un-adapt the adaptational revenge project that Aaron has shaped. With Lavinia's death, he claims, comes sorrow's end and so too the end of Ovid's role in the play alike. Aaron's adapted narrative gets upended by another, one that seeks to bring death to sorrow and the bodies that enforce and are marked by it. In introducing this new text to be adapted, then, Titus introduces also a new praxis of adaptational revenge, one that hinges paradoxically on the death of both adaptation and vengeance. The text he cites (or, rather, the way in which he cites it), heightens this effect of an adaptational act that works to undo the adaptation Aaron has presented. As critics have noted, Titus either incorrectly cites the Virginius story he adapts here or purposefully chooses a lesser-known version of it. Gillian Murray Kendall argues that it is a choice he makes willingly, writing, "He is forced to make do with what fictions he can in order to complete his plot and match word to deed, present action to written precedent, language to reality" (Kendall 313). Though it is impossible to know whether this was indeed a willful

decision or a mere flub on Titus's part, it suggests regardless something about the destructive and temporally destabilizing capacity of adaptation to *undo*. Saturninus offers no argument to Titus's recitation of the tale, and nor does anyone else listening. It is as if the 'correct' or at least more widely known version of the story is wholly erased by Titus's altered announcement of it. We see, then, a disruption in the conventional cause-effect structure adaptational acts are imagined to have. There is, after all, linear shape to how Aaron's adaptation occurs throughout: it begins with a source-text that, from there, gets chronologically worked upon, adaptational reworkings acting as resulting offshoots that necessarily come after the set origin. What Titus here enacts is an adaptational move that erases past and future, effacing the terms of the original story and seeking also to bring death to all those with a role to play in its current adaptation and future ones to come. Where Aaron's adaptation follows a temporal logic that seeks to extend life and the sorrow that comes with it, Titus's adaptation reacts in kind by seeking instead to undo not only life but the temporal coherence of adaptation itself. Source-texts, bodies, and the adaptational potential both carry are killed with Lavinia.

That is, at least, what Titus would like to think. The fact that Titus fails to cancel out sorrow and the adaptational future it opens up is conveyed immediately. Just after Lavinia's death, Titus declares, "I *am* as woeful as Virginius *was*" (emphasis mine, 5.3.49). Where Virginius' sorrow is here grammatically rendered as past and done through Titus's use of 'was,' Titus still speaks in the present, just as woeful as Virginius was even with his dead daughter before him. Lavinia's death has ultimately undone nothing, the adapted source-text stubbornly wreaking its own havoc on Titus despite his attempt to undo both it and the larger Ovidian web it is caught within. Even after Titus has gone on to ensure the death of himself, Tamora, and Saturninus, sorrow lives on in forms still tied to Aaron's orchestrating hand. In fact, both Lucius

and Marcus use the word in the play's final exchanges, even deploying the same variation of it: Marcus refers to Titus' house as "sorrowful" (5.3.141) and so too does Lucius make reference to the "sorrowful" (5.3.153) tears that he drops onto Titus' dead body. That the hand of Aaron is still borne in the uses of the word here is indicated in a couple of different ways. Firstly, Marcus' description of Titus' house as full of sorrow is linked directly to Aaron's presence within it: "Go into old Titus' sorrowful house / And hither hale that misbelieving Moor" (5.3.141-142). More subtly, both of the appearances of the word come after attention to Aaron's baby has been made a focal point of the onstage proceedings, with Marcus pointing and urging attention to his presence: "Behold the child" (5.3.119).<sup>18</sup> The child in question, which Aaron has effectively given up his own life for, has ties to the thread of sorrow running throughout the play both by being of Aaron's own creation and by having been himself already imagined as an explicit bringer of sorrow: the nurse who delivered him counters Aaron's claim that his child is a "joyful issue" (4.2.67) by declaring him instead "A joyless, dismal, black and *sorrowful* issue" (emphasis mine, 4.2.68). The ongoing life of Aaron's child and the sorrow he is imagined contain joins the repetition of the word itself as well as the denied burials at the play's close to point to the still-open wounds that allow Aaron's vengeful praxis to continue to survive. As Bate writes of the end, "The wheel has come full circle...The troubles of the Andronici began with the question of proper burial rites and the sacrifice of Alarbus; the play ends with the living burial of Aaron and the refusal of proper burial rites for Tamora" (Bate 15). Sorrow lives to see another day, its cyclical returns foreshadowed anew, reactionary adaptational vengeance still on the horizon even as the text comes to and end.

I want to close by considering how this adaptational praxis of revenge I have outlined comes to be deployed when the play is itself adapted for stage and film. In doing so, I return to

Titus's own anti-adaptational deployment of revenge, hell-bent as it is on a destruction of originary source-text and future adaptation alike. Doomed to failure though Titus's adaptational endeavor may be, I see in its destructive temporality a move to erase that comes to be similarly attempted in several of the play-text's most remarkable adaptations. It is in the anti-adaptation that *Titus Andronicus* and its titular character inspire that I locate queerness in its adaptational history. While there may, to be sure, be an argument to be made about Aaron and Lavinia as bodies queer in the most generalized sense of the term, adaptational and non-normative as both are, I find the more generative queerness in the destructive impulse that Titus brings to the text and to the performance-adaptation lineage that has followed it. If Lee Edelman's normative futurity is based on the hope of a future that marks a paradisaal return to a perfected and fully present past, then the impulse to destroy originary source-text that Titus and some of *Titus Andronicus*'s adapters deploy offers instead an anti-futurity, a queer refusal to allow the source-text at hand a future or, indeed, even its own past.

As my introduction to this chapter suggested, *Titus Andronicus* is a play-text that may not itself have survived as a memorable entity in the Shakespearean canon if not for the successful adaptations it has inspired. Given the play-text's investment in adaptation to act as a vengeful medium through which sorrow is bitterly kept alive, one must wonder what exactly survives when *Titus Andronicus* is adapted, and indeed what, if anything, can be said to be revenged. I stake the claim that the manner in which the play has constructed Aaron as the central orchestrator of revenge's form has catalyzed a stage history in which adaptations render their representations of his character as the major site in which revenge against the play-text itself is enacted. That the play seems to invite adaptational revenging in this way is visible in the alterations it seems to necessitate when adapted. Edward Ravenscroft's Restoration adaptation,

published in 1687 and subtitled *The Rape of Lavinia*, is a testament to this imagined reality.

Ravenscroft's prologue to his published adaptation puts the authorship of the play into question, while boasting about its new improvement under Ravenscroft's hand:

I have been told by some anciently conversant with the Stage that it was not Originally his [Shakespeare's], but brought by a private Author to be Acted, and he only gave some Master-touches to one or two of the Principal Parts of Characters; this I am apt to believe, because 'tis the most incorrect and indigested piece in all his Works; It seems rather a heap of Rubbish than a Structure... Compare the Old Play with this, you'll finde that none in all that Authors Works ever receiv'd greater Alterations or Additions, the Language not only refin'd, but many scenes entirely New: Besides most of the principal characters heighten'd, and the Plot much encreas'd. (Ravenscroft sig. A2)

The resentment for Shakespeare's (or not-Shakespeare's) play here expressed postures the adaptation that follows as revenge for the play's perceived low literary merit. And yet, as critics have pointed out,<sup>19</sup> Ravenscroft in fact changed very little of the original play, its only major departure concerning the role of Aaron. In what follows, I will consider three major adaptations (or what survives of them) in order to show that Shakespeare's play is most efficiently revenged against when Aaron's arc is altered in a manner that both reviles the racist depiction Shakespeare subjects him to and when that vengeful re-depiction nullifies the theory and cycle of revenge he brings to the play-text. Ultimately, revenging the racism of Aaron's originary representation revenges the play at large by interrupting the pattern of his own creation that promises in-text future adaptation. Each of these new Aarons offer racialized redemptions that stifle the play-text's compulsion to adapt. The revenge that these adaptations enact against Shakespeare's play

comes in their implicit suggestion that the play-text not be adapted again. The closures these retellings provide create adaptational apocalypses in which adapting to revenge equates to adapting to un-adapt, killing the everlasting sorrow Aaron's presence in the original play promises and, by extension, the capacity of the play to survive in unaltered form.

The stage has seen two major adaptations that take Aaron's arc in the Shakespearean source-text as a flaw in need of redemptive fixing: Ravenscroft's already-mentioned Restoration adaptation and Ira Aldridge's nineteenth century one. I bring these two plays together not merely for their shared interest in redeeming the racial problematics of Aaron's construction in the original, but also for the way in which both find a means of eradicating the open sorrow of the play's original ending. In the Ravenscroft, Jonathan Bate has drawn attention to the way in which the changes Ravenscroft is so proud of emerge almost exclusively around Aaron's character: Aaron gets speaking lines sooner in the play, makes earlier and more frequent reference to the fact of his race and the marginalization that comes with it, loses his son to Tamora's knife, and dies onstage, burnt alive on a rack.<sup>20</sup> As Bate notes, Aaron's set-up in Ravenscroft's adaptation renders him closer to King Lear's Edmund in his similar mission to revenge himself upon explicitly oppressive powers. The death of Aaron's son also elicits audience sympathy, and the extent of his love for his child is illustrated (rather strangely) by way of Aaron's cannibalism of his dead body: "[Tamora] has outdone me in my own Art - / Out-done me in Murder - Kill'd her own child / Give it me - I'll eat it" (5.1, Ravenscroft 55). Of this adaptational divergence, Bate writes, "...Cannibalism appears for a moment to be something other than mere barbarism...In contrast to both Titus and Tamora, who stab their own children, Aaron has a truly consuming love for his baby" (Bate 53). Of more interest to me than these alterations in and of themselves are the textual omissions that these alterations open up, namely



the omission of the play's idea of sorrow as a concept tied intimately to revenge. To be sure, that both Aaron and his son die explicitly and onstage does a great deal to lessen the cyclical sorrow-provoked revenges that the original's play's end foreshadows and invites. Though Titus still hopes aloud that Lavinia's death will come with the death of his sorrow, and Lucius still makes reference to the "sorrowful drops" (5.1, Ravenscroft 56) of his tears, the repetitious effect of this word is blunted by the fact that it does not make its original appearance in Marcus' approaching speech to Lavinia post-ravishment, nor in Aaron's big confession. Aaron's confession, moved here to the very end of the play, retains only the language specific to the events that have taken place onstage, talking still of his Andronici-proximate orchestrations and even of the sexually aroused reaction they incite in Tamora (5.1, Ravenscroft 55), but he loses his more theoretical meditation on the digging up of bodies and the sorrow he inscribes upon them. The loss of this imagery and the revenge-specific ideas of reiterated sorrow it creates rids of the play-text of Aaron's cohering role as Revenge's constructor for the play even as it works to make his villainy less overt, and thus less racially harmful. Sorrow's presence in the play as both a spoken word and theorized concept is partially retained, but it loses the thematic patterning that characterizes vengeful praxis in the Shakespeare play and that robs the source-text's ending of genuine closure. Ravenscroft, by revenging his adapted text against the racial biases of the Shakespearean original, does so at the cost of losing the endings open compulsion to anticipate future adaptations both in-text and out of it. The loss of the in-text cyclical return of Shakespeare's ending threatens the loss of a more metatextual desire to continue the adaptational work the play anticipates but does not itself act out. Indeed, given Ravenscroft's assertion of the perfected improvement of his version, it stands to reason that he considered future alteration and adaptation unnecessary. The play ends with Aaron altogether a more sensitively depicted

character, but he loses his elevated status as the consummate revenger who sets cycles of vengeance into motion that spin forward, everlasting, into the future. Ravenscroft's adaptation does not necessarily let sorrow die, but nor does it allow it the complex life that so shapes *Titus Andronicus*' form and its adaptability.

Perhaps fortunately, Ravenscroft's altered adaptation did little to actually stave off future reconsiderations of Shakespeare's play. Unfortunately, Ira Aldridge's nineteenth century adaptation does not survive in any textual form as complete or accessible as Ravenscroft's published work, but we do have enough information to assess its similar standing as an adaptation invested in racialized redemption at the price of losing the original play's musings on sorrow and cyclical adaptational return. Ira Aldridge's *Titus Andronicus* is notable for the fact that its black lead actor commissioned the retelling, in an effort to capture the success of his portrayal of Othello.<sup>21</sup> Aldridge made Aaron the play's central character and the hero of the text, radicalizing and furthering Ravenscroft's attempt to give the Moor a more significant and sympathetic part. A reviewer in *Notes and Queries* recounts the performance, writing, "In the present century an attempt was made to bring *Titus Andronicus* to the stage... The revolting scenes of necessity were omitted, and the catastrophe changed, so that, excepting the title... it had very little resemblance to the original... The representation of Aaron was good but the adaptation was ineffectual" (J.M. 423). As noted here, the adaptation's infidelity to its source-text was in some ways involuntary, as moral standards of the nineteenth century rendered the staging of even an offstage rape impossible. Where one reviewer found this change debilitating to the overall quality of the play-text, another felt it marked an improvement over Shakespeare's: "The deflowerment of Lavinia, cutting out her tongue, chopping off her hands, and the numerous decapitations and gross language which appear in the original are totally omitted and a play not

only presentable but actually attractive is the result” (qtd. by Marshall, Stock 172). Though the text is lost to us, its catalogued omission of Lavinia’s Ovidian arc paired with its “noble and lofty” (qtd. by Marshall, Stock 172) Aaron suggests that this adaptation loses the central concepts of sorrow’s link to revenge and adaptation like Ravenscroft’s before it. A letter from the commissioned dramatist C.A. Somerset to Aldridge reveals that Aaron does die onstage, not burnt alive as in Ravenscroft and Vos but by poison: “Aaron will grapple the Emperor by the throat and strangle him, but not before he himself has been poisoned at the banquet table” (qtd. by Andrews 92). Again we see an elevation of Aaron’s character notable for its redemption of the stereotype of the original but that denies Aaron the adaptational theory of revenge he brings into the play-text. A heroic death for Aaron and the loss of the play’s central image of adaptationally embodied sorrow strips the play-text of the in-text and metatextual invitations for future revenges, adaptations, and sorrows that I have argued are so essential to the play’s investment in the dangers and powers of adaptational processes. Tragic though it is that Aldridge’s revolutionary adaptation is only available to us in the recounted fragments here collected, it is perhaps fitting that a reworking of the text uninterested in the play’s foremost representation of adaptational survival did not itself survive.

I read the continuation of this anti-adaptational tradition in Julie Taymor’s 1999 film *Titus*, a film I have already spent some analytic time with and which I would like to return to now. Taymor’s adaptation diverges from that of Ravenscroft and Aldridge’s by remaining largely faithful to the play-text; there are no additions to the play’s language nor any major character or structural shifts. Aaron’s opening and ending remain loyal to the ones Shakespeare scripted for him, and we even see Aaron’s partial, live burial at film’s end, the ultimate fall from his ascended triumph of Act 5, Scene 1. And yet, for all this faithfulness, I read the film’s ending

as a refusal of the adaptational cycle the play-text sets newly in motion at its end. In the spirit of the play, to be sure, *Titus* acknowledges this originary cyclical return by staging a paralleled return of its own, bringing the setting of its ending back to the setting of its beginning. The film, opening with a boy (who comes to take the part of Young Lucius) being presented to an empty coliseum, returns to this setting for its close, Young Lucius again in tow along with the play's other several dead and still-living bodies. This return to the beginning, however, is met with a break leading into an ending that has proven polarizing for critics.<sup>22</sup> The ending sees Young Lucius extricating Aaron's son from the cage he is being held within before walking away from the coliseum into a brightly colored and artificially lit sunset. The sentimentality of this hopeful privileging of the play's children has inspired scorn. Of this changed ending, Richard Burt writes, "In...making it a generational issue, Taymor re-inscribes a fascist aesthetic and thus subverts her own critique of fascism and her redemption of the play as a work of art rather than trash" (Burt 305). Similarly, David McCandless criticizes what he sees as a disappointingly conventional Hollywood Happy Ending, writing, "By grafting a happy ending onto a brutal revenge movie, Taymor lets her spectators have it both ways, sanctioning both retaliation against and redemption of the enemy" (McCandless 511). Though I take both of these points, Lee Edelman's polemical assertion of "fuck the child" (Edelman 29) in mind,<sup>23</sup> I nonetheless see in this futurity that Young Lucius and Young Aaron walk into a textual self-destruction that denies the adaptational cycle implied by the play's ending and by so doing denies the impetus by which the play is adapted at all. Though the refusal of this vengeful cycle does promote a saccharine redemption that feels egregiously out of place from the rest of the film, I'd like to suggest that this very egregiousness acts itself as a revenge. The film's ending, descending into a filmic convention so at odds with the rest of the movie as to be laughable, calls into question the value

of adapting *Titus Andronicus* in the first place, the in-text refusal to do so making one wonder why an out-of-text one was needed. The hopeful, sunlit future the characters walk into renders the world they leave behind better left forgotten, its only value to be found in its capacity to be escaped. Like Ravenscroft and Aldridge, who deny the adaptational open futurity of the play's end, Taymor's film closes off a future for the play-text by opening up instead an alternative world only illusorily hopeful, the journey toward it going ultimately nowhere, its slow three-minute walk stagnating finally into a freeze frame that memorializes the seeming world ahead. The move to redemptively adapt *Titus Andronicus* seems to continuously create endings that stifle the play's own theory of adaptational work and thus open up questions about the value of adapting the Shakespeare play at all. Looking to Taymor's ending and the revengeful refusal of the text's adaptational future, it is tempting to wonder if the originary play-text, like the bodies it so gruesomely defiles, should not survive its shame.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Deborah Warner's 1987 production, when went on to be re-performed in 1988, before going on European tour, didn't cut a single line of the play.

<sup>2</sup> Ira Alridge's nineteenth century production saw Aaron as the central character and hero of the text. I will be discussing this particular adaptation in more depth toward the end of this chapter.

<sup>3</sup> Season five, episode four: "Scott Tenorman Must Die" (2001).

<sup>4</sup> On allusion and *Titus Andronicus*, see William W Weber's "'Worse than Philomel': Violence, Revenge, and Meta-Allusion in *Titus Andronicus*," Danielle St. Hilaire's "Allusion and Sacrifice in *Titus Andronicus*," J.K. Barret's "Chained Allusions, Patterned Futures, and the Dangers of Interpretation in *Titus Andronicus*," and Grace Starry West's "Going by the Book: Classical Allusions in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*."

<sup>5</sup> For a more fleshed-out definition of how I deploy adaptation as a term and a concept, see Chapter One's Introduction: "Shakespeare, Survival, and Adaptation Embodied," beginning on page one.

<sup>6</sup> For a standout example, see Douglas Parker's "Shakespeare's Use of Comic Conventions in *Titus Andronicus*" (1987).

<sup>7</sup> See his notes on this line in his 1995 Arden edition of the text: "**wreakful** - vengeful (rhetorical reinforcement of the noun, though strictly tautologous)" (Bate 254).

<sup>8</sup> See: Jean Feerick's "Botanical Shakespeares: The Racial Logic of Plant Life in *Titus Andronicus*" (2009), Carolyn Sale's "Black Aeneas: Race, English Literary History, and the 'Barbarous' Poetics of *Titus Andronicus*" (2011), R. Fleissner's "Othello as 'Faire' and Aaron's

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child as ‘base’” (2003), and Ania Loomba’s *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism* (2002), among others.

<sup>9</sup> See: Emily Bartels “‘Incorporate in Rome’: Titus Andronicus and the Consequence of Conquest” (2008).

<sup>10</sup> I emphasize the ‘loose’ here – even critics who argue for reading his opening soliloquy as insight belabor the point that he remains largely enigmatic in his motivations.

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Bate references the Santa Cruz production that gave the line to Aaron, but argues that “the point seemed dramatically forced” (Bate 246).

<sup>12</sup> This reality is only further established when he turns to the face the audience he addresses before moving horizontally down the hallway, the image of a world below his feet giving way to the bar-like pillars of his interior surroundings. Where Tamora’s ascent brings her closer to the camera and thus larger and more central to the frame, Aaron only diminishes as he gets further into his soliloquy. A break in this symmetrical pattern emerges when Aaron catches himself fantasizing about “wait[ing] upon” (2.1.20) Tamora. Taymor’s film gives great weight to the question that immediately follows it: “To wait, said I” (2.1.21)? Aaron here turns his face back toward the camera, the still shot of his descent down the hallway interrupted to zoom into a close up of his face, skeptical and derisive as he asks his question.

<sup>13</sup> Indeed, physically ascended though he may be here, the confession he performs effectively kills any and all hopes of political power.

<sup>14</sup> Even the recounted tale of this sorrow is proven to inspire bodily reaction, for Aaron feels compelled to speak also of Tamora’s swooning response: “And when I told the empress of this sport, / She sounded almost at my pleasing tale / And for my tidings gave me twenty kisses” (5.1.118-120).

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<sup>15</sup> See: *Queer/Early/Modern.*, As Freccero explains, “[the] willingness to be haunted is an ethical relation to the world, motivated by a concern not only for the past but also for the future, for those who live in the borderlands without a home” (Freccero 75).

<sup>16</sup> This scene is a later addition – Jonathan Bate notes that its inclusion was likely inspired by Aaron’s reference to killing a fly in 5.1.

<sup>17</sup> It is fitting that a moment so concerned with adaptational processes both literary and bodily would prove ripe for interpretation when the larger *Titus Andronicus* play is itself adapted. I want to return briefly to Taymor’s film *Titus* to illustrate how this adaptational sequence has been most popularly adapted, considering how the dress and presentation of Lavinia conveys both the sense of Philomela’s winged flight and a visual nod to past adapted Lavinias. Here, we see Lavinia in pursuit of Young Lucius. Of particular interest to me is Lavinia’s dress and the positioning of her arms as she chases the boy. The bright scarlet of her dress is made all the bolder by the contrast it bears to all the other dresses she wears post-ravishment, all of which feature neutral greys, beiges, and whites. Also striking is the length of the sleeves here, which fall far past the wrists. Though the film makes the decision to grant Lavinia prosthetic hands after she loses her natural ones, this is the only scene in which they are rendered invisible by her clothing and the lengthened positioning of her arms. Lavinia’s other outfits after Act Two are all neutral in color, and also emphasize the visibility of her prosthetic hands. Although the white dress she dons for her final scene has sleeves of a similar length and her arms held straight so the material may drape down past the wrist, the lighting of her entrance in it is careful to show the prosthetics through the material. The visual similarity of Lavinia’s stylistic presentation through most of the film renders the scarlet, long-sleeved dress of the scene in which she chases Lucius markedly distinct. Her arms, stretched to the side and behind her as



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she runs, give her silhouette the wing-like effect of a bird in flight, aided by the handless reach of her arms as well as the outdoor setting, unusual in a film comprised in large part by indoor scenes.<sup>17</sup> The effect of a Lavinia in flight bears the visual trace of Philomela's metamorphosis, picking up on the potentiality that the play-text offers to read the flying verbal imagery as such. Further, I want to suggest that Lavinia's sleeves bring another visual trace to bear onscreen as well, the red drape of them reminiscent of Lavinia's immediate post-ravishment stylization in Peter Brooks' seminal theatrical adaptation, which famously saw Lavinia (played by Vivien Leigh) entering the stage with blood-red ribbons hanging from her arms and open mouth. The manner in which Lavinia's wounds were here depicted was massively influential. As Bate states, "...It shaped the predominant theatrical approach to the play for thirty years" (Bate 59). The similarly stylized red drape of Taymor's Lavinia here thus simultaneously recalls Philomela's winged transformation and a long stage history of Lavinias preceding the one currently onscreen, the moment playing with both the explicit Ovidian adaptation that the play-text provides and a more meta-adaptational history. This complex adaptational fabric literally draped on Lavinia foregrounds the processes of adaptation here at work. Her flight both demonstrates her ability to adapt to the new communicative difficulties of her body and adapts the ending of the text that has inscribed this very difficulty upon her. Adapting Philomela, past Lavinias, and her own body all at once, Taymor's Lavinia sets the stage (or screen) for the piece of adaptational closure she is about to inspire when she flips the book's pages to the Philomela story and proceeds to name her Tereus. Taymor's film visually demonstrates the reality that the play-text points to: Lavinia's body is the tale's central subject-object of adaptation as well as of revenge, and, in herself adjusting to this new bodily reality, Lavinia reveals herself an adapter and revenger in her own right.

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<sup>18</sup> It is worth noting that the fate of Aaron's child is ambiguous, and that there are productions that represent the baby dead in a casket, including Julie Taymor's theatrical production which preceded her film (in which the baby survives). I share Jonathan Bate's assumption, however, that Lucius has kept his promise to Aaron and let the child live.

<sup>19</sup> See: John W. Velz's "Topoi in Edward Ravenscroft's *Indictment of Titus Andronicus*" (1985).

<sup>20</sup> This is itself an adaptational nod to a Dutch adaptation by Jan Vos written between 1637 and 1638. Though we have no access to the play, it is believed to have started a stage tradition of heightening Aaron's role in the play.

<sup>21</sup> For an in-depth exploration of Ira Aldridge's stage history, including his wildly successful performance of *Othello*, see Hazel Waters' "Ira Aldridge and the Battlefield of Race" (2007), and Herbert Marshall's *Ira Aldridge, the Negro Tragedian* (1958).

<sup>22</sup> By "polarizing" I mean it has been met largely with scathing critique, but the ending has found a fan in Thomas Page Anderson, who reads in it a simultaneous nod to and subversion of Julie Taymor's theatrical and financial past with Disney and *The Lion King*.

<sup>23</sup> In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Edelman writes, "Fuck the social order and the Child in whose names we're collectively terrorized...fuck the whole network of Symbolic relations and the future that serves as its prop" (Edelman 29). For more discussion on Lee Edelman, see Chapter Two: "'Let Me Forget Myself': Names and the King's Many Bodies in Christopher Marlowe's and Derek Jarman's *Edward II*."

## CHAPTER IV

### ‘YOU MADE ME LOVE YOU’: CONSENT AND TECHNOLOGIES OF HAUNTING IN *ROMEO AND JULIET*

William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* is a play-text as widely known as it is inescapable. Dympha Callaghan has gone so far as to call it “the preeminent document of love in the West” (Callaghan 1), and Carla Freccero notes that its “citations...infiltrate our radios and iPods, not to mention our love affairs, whether gay or straight” (Freccero 302). That Shakespeare’s play-text has had so formative an impact on how we conceptualize and experience love renders it an integral object of study for those of us concerned with the adaptational afterlives of the early modern period. What’s more, that it holds interpolative sway over the romantic lives of all, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, opens up one question essential to the thesis of this project in particular: How have vulnerably queer bodies come to adapt and adapt *to* the specter of *Romeo and Juliet*, both in explicit stagings of the play and in day-to-day lived life? This question is for my purposes centrally about consent, for if *Romeo and Juliet* really is inescapable, its narrative hold a shaping force in the most intimate arenas of our lives, how might willful adaptations of its scenes and philosophies act as a means of consenting to that domineering pull? In answering this question, I look to the liminal space in which Romeos and Juliets both adapted and ‘originary’ necessarily thrive, announced as they are as simultaneously dead and living as early as the play’s prologue (and perhaps even as early as its title, for the character names have become in many ways synonymous with impassioned death). This spectral, undead quality of the titular characters becomes explicitly foregrounded in contemporary filmic

reimaginings, with new media technologies especially equipped to present Romeos and Juliets that haunt their onlookers like ghosts.

The effect of this haunting is twofold. On the one hand, it adds a challengingly sinister dimension to a tale all too often idealized and sanitized in its reiterations.<sup>1</sup> On the other, it risks a disembodiment that renders these onscreen figures as radically removed from our material lives. It becomes possible to see Romeo and Juliet as ghostly figures tragic but ultimately harmless, their otherworldly missteps removed from the embodied experiences of we as spectators. This dissonance between spectral confrontation and spectral disconnect is made materially productive when the body is foregrounded, its manipulations and mobilities reminiscent of our own. The potentiality of Romeos and Juliets that haunt can be realized only when that haunting influences reflective effect on how their bodies, spectral but decidedly *not* immaterial, bear upon our own. It is a potentiality I see realized in one contemporary *Romeo and Juliet* adaptation in particular: Alan Brown's 2011 film *Private Romeo*, which takes an all-male military academy as its setting and sees two cadets fall in love while reading the play in-class. The film uses streaming technologies and its cinematic medium to attend to the play's life-death liminality while attending also to the ways in which bodies on- and off-screen are shown to matter upon contact with Shakespeare's play. Multiply adaptational in that it is an adaptation of the play-text depicting characters undergoing an adaptation of the play-text, *Private Romeo* poses questions about how queer subjects may orient themselves within the all-consuming language and ideologies of Shakespeare's play. This adaptational reorientation takes the form of a fraught consent, as each of the onscreen characters are slotted into roles and speeches they seem incapable of evading. It is this exploration of what consent under Shakespeare looks like that ensures attention to the embodied reality of these adapting characters is not forgotten, for, as

Elaine Scarry reminds us, consent necessarily takes the body as its medium: “The matter of consent is primarily living matter...The body is the agent and expression of consent” (Scarry 887).<sup>2</sup> In adapting *Romeo and Juliet* by way of a narrative that is *about* queer subjects adapting *Romeo and Juliet*, *Private Romeo* facilitates reflection on the role the play-text plays in all our lives, discouraging the impulse to read its *Romeo and Juliet* as distantly immaterial by grounding its adaptational processing in the body’s oscillating ability and inability to consent. *Private Romeo*’s *Romeo and Juliet* may be ghosts, but they are ghosts made of living matter that reveal the stakes of what it means to live and love through Shakespeare.

*Romeo and Juliet*’s compulsory presence in popular media and the literary canon has engendered sprawling critical discussion of the play and the adaptational history that both precedes and follows it.<sup>3</sup> Considerations of the play-text’s queer capacity have been scant in number, but explored in nuanced depth by early-modern-grounded queer theorists Johnathan Goldberg and Carla Freccero. Goldberg, tracing names and words beginning with the letter R in the text, argues that the gender of love-objects throughout elide easy categorization and thus open the play out to a host of differing sexual-romantic figurations. Goldberg writes, “...Anyone – man or woman – might be in the place marked by the open Rs of *Romeo and Juliet*” (Goldberg 232). Indeed, the gender changeability Goldberg identifies has tremendous influence on queering projects of the play, evidenced in part by *Private Romeo*’s own all-male cast and, even more recently, by works such as the 2016 short film *Still A Rose*, which adapts Act 2, Scene 2’s famous balcony scene with a varied set of couplings, mixed-race and same-gender alike.<sup>4</sup> Carla Freccero expands upon this reading of queerness in the play-text to consider how its romanticization of the Lacanian death drive has an even more de-normativizing effect, upending futurity as Lee Edelman has figured it.<sup>5</sup> My own interpretation is indebted to both of these

thinkers, but I want to consider the embodied benefits and consequences of this inherent queer desire. I seek also to locate a critically neglected thread of queerness in the play-text, palpable in the prologue and in its failure to do what it so self-consciously sets out to do. My reading of the play thus finds traction in these pre-existing queer readings but moves beyond them to posit the prologue as an incipient moment of queerness potentialized and to examine the stakes of this queer portability. That *Romeo and Juliet* is adaptationally open to we non-normals seems clear, but how and why does that matter to us? By looking to the adaptational byproducts of this very question, I point to a hitherto unexplored dimension of queerness in the originary text while pointing also to the urgency of considering the role of the body in this ever-adapting queerness.

I want to begin where the play does, with its 14-line prologue.<sup>6</sup> It is, next to *Henry V*, the most well-known and widely-discussed of Shakespeare's prologues, owing in part to its unusual brevity and its form as a sonnet.<sup>7</sup> There are two major features of the prologue that I would like to point out: firstly, the boundary-collapsing ghostliness it grants the play-text's title characters and, secondly, its self-reflexive failure to lay down the very narrative law it seeks to enforce. Douglas Bruster and Robert Weimann discuss modern-day perceptions of the Elizabethan prologue as archaic, artificial, redundant, and obsequious (Bruster, Weimann 2). *Romeo and Juliet*'s prologue certainly fits these criticisms, artificial as it is in its self-awareness of the events about to unfold, redundant in its summary of the narrative to follow, and obsequious in its pleading desire to keep the attention of its audience. Of critical interest to Bruster and Weimann, however, is the ability of the prologue to overcome these seeming failings in order to pave gateways between the representational world of the play and the 'real' world exterior to it. They write:

More valuable here than an apology for these features... is the simple point that it is precisely because dramatic prologues were asked to – among other things – introduce and request that they took up a position before and apparently ‘outside’ the world of the play. From this crucial position, prologues were able to function as interactive, liminal, boundary-breaking entities that negotiated charged thresholds between and among, variously, playwrights, actors, characters, audiences, playworlds, and the world outside the playhouse. (Bruster, Weimann 2)

This liminal quality of the prologue is present for *Romeo and Juliet* at the level of content as well as on the usual metatextual level that Bruster and Weimann outline. Though critics such as Marvin Carlson have argued that all theatrical productions can be said to be composed of ghosts,<sup>8</sup> *Romeo and Juliet* renders its own ghostliness textually explicit through the radical liminality of its opening lines and language of death-mingled life they contain. The prologue, informing its reader-listeners that the “death-marked” (Prologue.9) Romeo and Juliet will “with their deaths bury their parents’ strife” (Prologue.8), essentially kills the pair before they have entered the text, unsticking the temporal placement of their deaths from the ending to a beginning that precedes even their embodied realization. Bryan Reynolds and Jenna Segal note the spectralizing effect of this narrative move, writing, “Knowledge of the conclusion of Romeo and Juliet haunts the onstage representation of the main characters, leading the audience to anticipate the announced outcome...In effect, the characters are both dead and not dead, beings without being that have come alive through a performance that culminates with their lives lost” (Reynolds, Segal 63). Not a great deal has been critically made of this ghostliness,<sup>9</sup> its queer potentiality in fact diminished by Jonathan Goldberg’s assertion that the characters “do not

sustain a life-in-death” (Goldberg 191) by play’s close.<sup>10</sup> I want to build upon these considerations and non-considerations of the prologue’s life-death liminal breakage by arguing that there is something queer about this spectral imagining, allowing Romeo and Juliet to haunt not just the representational world of the play (as Reynolds/Segal note) but also we as spectators and consumers. The affective significance of what it means to be haunted has been established by Avery Gordon and Carla Freccero,<sup>11</sup> the latter of whom has framed this significance in terms specifically queer: “[The] willingness to be haunted is an ethical relation to the world, motivated by a concern not only for the past but for the future, for those who live on in the borderlands without a home” (Freccero 75).<sup>12</sup> The threshold-disrupting properties of the prologue form at large, then, give way to a boundary collapse for *Romeo and Juliet* that has reverberating consequences throughout the play, figuring their lives as deaths and their deaths as life. In radically blurring these lines, Romeo and Juliet effectively haunt us, forcing engaged consideration of what their lives and deaths mean for our own.

This ghostliness is, in fact, a symptom of the other major function of the prologue I aim to draw attention to: its inability to enact the closure it sets out to enact. Acting as summary, the prologue hopes to lay down narrative law, its assertions soon to be wholly realized by the performances to follow. The threads of fate and inevitability so many have traced throughout the play find their origin here,<sup>13</sup> textual trajectory concretized before it opens. The prologue, introducing Romeo and Juliet as characters dead yet alive and still-dying, imbues the ensuing action not just with tragic inevitability but in fact with the possibility that this inevitability may be flouted, even the death it so ardently promises framed in terms uncertain. That Romeo and Juliet will die and by so doing resolve the war between their families is, to be sure, explicitly laid out: “A pair of star-cross’d lovers take their life; / Whose misadventured piteous overthrows / Do



with their death bury their parents' strife" (Prologue.6-8). Joint death, its specific suicidal cause, and the harmonious resolution that comes of it are all here established, leaving little question about the fate set to befall the title characters. However, with this seeming certitude comes self-consciousness, an unease that closes the prologue and leads us into the play's opening scene: "...If you with patient ears attend, / What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend" (Prologue.13-14). Despite its claims about an ending certain, the prologue cannot help but to acknowledge its own lack, its innate insufficiency. Drawing attention to the very fissures that constitute it, the prologue realizes its inherent failure aloud, a collapse itself inevitable given that it exists only to be supplemented and overthrown by the more substantive text to follow. By closing on this note of incompleteness, this plea to the audience that they allow the two hours that follow to compensate for what it has failed to do, *Romeo and Juliet's* prologue capsizes its stated surety and throws into question the inevitability it promises. Romeo and Juliet must die, the prologue tells us, effectively killing them in the larger play's stead, but its language of mingled life-death spectrality and confessed doubt in its own machinations invite us to wonder: how intractable is that 'must'?

If gender instability and anti-futurity stand as features that point to the queerness structuring Shakespeare's play-text, then so too does this failing of the expository prologue. Facilitating modes of haunting and the possibility of textual changeability that skews away from its own dictated end, the prologue paves unique entryways into the textual play-space, entryways that enable queer bodies to enter, alter, and be shaped by *Romeo and Juliet* in new and ever-changing ways. It is this reality that brings me to a consideration of adaptations of the play, beginning with analysis of how its slippery prologue has been adapted. I am especially interested here in contemporary adaptations and the digital innovations they deploy to capture the

spectrality and instability of the play's opening lines. Speaking to the play's complicated adaptational history, Courtney Lehmann writes, "*Romeo and Juliet* and cinematic innovation have historically gone hand-in-hand" (Lehmann 93). In what follows I want to posit that this capacity to innovate around *Romeo and Juliet* has allowed for the expansion of the nebulosity of the prologue, picking at its insecurities and weak spots in order to present versions of the tale that undercut the seeming factuality it sets into motion. What's more, the digital technologies these adaptations present work also to heighten the spectral, near-otherworldly quality of the Romeos and Juliets caught somewhere between life and death. In this last observation I am indebted to the work of Jeffrey Sconce, who writes in *Haunted Media* of the perpetually spectral quality of televisual media. According to Sconce, "Sound and image without material substance, the electronically mediated worlds of telecommunications evoke the supernatural by creating virtual beings that appear to have no physical form" (Sconce 4). I assert that this non-material materiality captures through its boundary-collapsing properties the intermingled presence and absence found in the image of Freccero's ghost and, even more crucially, the ghosts of Romeo and Juliet as presented in Shakespeare's play-text. Spectrality and adaptational instability begin to demand something more than passive consumption on the part of the audience, necessitating that we remain vigilant in our engagements with the play-text and with our identifications and disidentifications with its death-marked characters.<sup>14</sup>

Baz Luhrmann's 1996 *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* is perhaps the most contemporarily well-known filmic adaptation of Shakespeare's play-text. Reviled and adored in equal part for what has been termed its "MTV aesthetic",<sup>15</sup> Luhrmann's film synthesizes and dissonates its Shakespearean language with youthful, music-video-esque visuals.<sup>16</sup> Recent criticism has argued for the film's worthiness within the Shakespearean filmic canon,<sup>17</sup> though

its reviews at the time of release largely panned it for its mangling of Shakespeare's play-text. Perhaps most memorably, Roger Ebert criticized the film's butchery by ranking it below what he frames as similarly absurd adaptational deviations:

I've seen Shakespeare done in drag. I've seen Richard III as a Nazi. I've seen "The Tempest" as science fiction and as a Greek travelogue. I've seen Prince Hal and Falstaff as homosexuals in Portland. I've seen "King Lear" as a samurai drama and "Macbeth" as a mafia story, and two different "Romeo and Juliets" about ethnic difficulties in Manhattan ("West Side Story" and "China Girl"), but I have never seen anything remotely approaching the mess that the new punk version of "Romeo & Juliet" makes of Shakespeare's tragedy. (Ebert)

I quote this sentiment at length because it speaks to the provocation the film exhibits, its 'punk'-ness and imagined youthful audience more galling (and, we might say, going off the framing here, more *queer*) than Shakespeare performed in drag or, God forbid, a gay *Henry IV*.<sup>18</sup> This radical deranking of *Romeo + Juliet* is perhaps surprising, given that its loyalty to the language and plot beats of Shakespeare's 'original' easily surpasses that of some of the other films Ebert alludes to here, which do away with the play-as-script entirely. It seems, then, that working within the confines of the play-text's explicit language can actually open up more room for differential, queer potentiality (presented here as "mess") than films that only loosely adapt the central conceits of the story. That Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* gives the effect of something more subversive of Shakespeare's play than films that disregard its language entirely reveals the adaptational possibility inherent *to* that language, capable of being performed and reframed in ways so ostentatious they no longer feel like Shakespeare at all. This is an idea that has natural stakes for the ways in which we engage *Romeo and Juliet*, suggesting that the closer we stick to

the in-text fissures it offers, the more radical our opportunities for transformation. Perhaps the most effective way to negotiate with *Romeo and Juliet*'s inescapable citabilities is to stick by its words, locating therein the messy absences that allow it to signify multiply.

Academic criticism since the film's release has been thorough, its dismissal at the hands of film critics resisted by Shakespearean scholars such as Crystal Downing, who insists that the film "captures subtleties of Shakespeare's script better than more mystified renditions of Romeo and Juliet's love" (Downing 126). There has been little sustained discussion, however, on the film's adaptation of the prologue, which is performed firstly by a newscaster and then via voiceover by a narrator. Opening the film with the Shakespearean language that will come to constitute its entirety, the adapted prologue here sets up the simultaneous fidelity and disloyalty to its source-text of the film at large, illustrating the transformative capacity of Shakespeare's words reiterated. I turn my attention now to this two-and-a-half minute opening in order to demonstrate how it adapts the prologue's spectrality and inherent insufficiency and, by so doing, presents the play-text's prologue as determinative of the events to follow and yet also unreliable in its assurances of what's to come. There is a definite sense in which the prologue sets the narrative events to follow in stone, or, indeed, on *film*. As Mary Lindroth notes, "Luhrmann's film calls attention to its status as film through such cinematic devices as the soundtrack, slow-motion, and jump cuts" (Lindroth 62). Never is this self-reflexivity more apparent than in the opening minutes, which move at breakneck speed through a series of shots establishing the beach-city setting, the cast of characters, and, most interestingly for our purposes, flashes of later scenes to come, including two that show Romeo at story's end about to discover Juliet's seeming corpse. These shots, identical to the ones that will be shown in contextual full come film's end, remind we viewers that the fact of our watching the movie's beginning necessarily means that it

has already been edited together, complete. Looking upon scenes still to come while the narrator makes auditory promises regarding the play's end, it becomes easy to take the prologue's word for it when it speaks of the end ahead. The end is already in place, archived on film that creeps its way into this beginning in order to be more fully recognized later. There is, then, a level at which the prologue succeeds in providing the exposition it exists to provide, its self-aware cinematic medium supplementing linguistic promise with visual proof. And, sure enough, sitting through to the end will reveal that Romeo and Juliet do in fact meet the deaths here spoken of, prophecy fulfilled.

This vision of a lawfully expository prologue that seals film's end in place is perhaps supported by the fact that the film omits the final two lines, which, you will remember, self-consciously invited reader-listeners to question the prologue's surety in Shakespeare's text: "...If you with patient ears attend, / What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend" (Prologue.13-14). And yet, the film cannot help but to adapt this self-confessed failing even as it tries to cover over it. That the prologue is performed, then immediately repeated, then flashed across the screen in text a *third* time reveals something of even this prologue's insufficiency. Its first iteration cannot stand on its own, it must be concretized by way of repetition, visual, auditory, and even textual. This compulsion to repeat does, on the one hand, further concretize the prologue's ability to inform the audience what is coming. Should any words, phrases, or lines have been 'missed' on the first announcement, they can be caught, processed, and weaved into expectation on the second or third repeat. On the other, the excessive compensation for the too-quick first performance draws attention to its brevity and to all that it, like the source-text's before it, misses in itself. An attempt to pin it down, almost as if to audience memory, in fact enhances its murky liminality through remediation that alters its temporal course each time: the

newscaster's utterance slow enough to follow but delivered without noticeable pause, the V.O. narration dragged out palpably with several-second pauses punctuating word pairs and one line to the next and, finally, the flashing text happens almost too quickly to follow, the lines flashing onscreen in their white text for just a fraction of a second each. In just a little over two minutes, then, the prologue, seemingly stable and law-making, is experienced three different ways, at three different speeds, through three different mediums. Its compulsory excess presents it as variable, conducive to being excised, sped up, or slowed down, the changeability of its form inviting skepticism toward the seeming intractability of its projected content. A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life, the film's prologue tells us again and again and again, but its very anxiety to materialize this as fact renders it openly transformable. It is maybe for this reason that Roger Ebert closes his damning review of the film with a musing on what it means to 'spoil' its ending: "No doubt I will receive mail from readers accusing me of giving away the story's ending...If you do not already know what happens to the star-crossed lovers, then you are not the audience this movie is aiming for. But, stay my pen! Perhaps you are" (Ebert).

The self-reflexive excess of the *Romeo + Juliet*'s prologue adds an additional layer of expository skepticism through the spectralizing capacity of its televisual medium. As Sconce reminds us, all digital media gives a distinct sense of the ghostly by presenting bodies that transcend material form. Luhrmann's film amplifies this idea in its metatextual opening seconds, which feature a static-screening television set that leads us to the newscaster's presentation of the first iteration of the prologue. The opening faraway shot of the television is compositionally overwhelmed by jet-black negative space. The camera slowly zooms in toward the set, allowing it to more centrally dominate the frame as our newscaster-chorus appears on the screen and reads the prologue. By the time she has finished, closing on line 12's "...Now the two hours' traffic of

our stage” (Prologue.12), the black backdrop has been cropped out entirely, camera zoom increasing in speed as we get closer and closer to the TV screen, as if we are passing through it. We then shift into an establishing shot of the city setting, static-distorted as though it too is still airing on the TV screen we can no longer see the boundaries of. The idea of the prologue as a liminal and boundary-breaking space is played with fairly explicitly here, as we must literally and cinematically ‘pass through’ the prologue as though it is a portal into the otherworld of the play-film. Indeed, the black void of its background and its centered entrance point is reminiscent of *The Twilight Zone*’s opening credits, overlaid as they are with the narration “You are about to enter another dimension” (*The Twilight Zone*). The effect of this televisually-mediated inter-dimensional travel, on the one hand, contributes to the prologue-centric skepticism the film facilitates. As Lindroth notes of the ending, which features a reverse zoom-out away from the television set, “The film ends with a self-reflexive device calling attention to the film as film and one that results in a final subversion of the newscaster’s authority and of the entire medium of TV” (Lindroth 66). More than that, however, is the way in which it doubly illuminates the distant immateriality of Romeo and Juliet’s living-dead bodies. They are digitally mediated not just via the screens through which we as audience members watch the film, but also through the meta-screen the film presents for us. The spectralizing effect of this twice-removed distance reminds us, as the play-text does, the degree to which Romeo and Juliet are *already* dead, the temporal instability of which invites us to wonder whether or not they need thus die again.

This question finds its payoff in the film’s staging of the famous joint-death scene, as it depicts Juliet beginning to regain consciousness well before Romeo actually dies. She begins visibly shifting in her sleep a solid two minutes before Romeo raises the vial of poison that will kill him to his lips, and an extreme close-up of her eyes fluttering open happens nearly 30

seconds before he's consumes the vial's contents. Juliet is conscious enough to reach her hand up to Romeo's face as he brings the vial up to his mouth, ultimately making skin-to-skin contact only after it's too late. These drawn-out moments, however, in which both characters share cognizant life at the moment where their deaths have been prophetically assured teases the audience into believing, if only for a minute (or, indeed, for 30 seconds), that Juliet will of course stop him and save them both. It becomes possible to imagine this Romeo and Juliet surviving the deaths that the prologue belabored so repetitively, a possibility that in fact acts as an extension of that very opening anxiety and the adaptability it unconsciously potentialized. Though Luhrmann's Romeo and Juliet *do* die despite this window of opportunity allowed them, the tension of the moment arises from the implicit expectation that the prologue might still be proven wrong. *Romeo + Juliet's* prologue does end up delivering on its promise, but comes dangerously close to failing to do so, its inherent fragility exposed once more.

The possibility of death flouted that Luhrmann's film poses is perhaps the reason why so many recent Young Adult books and films have seen it fit to cite or adapt *Romeo and Juliet* through supernatural romances in which one or both parties are literally dead, such as *Twilight: New Moon's* vampiric Edward and Bella, *Warm Bodies'* zombie love story between R and Julie, or *American Horror Story's* ghostly Tate and Violet. Greg M. Colón Semenza discusses such YA takes on the tale as "cute Shakespeare," a sanitization of the play-text that rids it of subversive potential.<sup>19</sup> Though I think there is something to be said about the dissident act of crossing *Romeo and Juliet* over with horror elements, "cute" or no, I would like to turn my attention to an adaptation proximate to this YA tradition but decidedly without its sanitization: the 2013 short film *Exiles*, directed by Tommy Bertelsen. The film, written and starred in by Troian Bellisario of ABC Family's *Pretty Little Liars* TV fame, was independently made and



funded by a Kickstarter campaign composed largely of *Pretty Little Liars*' teenaged fanbase. The film, pitched as posing the provocative question of what could be imagined if Romeo and Juliet's tragedy was that they lived rather than died, met and surpassed its budget goal of \$12,000. Initiated through the digital medium of the Internet, *Exiles* eventually found its release through there as well, and has been available to watch for free streaming online since its release on December 23 2013. It was published on its website, "romeoisbanished.com," which featured also the usual details such as an "about" page, an image gallery, "contact" links, etc.<sup>20</sup> I turn to *Exiles* because it exists within the reactionary uprising of YA-inflected Romeos and Juliets after Luhrmann's film, specifically to the ambiguities of its cinematic prologue and its brief, theoretical imagining of a Romeo and Juliet that do not die. The entirely web-mediated existence of *Exiles* expands upon the spectralizing television form that *Romeo + Juliet* utilized, a ghostly positioning that it explores not only via its digital form but also via the content of its originary website and the film itself. *Exiles*, I will show, renders its so-called surviving Romeo and Juliet as desperately ghostly, appropriating that pocket of opportunity in the play-text's prologue and Luhrmann's adaptation in order to present a telling of the tale that haunts.

Rather than adapting the text of the play directly, *Exiles* imagines what would have come *after* the play had Romeo and Juliet lived out their banishments. Because of its narrative temporal placement, the prologue does not get adapted into the short film, but the film offers its own version of it through the expository function of its "About" page. Like the play's prologue, the paratext there offered describes the events that it precedes. Unlike *Romeo and Juliet*'s prologue, this summarizing textual moment is only a brief sentence long (fittingly, for the film itself has little in the way of plot or even dialogue and is much more focused on introspection), promising "a brutal and atmospheric addendum to the greatest love story of all time" (Bellisario).

I have already discussed how *Romeo and Juliet*'s prologue is riddled with the life-death liminalities and self-conscious failings it on the surface seeks to expel. The presence of this expository nebulosity is adapted on the *Exiles* webpage, not only through the immediately ghostly quality of its web-based medium but through the particularity of its design *through* that medium.<sup>21</sup> Before even discussing the prologue-esque description itself, the image that serves as its background is worth being addressed. This image, of Troian Bellisario's Juliet, is an animated one that sees her staring at her viewer, wind blowing through her hair. The image is heavily blurred and she is only just barely recognizable. Most striking about this image is the way it renders its Juliet as ghostly and quietly haunting before the film has even begun: the heavy haze of the animation offers a Juliet that is simultaneously present and absent, recognizable and unrecognizable, human and not. The eeriness of her fuzzy, unblinking stare is haunting both in its poignant affect and in the living-dead quality its lack of focus evokes. If the spectrality of web mediums is caused in part by "creating virtual beings that appear to have no physical form" (Sconce 4), as Sconce has argued, then we see that here intensified through a virtual Juliet whose non-material materialization is made all the more noticeable by her nebulous filmic visage.

The specter that the text of *Romeo and Juliet* was under threat of unleashing through the unintended instabilities of its prologue is here foregrounded, presenting a Juliet who haunts rather than gets buried. The text over her face on the "About" page draws explicit attention to the traces that constitute and emanate from it when one hovers over it with their cursor. The descriptive statement "a brutal and atmospheric addendum to the greatest love story of all time" (Bellisario) becomes fragmented into the simpler, more provocative "a brutal love story" (Bellisario). That the cursor must remain suspended over the now-hidden text in order to keep it out of view means its trace remains even while it is no longer in sight. Similarly, moving the

cursor to re-reveal the concealed portion of the text ensures that the shorter version of it can't well be forgotten after it has been exposed. The two prologue-esque statements, both alike and different, haunt each other, and the descriptive sentence surrenders to the traces of marginal signification that erupt within it: deeming the short film a "brutal and atmospheric addendum to the greatest love story of all time" (Bellisario) inevitably implies the latent brutality of the *Romeo and Juliet* Shakespearean original. Rather than making moves to cover over that lingering implication, the *Exiles* "About" page puts it on full display, opening up alternative pathways of reading the piece of text that may carry over into the viewing of the film itself. Unlike Shakespeare's prologue, or even Luhrmann's, *Exiles* seemingly has no fear of allowing its ghostly traces to usurp its intended aim, as it itself explicitly offers one such constituting absence and, by so doing, encourages the excavation of others. The animated mutability of its web page treats the text it exists to present as itself non-static and thus open to exactly the kinds of interpretive interlocution that expository summaries may otherwise strive to stifle.

That the website thematizes traces, specters, and mutations is fitting given the way in which the short film itself opens up. The film begins with a blank screen followed by a sleeping Juliet, in the backseat of a car en route to her banishment. Opening on a living, breathing Juliet sets the immediate stage for mutable alteration the film and its accompanying web site encourage. Significant also to these opening shots, however, are the ways in which they evoke *death* alongside renewed life. The film's initiary moments feature nothing beyond a blank, black screen. Though this in itself is not an unusual way to open a film, the black stillness lingers for a discomforting twelve seconds, a peculiar length of time that only feels longer when one considers that the entire film is only about twenty minutes long. There are six seconds of complete silence (long enough that I started wondering if something was wrong with the video

stream on my first viewing), and then at the seven second mark the quiet sound of wind and car tires moving on a road crescendo until we get our first shot of something other than blackness twelve seconds in. I draw attention to these opening non-shots of the short film because they evoke the void of Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*'s beginning shot to different effect. Where the black backdrop and centered TV set allowed Luhrmann's beginning the sense of a portal being passed through, the opening of *Exiles* remains still, utterly visually absent even when the sound begins to kick in. By contrasting the auditory signs of movement (wind and wheels turning) with black blank stasis, *Exiles* presents a prologue-typical liminality that is as disorienting as it is representative of the thesis of the film writ large: the seeming forward movement that Romeo and Juliet's survivals allow them is undercut by the symbolic death they *cannot* flout even in the flouting of their literal tombs. It is not that the source-text's prologue potentializes full lives for Romeo and Juliet. It potentializes *liminal* life, spectral life, and death's absence cannot be cleanly extricated from any breath Romeo and Juliet share, even if they happen after the moment at which the two were meant to die. *Exiles* reminds us that the alternative possibility the prologue opens up comes with high stakes, the life-death boundary collapse engendering not just the promise of life after seeming death, but also of death after seeming life. Romeo and Juliet bodily perishing in joint suicide is changeable narrative fact, but their spectral positioning is not. Their lives and deaths haunt each other regardless of narrative outcome, and it is for this reason that they haunt *us* so effectively.

The first non-blank shots of the short film show us extreme close-ups of Juliet's body: firstly, her hands resting on her stomach and then another of her chest. We can see the wind rustling her dress and hair, but she herself remains unmoving. The stillness of her body, like the stillness of the blank screen that preceded it, evokes nothing less than absence and death. After a

few hovering seconds, her chest begins rising and falling with intakes of breath to indicate that she is, in fact, alive, but that life is revealed only after she is first seen in this state of repose and death-like stillness. Just like the image of her that constitutes the web page's backdrop and the blank opening seconds of the film, these glimpses at Juliet confront us with blurred temporal lines between life and death, treating her as both simultaneously. This is, however, the only moment in the film at which we see a potentially-deceased Juliet bodily unmoving, so our question thus becomes: What form does death take throughout the remaining nineteen minutes of the film? If death haunts, shapes, and constitutes a surviving Juliet indefinitely, where else is its presence cinematically felt? I want to suggest that it takes the form of a continuing *social* death for both Romeo and Juliet. When I use the phrase social death, I draw from Orlando Patterson's formative definition of it as a form of social negation instigated by radical alienation. Speaking specifically within the context of slavery throughout history, Patterson writes, "If the slave no longer belonged to a community, if he had no social existence outside of his master, then what was he? The response in almost all slaveholding societies was to define the slave as a socially dead person" (Patterson 38). Thinkers since have made the term applicable to differing contexts, among them Lauren Berlant, who adapts the concept in her figuration of 'dead citizenship,' a mode of life enforced upon identities gone static, or, as she herself puts it, "Identities not live, or in play, but dead, frozen, fixed or at rest" (Berlant 60). This symbolic death is made manifest for *Exiles'* seemingly living Romeo and Juliet via their shared dialogue and compositional framing, reminding viewers throughout that they have swapped their tombs for a different form of death rather than evaded it entirely.

That even literal death still plagues them is made apparent when, about midway through the film, Juliet breaks down at the grimness of their circumstances. Juliet laments, "We have

nothing. We have no one. We have no way of calling. We have no way of surviving. We are just waiting” (*Exiles*). They are failing at their survival of the play, Juliet here notes, and in that failing managing only to lie in wait of yet another death still to come. This is one of the ways in which the film establishes death’s centrality despite the survival its premise is founded on, a centrality it continues to implicitly support through the distance and alienation that structure the arc of the film both visually and dialogically. At film’s beginning, Romeo and Juliet, deserted though they are, carve out a two-person community that is mutually fulfilling and visually constructed by way of closeness, both between them as embodied subjects and between them and we the audience. Close-up faces sharing the frame and the tented blanket over their heads create a sense of sanctuary. The reality of their larger surroundings are covered over, an intimate space binding them together despite the desert sprawl just beyond. If the film may be imagined to have a moment of pure liveliness untainted by death, this would probably be it. And yet, the bound-togetherness of even this is disrupted by the dialogue that comes to fill the tight space as it unfolds. Romeo tells Juliet of a dream he had, quietly despairing in their joint glow:

I could have sworn I kept seeing you, like, really far away. And I kept, like, chasing you...and each time you got further and further away. And eventually you walked up the mountain, and I went up the mountain, and you still weren’t there. It was as if you just disappeared when I got up to the top. I could get to the mountain and I could see home, I could see everything...I couldn’t see you.

*(Exiles)*

Already, distance creeps between them, their exterior reality incapable of being repressed, Romeo’s words reifying the expanse just outside and the ever-increasing gap it stretches between them and between them and their old lives. Makeshift home though they’ve created, the illusion

of it can't sustain itself for long. Juliet, replying with comforting words that assert her presence and closeness to him, can do little to ward off the literal distance Romeo's dream breathes into the film and the static death it inflicts upon them. Close-ups and intimacy slide, inevitability, into extreme wide shots that visually emphasize their alienation from anything that marks life as life, even their togetherness failing away as they increasingly grow further apart literally and emotionally.

The death-afflicting isolation connoted by all this empty space is linked explicitly to literal demise in the film's closing shots, which see Juliet walk away from the camera while her final voiceover brokenly states, "I have to believe that being with him is what I was always meant to do...and that, somewhere, there's some version of us that got it right. Somewhere, we're in heaven" (*Exiles*). The line, purposefully ambiguous, offers up more than one interpretive mode of access. On the one hand, it is obvious that Juliet would wish here for an alternative endpoint, heavenly in fulfilled togetherness for her and Romeo. However, as any viewer even remotely familiar with Shakespeare's source-text will pick up on, the line also invites a more cynical reading: this 'somewhere' that Juliet yearns for, that she suspects already exists elsewhere, is the literal death that closes the originary source-text. The highest achievement of paradisaal bliss the film can imagine is in that death, the entombed Romeo and Juliet of Shakespeare the pair that "got it right" (*Exiles*). She's half-dead now, socially and symbolically, and the happiest alternate fate the text chooses to offer is the literal death her literarily grounded counterpart achieved. In living, Juliet doesn't avoid tragedy, she merely alters its formation for the more painful. Juliet lives, but haunts those who look upon her through the blurry image that greets the website, the desolate social dying the film takes great pains to visually convey, and with her closing suggestion that literal death was avoidable, but preferable.

The simultaneous possibility and impossibility of imagining a Romeo and Juliet that survive is realized further in Alan Brown's *Private Romeo*, which, like *Exiles*, features a flouting of the deaths that close the play. Unlike *Exiles*, however, *Private Romeo* features a male Romeo that falls in love with a male Juliet, a reality that alters the terms of their survival. On the changed ending of his film, director Alan Brown says:

I didn't see the point in doing the adaptation unless I had something to say. And I refused to do a film in which the gay lovers are punished or killed. *Brokeback Mountain* may be a beautiful, and beautifully acted film, but the characters live lives of loneliness and desperation, and one of them is brutally murdered. Enough of those films. The world needs to see gay love stories on film that end well. Film is a powerful medium. I believe in complete artistic freedom, but I also believe that we have to be responsible about the images and messages we put out there – particularly at a time when the struggle for gay civil rights is still being waged. And when violence against gay teenagers is such an issue. (Brown)

The stakes of the adaptational project are clear, and Brown notes that he is adapting a gay filmic history as much as he is adapting Shakespeare.<sup>22</sup> As I will show, *Private Romeo* joins the tradition I have outlined that spectralizes the play's titular characters. However, the film also offers musings on embodiment that have ramifications for its adapting characters and its audience alike. As Brown argues above, bodies subject to violence are very much on the line when Shakespeare is adapted queerly. I turn my attention to *Private Romeo* to demonstrate how it makes use of its cinematic medium to depict characters abstractly dead yet explicitly embodied, a synthesizing move that inspires reflection on how queer bodies come to matter in contact with Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. By grappling with the question of whether or not



one can consent to Shakespeare (or, indeed, to any indomitable piece of cultural media), *Private Romeo* reveals adaptation as a process necessarily embodied and reveals also the urgency that thus accompanies its own adaptational project.

As with the other films I've discussed thus far, *Romeo and Juliet*'s prologue receives notable adaptation here, notable insofar as the text of it is omitted entirely. I contend, however, that the film's opening shots work as an adaptation of the play-text's prologue, contextualizing what is to follow and, more significantly, proclaiming the death so central to it. The three opening shots work to establish setting. The first offers a wide shot of a basketball court, hoop and stands in the frame, the second the outside of the academy itself, partially obscured by trees, and the third a gym, filled with sterile-white machines and black weights. All three shots are utterly barren of people, showing only the spaces (all of which do figure into later scenes) desolate of any characters or movement within them. Establishing setting in this way works doubly to establish death, for, as with *Exiles*, what we see depicted is the radical isolation that comes to figure *Private Romeo*'s Romeo and Juliet as socially dead. Indeed, all three of these shots are bereft of people, noise, or anything resembling life, a quiet that comes to be explained when the camera cuts to the academy's classroom, wherein all of the film's characters are seen in English class, reciting *Romeo and Juliet* aloud from books before them. We see here the life that director Alan Brown argued for sustaining, as the boys are seen laughing and playfully bickering through their Shakespearean recitations.<sup>23</sup> However, even this eruption of life is plagued by the death that saturates the rest of the film's opening, recurring shots of them in the classroom with books propped before them continuously reminding us that it is *not* a text of their choosing. The classroom is as disciplinary a space as those pictured in the still, opening shots, and the text of *Romeo and Juliet* another tool of discipline and enforced practice. Sam and Glenn become

Romeo and Juliet because they have been given no choice but to recite it in class, and it is seemingly the only text available to them in a military academy setting where their every move is so regulated and disciplined that they appear throughout to have no voices to call their own. The few linguistic utterances in the film that do not come directly from Shakespeare's text take the form of military commands, and throughout the film the sense of despondency is ever-present. Even the text of *Romeo and Juliet* (forced as it is upon the students) contributes to the strict systematization all the characters are subject to, a fact we are intermittently reminded of when the narrative cuts back to the space of the classroom, where we see our Romeo and Juliet begrudgingly reciting their lines from the books propped before them.

The film, then, deploys its quiet adaptation of the prologue in order to do more than merely prophesize Romeo and Juliet's deaths. The prologue here functionally renders them already dead, albeit abstractly, socially so. This death, taking the form of a disciplinary isolation that leaves all the characters seemingly voiceless, is further established by a couple of webcam-facilitated musical moments that occur throughout the film. Both scenes show Mercutio and his fellow cadets recording themselves on webcam, mouthing along to the songs "Busted Heart" and "The Magpie" by Bishop Allen. As Jeffrey Sconce notes in *Haunted Media*, the ghostly qualities of this web-mediated form are made immediately apparent. Though lacking the blurriness that helped outline *Exiles'* Juliet's spectrality, Mercutio and co. here appear similarly sinister, unnaturally pale and washed-out in the light of the webcam they sit in front of. Death is present also in the lyrics of the songs they here lip along to. Let's look first at excerpts from "Busted Heart":

I was born a stranger thinking out loud in a foreign tongue

I was out of place

I was looking all around just trying to find a friendly face  
But they're all gone  
...Who left me all alone in this town?  
...And I'm trying to understand  
What I say, what I think, where I sleep, when I breathe  
What I do with my hands. (Bishop Allen)

Foreignness and loneliness are central to the first few lines here quoted, and the YouTube video format that these scenes take further emphasizes the relevance of the lyrics to the characters silently lip-singing along to it. The isolation these characters are ensnared within is conveyed in this scene as Mercutio seemingly wonders who left him all alone (Bishop Allen); the filming of this music video, which we the audience view as if on YouTube, reveals a desire for connection to the very outside world that has bereft him.<sup>24</sup> “The Magpie,” though more lyrically ambiguous, nonetheless speaks even more explicitly of death: “High school ring, high school ring, / Who would have guessed it was a homicidal thing... / Call him a thief, call him a crook, / You’ll never get back what the magpie took” (Bishop Allen). The loss, despair, and murderous themes that these lyrics suggest are fitting for Mercutio, who has become so instrumentalized in his military academic setting that he is incapable of any longer understanding “what [he] say[s], what [he] think[s], where [he] sleep[s], when [he] breathe[s], / what [he does] with [his] hands” (Bishop Allen). Though these are two of the only moments in the film that offer divergence from Shakespeare’s language, they function to reveal something of the nature of the larger Shakespeare-penned scrip of the text. Indeed, the movie uses the YouTube-filmic mode of the sequences and the voiceless lip-singing that accompany them to suggest a death imposed by all the texts and media the film’s subjects have no choice but to turn to in the unfolding of their

daily, regimented lives. As with *Romeo and Juliet*'s language, enforced upon them and inescapable, so too here is the performance of a different kind of text illustrated as a mode of death. The fear the sequences betray is the possibility that they can similarly do nothing more than essentially lip-sing along to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* as well, agency, choice, and voices effaced.

The final moments of the film see Juliet standing alone in the classroom after he and Romeo have blissfully awoken from their respective slumbers, deaths successfully evaded. As with the webcam-mediated numbers just discussed, we are met here with another musical moment, one rendered quite differently from Mercutio's yet still bearing clear echoes of the ones that preceded it. Gone is the low-quality 'YouTube' effect of the earlier musical numbers, and gone too is the lip-singing. Juliet here sings "You Made Me Love You (I Didn't Want to Do It)," originally performed by Al Johnson and written by Joe McCarthy and James V. Monaco. Juliet sings it live, however, only an acoustic backing track and his own singing voice composing the audio here. The voice and warmth of this sequence as opposed to Mercutio's musical moments offer something that feels like an escape from the film's larger pall of social death, and yet Juliet, even here, in literal and filmic life, cannot evade it entirely. First, there's the matter of the classroom setting he stands in, the very same one that the students were repeatedly shown in while forcibly reading *Romeo and Juliet* aloud. Connectedly, the coercion I have identified as central to the social deaths of the characters is made newly explicit through the lyrics of the song that Juliet here performs: "You made me love you, I didn't want to do it, I didn't want to do it / You made me want you, and all the time you knew it, I guess you always knew it" (McCarthy). Juliet here acknowledges in words unambiguous an upending of his will, and hearing these lyrics sung aloud in the same space that introduced the text of *Romeo and Juliet* to the film establishes

a link between this expressed coercion and the manner in which the entire romantic narrative has been instigated and developed. Love has emerged through the role Juliet has been tasked with playing within Shakespeare's text, a love simultaneously genuine and inherently compulsory. Even his expression of this sentiment necessarily takes the form of a recitation of a pre-written text, albeit a different one. All Juliet is capable of is adaptation, and he ends in a multiply adaptational space that imbues his survival with life and death, victory and loss, and love and coercion simultaneously.

With this close, *Private Romeo* avoids the immateriality otherwise threatened by self-consciously cinematic portrayals of ghostliness. Though Mercutio's webcam spectrality perhaps runs the risk of detaching his plight from the material reality of his body and, by extension, the material reality of our own, Juliet's close brings embodiment back to the fore through both the bodily projection of Juliet's live voice and the explicit concern with his own capacity to consent that clouds this declaration of living love achieved. By treating different texts alike as instruments of discipline as much as of adaptational potential, *Private Romeo* demands reflection on what it means to lead embodied lives that are essentially and inescapably adaptational. What Juliet's closing melody reveals to us is that to adapt is inevitably to concede to something violent, a movement toward survival that works just as forcibly toward its opposite. As the cases in this project have shown, we adapt in order to survive, but by that same gesture adapt so that we may die in ways implicit and binding. The texts forced upon us lose none of their capacity to inflict fatal harm however they may be adapted. Indeed, every motion to adapt a text in cultural circulation only extends the spatial and temporal reach of its dominance. And yet, much like Juliet here discovers, we are left with little other choice: Juliet escapes Shakespeare's words only to take on the pre-existing ones of yet another, albeit different, source-text. Though Juliet does so

with a smile where Mercutio can only grimace, death nonetheless seeps in, his inability to do anything but submit to a fate that has been chosen for him acting as a quiet reminder of the reality that befalls us all.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Greg M. Colón Semenza's "Tromeo & Juliet, Teen Films, and the Cinematic Aesthetic of Un-Cuteness," which I will discuss again later in this chapter. Semenza discusses the sanitizing of the play that has come with its increased marketing toward teenaged and YA audiences, citing films such as Baz Luhrman's *Romeo + Juliet* and supernatural romances such as *Twilight: New Moon* and *Warm Bodies*. Semenza reads the 1996 gross-out film *Tromeo & Juliet* as a prophetic counterattack to this saccharine youthful aesthetic. Semenza focuses largely on film, but it is worth noting also how frequently Romeo and Juliet appear in contemporary sanitized form elsewhere, such as Taylor Swift love songs and, most recently, an iPhone commercial that featured two children performing the balcony scene while proud parents filmed on.

<sup>2</sup> Scarry's article examines consent in different forms: medicine, politics, and marriage. Scarry writes, "...Consent has been (and continues to be) nourished in an array of daily practices – medicine, political philosophy, marriage law, criminal law, feminist discourse, and aesthetics. By moving through these spheres, it becomes possible to identify a small set of attributes that remain common across them and then bring those attributes to bear on the problem at hand. The essay that follows describes one common attribute: the grounding of consent in the body" (Scarry 867).

<sup>3</sup> For a history of *Romeo and Juliet* in onscreen adaptation, see Courtney Lehmann's 2010 *Screen Adaptations: Romeo and Juliet: A Close Study of the Relationship Between Text and Film*.

<sup>4</sup> *Still A Rose*, directed by Hazart, features two male-female pairings performing *Romeo and Juliet*'s balcony scene. As they get deeper into the scene, the boundaries between the

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separate performances begin to blur, until we are left with the two Romeos addressing one another on one side and the two Juliets addressing one another on the other. The film's content and adapted title move to suggest the essential unchangeability of the love story despite gender switches.

<sup>5</sup> Again, Edelman understands futurity as the hope of a redeemed future wherein all means absolutely and finally, an ideal he argues is embodied in the image of the child. Edelman writes, "The Child has come to embody for us the telos of the social order and come to be seen as the one for whom that order is held in perpetual trust" (Edelman 11).

<sup>6</sup> Gayle Whittier reads in the prologue the inception of the Petrarchan form that propels Romeo forward throughout the play as if by force. Whittier writes, "The play's opening, then, establishes the fact that the sonnet form, even when exhausted, will generate dramatic event; that there is a sovereignty in language that subordinates the intention of the speaker and precipitates fact; and that the human word, unlike God's in Genesis, destroys, and destroys in the warp of syntax, the process of dialogue over time. To what degree, then, does this residual and fatal power live on in the inherited poetic word" (Whittier 29)?

<sup>7</sup> Douglas Bruster and Robert Weimann catalogue the lengths of Shakespeare's prologues, noting while doing so the peculiar shortness of *Romeo and Juliet*'s. Following a list that shows most of his prologues averaging between 30 and 40 lines in length, they write, "What seems significant about these figures is that, with the exception of *Romeo and Juliet* (whose sonnet-prologue is not only a perfect fit with the Petrarchan conceits that drive the play's action but in keeping with Benvolio's misgivings about 'prolixity'), most of the prologues to plays with which Shakespeare was associated are about 32 lines in length, with 6 out of 7 falling between 31 and 42 lines long" (Bruster, Weimann 10).



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<sup>8</sup> Marvin Carlson writes in *The Haunted Stage*, "...All plays in general might be called *Ghosts*, since, as Herbert Blau has provocatively observed, one of the universals of performance, both East and West, is its ghostliness, its sense of return, the uncanny but inescapable impression imposed upon its spectators that we are seeing what we saw before" (Carlson 1).

<sup>9</sup> Though Reynolds and Segal make note of it here, they are much more interested in exploring fugitivity in *Romeo and Juliet* adaptations than spectrality.

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Goldberg considers textual multiplicity and the fraught debates that stem therefrom in his detailed analysis of *Romeo and Juliet*'s Q1 and Q2, "'What? in a Names That Which We Call a Rose': The Desired Texts of Romeo and Juliet." Goldberg begins with and draws largely from the work of Fredson Bowers, the bibliographer who placed great emphasis on the divide "between good and bad authority" (Bowers 122) when considering Shakespearean textual variance.<sup>10</sup> Goldberg, resisting this rigid construction of a single definitive text, outlines the complex inextricability that defines the relationship between *Romeo and Juliet*'s Q1 and Q2, ultimately concluding: "There never was a final *Romeo and Juliet*, a single authoritative or authorial version of the play. There were only versions, from the start" (Goldberg 189). He ultimately concludes, however, that the characters and texts reach stagnation in death in the end.

<sup>11</sup> Avery Gordon writes, Haunting raises specters, and it alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present, and the future...The ghost, as I understand it, is not the invisible or some ineffable excess. The whole essence, if you can use that word, of a ghost is that it has a real presence and demands its due, your attention. Haunting and the appearance of specters or ghosts is one way...we are notified that what's been concealed is very much alive and present..." (Gordon xvi).

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<sup>12</sup> The queer comes in for Freccero in these borderlands, a terrain explored throughout the piece through the figure of Brandon Teena, a trans man who was murdered in 1993. See: “Queer Spectrality” in *Queer/Early/Modern*.

<sup>13</sup> Matt Seymour considers inescapability as a theme within *Romeo and Juliet* by considering the function of Fortune throughout. He writes, “We can better understand Romeo and Juliet’s intense and rapid affection as a function of Fortune and not a choice” (Seymour 382). Similarly, Kiki Lindell notes that the tragedy of the play is in the inescapability posited from its very inception in their discussion of teaching *Romeo and Juliet* in performance: “One of the main concerns somehow became how to confound audience expectations and avoid playing the tragedy before it actually happens, and how to achieve an encounter with it as unprepared, perhaps, as that of a sixteenth-century penny-stinkard sneaking into the playhouse late and missing the Prologue” (Lindell 164-165).

<sup>14</sup> José Muñoz defines disidentification as the ability to “read oneself and one’s own life narrative in a moment, object, or subject that is not culturally coded to ‘connect’ with the disidentifying subject” (Muñoz 12).

<sup>15</sup> Elsie Walker discusses the critical association between the film and MTV, writing, “The criticism of Luhrmann’s *Romeo + Juliet* to date (mostly in the form of magazine and film reviews) tend to dismiss the production as ‘MTV Shakespeare’: the kind of mindless visual candy we associate with rock videos” (Walker 132).

<sup>16</sup> In a recent interview commemorating the 20-year anniversary of the film’s release, Luhrmann discusses his commitment to retaining the language of the play-text despite studio resistance: “We certainly had to fight for it. My then-executive, who consequently has become a great friend, told me on the way in: ‘Whatever you do, don’t mention the language.’ As a result, I

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think I was trying to bludgeon things like ‘what light through yonder window breaks?’ into, ‘Ok...so the lights are on.’ But keeping Shakespeare's text was the number one priority for Craig Pearce and me when we were doing the adaptation. Indeed, everything in the film is about clarifying that language. This is not something we took lightly. In Miami, Craig and I used to work in the same room hammering out the text, each on an old black and white Mac, and we called ourselves ‘The Butchers of The Bard.’ I think we even had hats made to that effect. It wasn’t because we thought it was cute, it was a genuine moral anxiety-- changing anything that William Shakespeare had put on the page for a reason. That said, Craig and I did cut, paste, and move words around, we reduced the text in places, but we never wrote ‘extra Shakespeare.’ People are shocked sometimes to learn that” (Luhmann).

<sup>17</sup> In addition to Crystal Downing and Elsie Walker, Lucy Hamilton discusses the nuances of Luhmann’s *mise en scene* in arguing for the film’s strength as a Shakespearean adaptation in “Baz vs. the Bardolators, Or Why ‘William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet’ Deserves Another Look”: “Luhmann has merely taken up the challenge which Shakespeare’s work continues to pose of reworking and revising to keep it fresh” (Hamilton 123).

<sup>18</sup> Ebert seems to be referring here to Gus Van Sant’s 1991 *My Own Private Idaho*, an independent film about two street hustlers that works as a loose, modern adaptation of the *Henry IV* plays, featuring largely original dialogue with some Shakespeare quotations peppered in.

<sup>19</sup> Semenza and Lupton’s readings of cuteness appear in the context of a special issue on “Cute Shakespeare” in the *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*. Other participants include Colby Gordon, Thomas Anderson, Viola Timm, Luke Wilson, Richard Burt, and Ryuta Minami. Lupton, in dialogue with Semenza’s reading (as well as a similar one by Richard Burt), considers an alternative function of the play’s cuteness that does not necessarily lend itself to naïve

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sanitization: “Cuteness, I am suggesting, can help us account for our conviction that these lovers have somehow survived and triumphed after all; that imaginative reframing, aesthetic rezoning, and subjective freedom play a key role in this triumph; that secularization does not tell the whole story of this sublimation; and that part-objects (including gloves, birds, hands, and breasts along with sugared sonnets and soft goods) support this imaginative process. Cuteness might also help us inventory a range of virtues and compartments not normally considered cute, including courage, resilience, receptivity, empathy, and care” (Lupton 10).

<sup>20</sup> Note: this website has since been taken down. It is still partially accessible via search on the Internet Archive: Wayback Machine ([archive.org/web](http://archive.org/web)), and the film is still available for free viewing on Vimeo.

<sup>21</sup> Important note: The website design of [romeoisbanished.com](http://romeoisbanished.com) has since been pulled down, and now redirects to a standard Vimeo page where the film is available for viewing. I thankfully possessed screencaptures of the site that I took in February 2014. The “Way Back Internet Archive” also has screencaptures available, though none of them captured the animated image of Juliet that makes the website’s background.

<sup>22</sup> The frequency with which queer cinematic bodies meet death has inspired popular website *TV Tropes* to coin the phenomenon the “Bury Your Gays” trope: “Often, especially in older works (to the extent that they *are* found in older works, of course), gay characters just aren’t allowed happy endings. Even if they do end up having some kind of relationship, at least one half of the couple, often the one who was more aggressive in pursuing a relationship, thus ‘perverting’ the other one, has to die at the end” (TV Tropes). See the “Bury Your Gays” page for a comprehensive list of texts in various mediums that have utilized this trope.

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<sup>23</sup> The opening shot of the classroom makes the liveliness clear in the crowd, camaraderie, and gleeful affect of the subjects presented, a liveliness all the more noticeable after being juxtaposed against the empty stillness of the opening establishing shots.

<sup>24</sup> For, as YouTube's "About" page declares: "YouTube provides a forum for people to *connect*, inform, and inspire others across the globe..." (Emphasis mine, YouTube).

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