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'*If you go down to the woods today:* Immersion and emotional response in Fresh Life Theatre's YouTube adaptations of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*'

When theatres closed in mid-March 2020 due to COVID-19, practitioners took their craft online. Actors, producers, and directors around the world turned video conferencing software such as Zoom and streaming websites such as YouTube into virtual theatre spaces, inviting global audiences to watch them perform online while in-person venues were unavailable. This paper examines the role of live-tweeting and interactive immersive virtual theatre in creating notions of liveness Lockdown Shakespeare.

The British Bristol/Bath-based Fresh Life Theatre Company moved their summer touring plans online, creating a series of films rethinking *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* A trilogy of made-for-YouTube short films, *Helena: Ugly as a Bear*[1], *Hermia: Heaven unto Hell*[2] and *Mortal Fools*[3] sought to 'strip[…] away the romcom gloss of traditional performance'.[4] Pre-recorded in lockdown using mobile phones and socially-distanced actors, these films were closer to screen adaptation than live theatre. However, while *Helena* and *Hermia* were not performed 'live', a sense of uniqueness was injected through the company's live Twitter feed. Those watching the premiere were rewarded with the one-off opportunity to interact with characters as the production developed. The live-tweeting acted as a paratextual device informing and shaping readings of the production. Placing toxic masculinity at the core the company used in character live tweeting to add comment on the darker side of social media and the of the pressures young women face purely for being *female on the internet*. The final instalment of the trilogy took audience interaction to a new level. *Mortal Fools* placed Puck at the fore, offering YouTube viewers an interactive 'pick your own adventure' journey through the woods. With 50 routes and 10 endings, the audience could make decisions that examined the wider darker aspects of the play.

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[1] *Helena: Ugly as a Bear,* Fresh Life Theatre, 2020 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3DMlyV8sR0&feature=youtu.be [Accessed 4 December 2020].
[2] *Hermia: Heaven unto Hell,* Fresh Life Theatre, 2020 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T4eB0CuiEd0 [Accessed 4 December 2020].
[3] *Mortal Fools,* Fresh Life Theatre, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bcPi8TL3fs8 [Accessed 4 December 2020].
[4] "PRODUCTIONS", *Fresh Life Theatre*, 2020 https://www.freshlifetheatre.co.uk/productions.html [Accessed 4 December 2020].

'All the men and women merely players': Reimagining Arden as/through immersive technology in *Black Mirror* and Lockdown Shakespeare

As You Like It's Forest of Arden is presented as a place where characters are able not only to escape the jurisdiction of the court, but in which they can assume completely new social, sexual and gender identities. This paper asks: what happens when Arden is reimagined as an immersive digital environment; and what happens when fictional immersive technologies echo this Arden-like sense of liberation?

Whilst the concept of computer-generated immersive environments has long been a staple of science fiction, Charlie Brooker's dystopian anthology series *Black Mirror* (2011-) has explored the concept on several occasions with a focus on characters breaking from or transcending the heteronormativity of their everyday lives to explore their sexuality. This paper will explore the echoes of Arden that can be observed in two *Black Mirror* episodes in particular: 'San Junipero' (season 3, episode 4), which seemingly upholds the concept of Arden as a utopian place of sexual liberation; and 'Striking Vipers' (season 5, episode 1), which ostensibly subverts the idea in a manner more typical of *Black Mirror*'s characteristically dystopian aesthetic.

As well as investigating the 'Shakespearean aftershocks'[5] to be found in the immersive digital worlds of these episodes, I will also consider the potential influence of *Black Mirror* itself upon the 2020 made-for-lockdown production of *As You Like It* by online theatre company CtrlAlt_Repeat. Performed live on Zoom, the production reimagined Arden as 'the world's first immersive social platforming game', inviting players to 'be who you're truly meant to be'.[6] Whilst the transformation of Arden from pastoral to digital space created postmodern *Black Mirror*-esque sci-fi echoes, CtrlAlt_Repeat's production also resonated sincerely with the way technological immersion allowed 2020's socially distanced world to remain affectively connected.

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"Theatre, Virtual Reality, and Agency"

Virtual reality (VR) platforms have now begun to extend the remediation of Shakespeare that began with radio and film to digitally immerse a spectator in a 360-degree recorded performance. Even more so than film, VR has a natural affinity with theater; as Sita Popat has observed, "Theater has always been a space of virtuality. The action on the stage exists as

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[5] Rob Conkie, *Shakespeare Aftershocks: Shylock*, Shakespeare Bulletin, 27:4, 2009. pp. 549-566 (p.549)
[6] CtrlAlt_Repeat, 2020. *As You Like It Saturday, May 23rd, 7:30pm BST. Follow for updates. #Theatre #Gaming #Trailer #Shakespeare #Arden #AsYouLikeIt* [Twitter] 18 May. <https://twitter.com/CtrlAlt_Repeat/status/1262333987013496832> [accessed 8 November 2020].

neither what it is actually nor what it is pretending to be; instead, it bridges the actual and the imaginary to create a virtual world in which performers and viewers are complicit." With the recent trend toward immersion and audience engagement in live theatrical performance, the analogy between theater and VR has become even more apt. While it may appear more like film in its reliance on recording and projecting image and sound, a VR performance is in fact more like immersive theater, insofar as it is not bound by a frame or a single point of view, and as it summons up an illusion of a space that the spectator inhabits beyond the "real world."

This essay explores some aspects of the present and future of Shakespeare performance in VR, investigating the interface of theater and VR technology (with a digression into the immersive performance of *Sleep No More*). In particular, I will focus on the question of the category of agency in VR performance, using the case study of the most complete version of a VR Shakespeare play to date that is easily accessible: *Hamlet 360: Thy Father's Spirit* (2019), a VR performance produced by the Commonwealth Shakespeare Company in Boston in collaboration with Google and the VR company Sensorium. This production utilizes the methods of both theater and film in evoking spatial immersion while gesturing toward a form of spectator agency.

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"Shakespeare and Immersive Reading: The Case of Comedy"

This essay will focus on immersion in relation to what the seminar description calls "the revival of deep, close reading." It will take up four questions: 1) What do we mean by 'immersion' and what experiences or affects are associated with it? 2) In the case of Shakespeare's comedies, what kinds of scenes, episodes, speeches, or other moments might be expected to produce immersion? 4) What is the relationship between immersion and criticism or critique? The paper will end with discussion of an example from *Much Ado About Nothing*.

"Immersion" is a useful baggy monster term in literary experience, identifying something that seems true and real but whose borders always remain a bit fluffy. It is necessarily metaphorical and has cognate terms, such as submersion, engulfment, intoxication, and (my favorite) enchantment. Such terms demarcate what may look to some as the reader's dangerous surrender to the world of the artifact. Rita Felski suggests that immersion, at its extreme, can have a rapturous, ecstatic, even erotically charged quality (*The Uses of Literature* [2008], 51). More commonly, it seem to me, immersion arises from the reader's experiences of pleasurable anticipation, suspense, admiration, and desire. Regarding immersion in Shakespeare's plays, one might automatically turn first to the tragedies, where the powerful experiences of individual characters tug at the reader's feelings. But what about

comedy, a genre that evokes not only engagement but also critical detachment from its readers? I would argue that immersion occurs with comedy; possible places to investigate would include deception scenes, comic set pieces, certain soliloquies, and endings. Focusing on immersion in Shakespearean comedy allows one to argue that the reader enchanted by comedy never stops thinking critically; the mind can be as deeply involved as the senses and feeling, as the reader sorts through narrative hypotheses, implications, rationales, mistakes, trajectories, and the like (I would argue more generally that thought is always a part of immersive reading). I will explore these ideas by discussing a scene (perhaps Benedict's deception, perhaps the ending) from *Much Ado About Nothing*.

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Close Reading: The Key to Intellectually Entering and Comprehending the World of a Literary Text

From my first encounter with the joys of a traveling library sent to my remote elementary school, I have frequently become immersed in the literary text that I am reading, not with effort and intention but unconsciously, to the point that I lose awareness of what is around me—being brought back to outer reality when I put down the text. I will discuss my classroom steps which produce love and understanding of a Shakespearean literary poem or text.

In my own classroom, my dilemma has been how to shift the focus to and keep it on what transpires between the literary text and the readers in my class. I resort to introducing close reading by using video clips as Ian McKellan's workshop on "Picking Apart 'Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow,'" in which he guides one in how to look after the sense, so that the actor (or in my class the reader) becomes "the playwright and the character at the same time." As they read, my students keep a reading journal in which they record their thinking on the author's world from which they share to initiate class discussion. The few who initially share an immersion inspire others. After a few meetings, to enhance a sense of conflict and how dramatic plot develops, I divide the class into groups to lead discussion. As we move from title to title, students become immersed in how Shakespeare builds plots as the groups share close readings as they rotate through the acts. Such immersion leads to superior performances of small scenes each group chooses from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* at the end of the semester. For example, Caliban, Trinculo, and Stephano plan Prospero's murder. Student depth of immersion and/or imagination triggered by close reading of their chosen scene is heart-warming. It feeds their imaginations and creativity in ways that delight and surprise the whole class. My students then understand and comprehend the connection between close reading and becoming part of the world in the literary text.

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Henry the Fourth, Part Two's Rumour is as figurative as Winter in a court masque, but I suggest he marks a watershed moment in Shakespeare's evolving regard for audience perception. As a prologue, he would satisfy expectations by simply speaking his piece and vacating the stage. Instead, Shakespeare's induction fosters imaginative engagement beyond that typically begged of early modern playgoers and resonates with a potent sense of the medieval. What the audience sees—an allegorical suit of tongues with an uncloaked disregard for the likes of them—declares Rumour not only alien to their material present, but also to his own modus operandi, not to mention the late 16th-century London stage. Keenly aware that any true-seeming representation of history is inherently fantasy and that the play to come needs auditors to meet it halfway, Rumour nominates himself to negotiate that middle ground and guiles them into a tight embrace of the impossible.

More than the sum of babbling tongues, Rumour distracts us from the disconnect that accompanies his Titivillus-like disruption of a chronicle play, winding an empathic insistence to "open your ears" through a "pipe / Blown by surmises" (*2H4* Ind. 15-16). Fortifying airy words into bricks and spans, Rumour builds a Shakespearean bridge from the distant theatricality of performance text to the illusive proximities of cinema and immersive promise of virtual reality. Considered in this context, Rumour reads as Shakespeare's earliest attempt to draw auditors from fixed positions of bench seat and standing room into an intimate, tactile world that might almost be coming to life.

Beyond Rumour, this paper will explore the (arguable) apotheosis of Shakespearean immersion, the Chorus of *Henry V*, who bends time and space to enfold his hearers, delivering impressions of heightened reality directly into their auditory cortices, like "jacking in" to an early modern *Matrix*.

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*Virtu*al Affect: Shakespeare, *Ethopoeia*, & Immersive Ethics

In *The Tempest* Shakespeare gives us a storm at sea, a ship in peril, and a spectator on dry ground who is all empathy and affect:

> O, I have suffered
> With those that I saw suffer: a brave vessel,
> Who had, no doubt, some noble creature in her,
> Dashed all to pieces. O, the cry did knock

Against my very heart.

That Miranda's vicarious suffering proves needless suggests that the moment is significant as a *moment*, as a bodily and affective experience creating the conditions for an ethical feeling or thought. A platform on which playwrights like Shakespeare experimented with virtual experience, the early modern stage was, of course, a laboratory of and for such immersive and affective events. In this paper I consider the relation of some of these thinking-feeling events to some of the practices – and experiments with immersive experience – that Shakespeare and his contemporaries were exposed to in Tudor educational institutions. Through extensive imitative and imaginative exercises – and with the threat of corporal punishment – Renaissance schools attempted to inculcate certain habits of mind. Understood to be part of the civilizing process, these exercises and the habits they instilled went hand-in-hand, educators claimed, with the development of moral character. As part of this regimen, early modern schoolchildren were trained in *ethopoeia*, which we might translate as "character making." This paper addresses *ethopoeia* specifically and certain aspects of rhetorical training more generally in relation to some of Shakespeare's immersive experiments in affective ethics. The hope is to attend to "character making" as an experiment in and with immersive experience and ethical knowledge. If time and space permit, I might return to Miranda and position this vicarious immersive experience – and the putative ethical knowledge on which it has designs – in relation to Hans Blumenberg's notion of "shipwreck with spectator."

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Immersion and Revisionary Appropriation: Updike's Anticipatory Quotations

A remaking of a Shakespeare play can often involve a swerve (or near swerve) from any immersion in its language (let's turn *The Taming of The Shrew* into a movie set in an American high school; let's borrow the bare bones of the *Hamlet* plot for a Broadway musical!). Part of the fun, part of the game, lies in kidnapping the canonical "high culture" text—or perhaps, more accurately, the Shakespeare *brand*—in the interests of producing a felicitous incongruity whose different accents and different lexicons may variously offer celebration, subversion or critique. My interest here, however, is in what happens when a reinvention is also linguistically immersive—when it is simultaneously steeped in the language of the original (re-*placing* rather than simply replacing that language, inserting close quotation within its own web of words) *and* writing back quite aggressively to the original. My example is John Updike's *Gertrude and Claudius* (2000), the novel that provides Shakespeare's characters with a strikingly poignant and lyrical "backstory." Updike's prose does not precisely offer pastiche (or collage) but his fiction, shot through as it is with small-scale direct quotation, represents, teasingly, a kind of echo chamber before the fact (the novel concludes just before the action of *Hamlet* I.ii). This paper will explore the

complicated relationship between subversive augmentation, revisionary appropriation and an almost eroticized surrender to the Shakespearean Logos in Updike's adulteration of canon.

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"You gallants lack the gall to challenge Galen": Imitatio and Immersion in Shakespeare

"Imitari is nothing"—Holofernes in *Love's Labour's Lost*

Enter Nurse
❋ The division of the parts ❋

1 Page (Matthew,1.2) Rosaline	For one actor	Lady Capulet Venus	For one actor
Angela Astraea	For one actor	2 Page (1.3) Squire Squirt Surgeon Scruple	For one actor
Berowne Chiara Guillaume Le Grand de Croy	For one actor	Moon Pampinea The Queen 1 Angel 1 Learned Physician	For one actor
Slapbag Brother Antonio	For one actor		
Pillicock Cupid	For one actor	Filomena Maria 2 Angel 2 Learned Physician	For one actor
Spedalingo Hicket	For one actor	Elissa Katherine 3 Angel 3 Learned Physician	For one actor
Capulet Lochia Garzoni	For one actor		

I've recently written a "new" Shakespearean play, *Enter Nurse, or Love's Labour's Won*, which is 5 acts, 20 scenes, and 3,089 lines of Elizabethan English. What inspired me to do so was a quote engraved on a 16th-century astronomical clock by its maker, Juanelo Turriano. The Latin inscription reads: "QVI. SIM. SCIES. SI. PAR. OPVS. FACERE. CONABERIS." Elizabeth King, a sculptor who has researched and written about Turriano offers this English translation: "you will know who I am if *you* try and make this." I wondered how Turriano's challenge might apply to attempts to understand and appreciate Shakespeare. I was also motivated by a quote from John Keats in 1818: "I have great reason to be content, for thank God I can read and perhaps understand Shakespeare to his depths." For a brief time, that quote seemed reason for me to be content, too, because I thought I could say the same. The more I looked at the quote, however, and thought about Keats' relationship to Shakespeare, the more I realized how reading Shakespeare as an aspiring poet and playwright differs from reading him as a Shakespeare scholar. Since *Enter Nurse* is not so much an adaptation or an appropriation as it is an imitation of Shakespeare, I am keen to talk with members of this seminar about how imitation requires immersion, and about the effects (both "reinvigorating"

and "compromising") such immersion has on scholarship. As the chart above indicates, *Enter Nurse* was written with Brett Gamboa's *Shakespeare's Double Plays* at hand and in mind: in performance, 12 actors play 30 speaking parts, 1 mute saint, and 3 mute angels; a dog plays a sheep. Most likely my written contribution to the seminar will be Act 4, Scene 3 of the play.

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Immersion and the Pilgrimage to Stratford

This paper, on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century 'pilgrimages' to Stratford and the immersive experience of walking in the footsteps of what William Henry Ireland called 'our dramatic lord',[7] is the first step (pardon the pun) of a project that re-evaluates Shakespeare's cultural reception by attending to the multiple and deep ways in which Shakespeare has been embedded in Western culture as if he were a religious figure. One example: in his *Confessions*, Ireland relates the pilgrimage to Stratford in 1794 which inspired him, as a 17-year old craving his father Samuel's approval, to notoriously forge Shakespearean documents. Having visited Holy Trinity Church (where they mused about what prompted Shakespeare to curse any would-be graverobbers), they proceeded to the site where Shakespeare's house no longer stood and the garden where the famous mulberry tree no longer grew; to Clopton House, where Shakespearean manuscripts had allegedly been transported (but no longer survived, such manuscripts supposedly having been incinerated just days earlier); and they purchased 'relics' from Anne Hathaway's cottage, before venturing to Bitford, the site of an ancient crab tree where an intoxicated Shakespeare allegedly past out and spent the night after a drinking contest. Virtually none of these sites contained any sights: they are characterised by elusiveness and intangibility; their chief virtue being their apparent proximity to Shakespeare and the tantalising promise of indirect access to quasi-divinity that walking in Shakespeare's footsteps offers to those so inclined. Only Shakespeare's grave in the church offers something more materially present, but it is telling that it is fanciful conjecture about Shakespeare's motivations that takes priority here. Other examples include anecdotes of travellers associating their own journey with that of Shakespeare's purported route to London (in *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, 1844), the 'poetical pilgrimage' of Washington Irving's *Geoffrey Crayon* (1819-20), and 'Leigh Cliffe' (George Jones) paying for the privilege of falling asleep on the floor of the room where Shakespeare was born (1836), amongst many others.

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[7] William Henry Ireland, *The Confessions of William-Henry Ireland* (1805), 19.

Immersed in Translation. Challenging common misconstructions of translating, via Shakespeare.

Caliban's reply to Miranda's rebuke concerning his misuse and abuse of her gift of education has rightly prompted substantial responses, well illustrated by titles like *Learning to Curse* and so on. However, another stimulating phrase from their dialogue has not been as extensively noticed or employed: "I endowed thy purposes / With words that made them known." Miranda places the act of translating at the heart of her "pains" to redeem a "savage" who did not "know [his] own meaning."

The suggestion that Miranda could read – 'to the letter', so to speak – the innermost intents in Caliban's "brutish gabble", and then render them into intelligible verbalization, may be endlessly interrogated. For present purposes, I will only call it a happily found and promising entry point for a critique of misconceptions of the task of the translator that commonly approach it from shallow viewpoints. Translating demands a complex, fluid transit from our key term *immersion* to its opposite *emergence*. What are the challenges and risks of becoming immersed in a foreign conceptual, imaginative, and above all, acoustic universe to eventually emerge in another one, different in aspect and accent, with the design to similarly affect dissimilar perceptions by means of something new that nonetheless depends on something prior?

After an example from *Measure for Measure,* establishing how *immersion* will be understood in the paper, I will apply it to the Weird Sisters' speeches as rendered in my translation of *Macbeth*. Then I will examine the speeches of the single "Weird Woman" in the superb 2013 adaptation *Mendoza*, to explore how its makers created a powerful, uniquely Mexican voice from Shakespeare's "instruments of darkness". Space allowing, I will finally look at what happens when seeking to "engraft" Shakespeare's *Sonnets* "new" in Spanish.

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Macbeth and the Idea of Atmosphere

This paper is about a concept tightly linked to the idea of immersion: "atmosphere." The term and its cousins (*Stimmung*, ambience, etc.), which all acquired a certain prominence around the end of the nineteenth-century, has recently resurfaced in works of environmental criticism such as Timothy Morton's *Ecology Without Nature*, with its account of "ambient poetics," and Peter Sloterdijk's *Spheres* trilogy, with its discussions of aesthetic activity as atmosphere production.

Extending these recent discussions, I focus on the question of how poetic language creates atmosphere. While we habitually employ the immersion metaphor in linguistic contexts—e.g. "immersion" in a foreign language—a tension exists between the sensory, embodied connotations of immersion and our ideas of language as a medium for meaning. The sound of language—vibrations in the atmosphere—does present one crucial sensory mode through which language can envelop us. However, the question of the relationship between atmosphere and meaning remains a difficult one.

I begin with Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, a text which has served as a locus classicus for discussions of aesthetic atmosphere. Starting with A. C. Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy*, the idea of atmosphere continually surfaces in discussions of *Macbeth*, while *Macbeth* continually surfaces in discussions of aesthetic atmosphere. Briefly reviewing early writings by De Quincey, Wilson Knight, Empson, and Leavis, as well as more recent contributions by Jonathan Gil Harris and Julia Lupton, I extract what I take to be the key question for any account of Shakespearean atmosphere: the relationship between mood, sensory experience, and linguistic meaning. Finally, I turn to *The Tempest*, with its wealth of ambient effects, as an alternative focus for future analysis of atmosphere in Shakespeare.

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Journal From a New Frontier: Shakespeare and Virtual Reality

Shakespeare-VR is an educational project based around virtual reality media shot in the ASC Blackfriars Playhouse, a historical recreation of the indoor theater used by Shakespeare's company. In this paper, I take a look back on my experiences as director of the project over the past two years and share some reflections on the state of VR technology as it pertains to Shakespeare, theater, and humanities education. With the arrival of affordable mass-market headsets and new Shakespeare-related VR projects popping up all over the globe, it now seems clear that a new chapter in the 400 year-old history of Shakespeare production has begun to unfold. What is less clear, however, is whether the new medium will have genuine staying power, or if it will turn out to be a passing novelty. In order to address this question, I will address issues including interactivity, embodiment, and the relation between virtuality and imagination. The paper is a draft of a chapter for a new volume on Shakespeare and VR that I am co-editing (with David McInnis) for the Cambridge Elements series.