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Literary Criticism's Copernican Turn:  
Kant's Influence on Coleridge's Shakespeare Lectures

I argue that Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 1811–12 Shakespeare lectures mark a pivotal moment in Romantic critical theory and introduce British audiences to a Kantian critique of British empiricism. In these lectures, Coleridge develops the distinction between art as “copy” and as “imitation,” framing his differences with earlier Shakespeare critics not merely as issues of taste but as fundamental philosophical disagreements about knowledge and representation. Contrary to some interpretations, Coleridge's Kantian claim that all knowledge is subjectively mediated does not undermine his faith in objective knowledge or in language's capacity to represent the world. Instead, Coleridge develops a mimetic theory of art by showing that Kant's emphasis on the mind's active role in perception can sustain, rather than subvert, the idea of literary works as representations of reality. Building on scholarship that explores Coleridge's revision of mimetic theories, this article demonstrates how his conception of “imitation” and “meditation” grew directly out of his Kantian epistemology, thereby reshaping the grounds of Shakespeare criticism and the broader discourse on Romantic art.

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“What’s a Bad Miracle?”:  
Fidelity, Sincerity, and Shakespearean Vibes in Jordan Peele’s *Nope*

This paper offers the beginnings of my exploration of what I have called “Shakespearean vibes,” presented through analysis of the 2022 film *Nope*, directed by Jordan Peele. In devising and using the term Shakespearean vibes, I am not intending to add unnecessarily to the (over)populous pool of terminology such as “aftershocks”<sup>1</sup> and “echoes”<sup>2</sup> that already exists; but to propose a subtle but important shift in the way in which Shakespeare can be detected in recent cultural objects in line with the wider social and cultural sensibility of the 2020s. The cultural concept of “vibes” has seen a sharp rise in popularity and usage since the early 2020s; it denotes “emplaced sociocultural relations” which can be described as “affects, atmospheres, relations, [...] vibrancies and textured entanglements, something sensory and sensed”.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, I explore the film’s Shakespearean vibes through the lens of metamodern performance theory. Tom Drayton characterizes metamodern performance through its “continual fluctuation between the fictitious and the factual, or the performer and the performed [...] the work – despite being open about the fact that it is inherently an inauthentic medium – is concerned with authenticity and eliciting surprisingly authentic emotions from you *at the same time* as being transparent about the construction of these emotions”.<sup>4</sup> I propose that, through its blurring of the boundaries of authenticity and referentiality, and its centring of sincere emotional depth even while presenting an inherently fantastical narrative, Peele’s film serves as an example of a metamodern exploration of a Shakespeare text – specifically *Hamlet* – through its Shakespearean vibes. In doing so, Peele achieves what James Newlin has described as uncanny fidelity to Shakespeare: “the sense of similarity between one of Shakespeare’s texts and a later text,” with fidelity pertaining to “a reproduction’s precision—as in the case of a ‘high fidelity’ recording or a ‘faithful translation’—rather than of loyalty or constancy”.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Conkie, Rob (2009), “Shakespeare Aftershocks: Shylock”, *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 27:4. pp. 549–566. p. 549.

<sup>2</sup> Hansen, Adam, and Kevin J. Wetmore Jr. (2015), *Shakespearean Echoes*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Watson, Ash (2025), “Vibes-based methods”, *Qualitative Research*. Available online: <https://doi.org/10.1177/14687941241308707> (accessed 2 February 2025).

<sup>4</sup> Drayton, Tom (2024), *Metamodernism in Contemporary British Theatre: A Politics of Hope/lessness*. London: Bloomsbury. p. 95–96.

<sup>5</sup> Newlin, James (2023), *Uncanny Fidelity: Recognizing Shakespeare in Twenty-First-Century Film and Television*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press. p. 17.

Melissa Croteau  
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Unwriting *Much Ado*:  
The Egalitarian Vulgar Romantic Comedy in Sydney's Blue World

The first time I saw the 2023 rom-com *Anyone But You* (dir. Will Gluck), a loose adaptation of *Much ado About Nothing*, I was mildly amused and not much impressed. However, on my second viewing, I found it cleverer than I remembered, with direct references to classic screwball comedy mixed with that Judd Apatow raunch, plus a Brit-pop anthem begging to be compared to "Sigh no more." Furthermore, it was a massive global hit, grossing nearly ten times its \$25 million budget. The play *Much Ado About Nothing* is all about fidelity from start to finish—"Men were deceivers ever"—but this film traffics far more easily with its generic bedfellows and other cinematic adaptations of *Much Ado* and other Shakespeare comedies, particularly *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, than it does with the Bard's text. *Anything But You* seeks a dialogue with, rather than fidelity to, *Much Ado*. That can be emblemized by the rom-com's replacement of the "Sigh No More" theme, which warns women to beware of unfaithful men, with Natasha Bedingfield's 2004 self-empowerment anthem "Unwritten," which, we discover, is Ben's "serenity song," the song he listens to on repeat when he feels afraid. This song is about the freedom of self-fashioning and self-improvement as we move into a potentially brighter future, and it reflects the current state of our double protagonists, Bea and Ben. Instead of reminding us that women must accept cheating and jealous husbands, "Unwritten" tells the audience that Bea and Ben can help each other grow into an exhilaratingly open future. Admitting that people and their stories are always "unwritten," or unfinished, while demonstrating the "unwriting" of *Much Ado*—reshaping it into its hybrid form of classic screwball comedy combined with vulgar comedy of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries—*Anyone But You* is more interested in keeping faith with its generic cinematic predecessors while it throws a cheeky wink at the Sweet Swan of Avon.

Emma Elizabeth de Beus  
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Shrouded Shakespeare:  
Reading Contemporary Adaptation as Entanglement via *Promising Young Woman* (2020) and  
*Saltburn* (2023)

In this paper, I argue that the films *Promising Young Woman* (2020) and *Saltburn* (2023), both directed by Emerald Fennell, represent prime examples of how many contemporary Shakespeare adaptations have left the confines of the term adaptation far behind. I argue that Fennell's debut film reinvisions *Hamlet*, while her second reinterprets *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. However, labeling these far-flung "adaptations" as such is contentious; films such as the two considered here on the surface have nothing to do with Shakespeare's plays. Indeed, many would argue that if these are Shakespeare adaptations, then what in contemporary culture is *not* one, if mere passing nominal or thematic similarities are to be considered. However, this analytical gap results in the loss of relational understandings between recognizable adaptations and ones which are less clear-cut. Through this analysis, it is possible to discern the range of adaptive processes in terms of the degree of source material involvement and increase cognizance of the appeal of adaptation itself as a form. As such, we need a new paradigm to understand the work undertaken in contemporary adaptation in all its subtleties. I argue that there are five forms of adaptation along a spectrum, each drawing on a different aspect of optics (the physics of light), each representing a greater degree in the alteration of that light from the source: reflection, refraction, polarization, diffraction, and entanglement. Therefore, my paradigm arguably measures distance and distortion from the source material to its newly adapted form. In this paper, I will consider the final, most extenuated form on the spectrum through the intertwined case studies of Fennell's two films. Entangled adaptation, as exemplified by *Promising Young Woman* and *Saltburn*, occurs when literary adaptations are pushed to the point where the source material is no longer directly discernible and their literary meanings function independently from the source, yet reading them as interconnected creates intertextual potential.

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Fortune's Pageant:  
The Tragic Arcs of Margaret of Anjou and Eleanor Cobham in *Henry VI, Part 2*

The Wars of the Roses were more than fashionable in the 1590s—they were *everywhere* in popular culture, and *Henry VI, Part 2* is generally considered to be Shakespeare's initial foray into that setting (dare I call it a fandom?), the earliest of the three parts to be (co-)authored, and printed under the title *The First Part of the Contention* (1594). From its invocations of Senecan drama between the warring families of York and Lancaster to the chaos of Jack Cade's rebellion, it is a play filled with tonal shifts, reflecting the multivocal nature of its source material and its cleverly tongue-in-cheek approach to historicity.

Among the many chronological fictions in the play is the rivalry between Queen Margaret of Anjou and Eleanor Cobham, duchess of Gloucester. In actuality, the two women weren't even in England at the same time, let alone at court together, but their interlocking tragic arcs in the play prove enough of an innovation that contemporary poets and playwrights, and even later historians and biographers, accepted the rivalry at face value. I will discuss these two women both as the products of adaptational and interpretative choices, as well as some of the contemporary and later versions clearly based on *Henry VI, Part 2*.

Greg Foran,  
Nazareth University

### Fidelity and Resistance in D'Avenant's *Macbeth*

After the public theaters were reopened in 1660, Sir William D'Avenant revived and updated Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, which reigned on the English stage until David Garrick restored the Shakespearean text in 1744. Though subsequent generations of literary critics had trouble forgiving D'Avenant for his "wanton tampering" with Shakespeare's text, more recent scholarship recognizes D'Avenant as having produced the version of *Macbeth* that Restoration audiences needed. In that vein, this essay explores how D'Avenant's artistic (in)fidelity to Shakespeare stems from his attempt to find a stable basis for political fidelity. In particular, D'Avenant expands the roles of Macduff and Lady Macduff to explore competing visions of the subject's relation to sovereignty: feudal loyalty, the Cavalier commitment to passive obedience even in the face of tyranny, and the Hobbesian contract that gives priority to individual self-preservation.

Keith Jones  
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“The worst is not / So long as we can say ‘This is the worst’”:  
*Adaptations of King Lear*

In Act IV of *King Lear*, the tragedy has nearly reached its pinnacle. Edgar imagines that he has reached the lowest of all possible lows and imagines that things can only get better, saying “The lamentable change is from the best, / The worst returns to laughter.”<sup>1</sup> Those who are at the best can always fall; those at the worst can’t get any worse.

And then he learns that he has not sunk as far as he can go. Seeing his father blinded and exiled, he changes his philosophy, saying, “O gods! Who is’t can say ‘I am at the worst’? / I am worse that e’er I was,”<sup>2</sup> soon adding, “And worse I may be yet; the worst is not / So long as we can say ‘This is the worst.’”<sup>3</sup>

For some, *King Lear* is Shakespeare’s worst play—meaning his darkest, most nihilistic, most tragic drama. But we’ve all experienced performances that make it even worse, either by devastating audiences by heightening its violence and lessening its hope or by simply being badly (or even laughably) performed.

Adaptations and derivatives of *King Lear* can explore its tragic themes with profound seriousness: Akira Kurosawa’s *Ran*, Linda Lê’s *The Three Fates*, Rituparno Ghosh’s *The Last Lear*, and Jane Smiley’s *A Thousand Acres* (and its film version) are cases in point. But often the tragedy is travestied, often delightfully.

I hope to explore adaptations and derivatives of *Lear* that find humorous means of exploring the play. That humor is often straightforward, as when *The Simpsons* shows us Crusty the Clown in the title role<sup>4</sup> or when a production of the show becomes a plot element in the “King Lear Jet” episode of *Just Shoot Me*.<sup>5</sup> More often, though, the approach to using *King Lear* mixes tragedy and comedy, as in the third season of *Slings & Arrows*<sup>6</sup> or the films *A Bunch of Amateurs*,<sup>7</sup> *If I Were You*,<sup>8</sup> and *The Dresser*.<sup>9</sup> In an essay that examines these and other revisitations of *King Lear* and employs the Shakespeare adaptation criticism of Margaret Jane Kidnie and Sujata Iyengar, I hope to explore both what we learn from the adaptations and derivatives themselves and what a return to *King Lear* with them in mind reveals about Shakespeare’s greatest worst play.

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<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. R. A. Foakes (Arden Shakespeare, London: Routledge, 1997), 4.1.4–5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.1.27–28.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.1.29–30.

<sup>4</sup> *The Simpsons*, Season 11, episode 3, “Guess Who’s Coming to Criticize Dinner?” written by Al Jean, directed by Nancy Kruse, aired October 24, 1999, on Fox.

<sup>5</sup> “King Lear Jet,” by Danny Zuker, perf. Laura San Giacomo and George Segal, dir. Lee Shallat Chemel, *Just Shoot Me*. Season 2, episode 5, NBC, 11 November 1997 (Shout! Factory, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> “Vex Not His Ghost,” by Susan Coyne, dir. Peter Wellington, perf. Martha Burns, Paul Gross, Don McKellar, Mark McKinney, Oliver Dennis, Susan Coyne, Stephen Ouimette, Catherine Fitch, and William Hutt, *Slings and Arrows*, Season 3, episode 2, Movie Central: Canada, 31 July 2006 (Acorn Media, 2006–2007).

<sup>7</sup> *A Bunch of Amateurs*, dir. Andy Cadiff, perf. Burt Reynolds, Alexandra Weaver, Gemma Lawrence, Peter Gunn, Alistair Petrie, and Derek Jacobi (2008) (Entertainment Film Distributors, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> *If I Were You*, dir. Joan Carr-Wiggin, perf. Marcia Gay Harden, Leonor Watling, and Joseph Kell (2012) (Kino Lorber, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> *The Dresser*, dir. Peter Yates, perf. Albert Finney, Tom Courtenay, and Edward Fox (1983) (Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2004).

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Echoes of *The Tempest*, or Kott and the Betrayed Others

The paper, in its final version, is meant to approach the concept of fidelity from the perspective of translation studies, where post-translation has gained some traction as a concept explaining the relationship between the playtext and things done to it (to put it very bluntly) in terms of a spectrum and not either/or. I re-read Jan Kott (in Polish and in English); then look at the way Kott reads *The Tempest* and compare it fleetingly with the things done to *The Tempest* in translation and in performance in Poland, choosing those productions where Kott was actively involved, most importantly Krystyna Skuszanka's repeated directorial efforts to stage the play. What emerges in this interplay of repetitions is a *remediation* that will be discussed with reference to echoes as used by Derrida in his take on Narcissus and Echo that offers an alternative model of thinking about translation and engages notions alternative (supplement-like?) to the concept of fidelity. (For the sake of brevity I chose to play with the meaning of the word "betray").



Natalie Loper  
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*10 Things I Hate About You* and Redemptive Fidelity

Last year I was observing a freshman composition class, and for the attendance question the teacher asked students to name their favorite movie. In a class of nineteen, two different students named *10 Things I Hate About You*, which just turned twenty-five years old. I wanted to ask them why that movie, considering that it was made before they were born. I also wanted to know if they realized it was Shakespeare. But because I try to be as unobtrusive in other people's classes as possible, I said nothing. Luckily, the teacher asked one of them why that movie, and the student answered, "the nostalgia factor." Nostalgia for what? The 1990s? A movie that has been rebroadcast on network television and streamed on Netflix? The charisma of its stars, particularly Julia Stiles and (especially) the late Heath Ledger? Whatever the case, the movie has endured in popularity and holds up surprisingly well alongside other Shakespeare adaptations. My Shakespeare class this fall voted to read *The Taming of the Shrew* and watch *10 Things* as our final unit because about half of them love the film so much. Shakespeareans have tended to be critical of the film, mostly due to its appropriation of problematic content from its source play. I myself have had mixed feelings about the movie, changing my mind about it more than once. In this essay, I wish to reconsider the film and its popularity, arguing that although the taming plot results in a moment of character weakness and gaslighting, Ledger's Patrick—and the chemistry he shares with Stiles's Kat—redeem the film from its source text. While Shakespeare's play offers an ambiguous ending, in which the extent of Katherine's taming remains a source of discussion and consternation for scholars, the film presents a redemptive storyline. Kat's acrimony stems from her mother's abandonment and a painful encounter with Joey, the film's playboy villain; Patrick and Kat's sister Bianca help her to move past the hurt and to experience joy again. The film pays allegiance to Shakespeare with its character names, the witty banter between its stars, the marriage plot, and the Bianca subplot, but its departures from its source have helped it outshine other adaptations of the play and remain one of the most endearing and enduring film adaptations.

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### A Mouldy Tale Newly Set

When Shakespeare's plays were put on stage for the first time, they met forces of the market. This is true for any play, but particularly one like *Pericles*, which has signs of being hastily patched for the stage. That play was originally called a "mouldy tale" by Ben Jonson, and in the present moment Shakespeare's work in its entirety carries with it the mark of antiquity. In this paper I look at the Royal Shakespeare Company's recent staging of *Pericles*, a performance that adjusted the text in pivotal ways. My argument is that fidelity, in its widest sense, is one option in adaptation, and loyalty is another; both have their corresponding reversals: infidelity and disloyalty. This performance was more happily disloyal than unfaithful, and in the process it uncovered the play's original magic.

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“It belongs in clear Finnish words”:

Navigating Shakespearean Fidelity as Finnish Nation Building in J.F. Lagervall’s *Ruunulinna*

The first Finnish Shakespeare translation was J.F. Lagervall’s 1834 *Ruunulinna*. Roughly translating to “cloudcastle,” *Ruunulinna* takes its inspiration from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, although Lagervall makes clear in his Epilogue that his “translation” was loose at best: “*Macbeth* has long been understood in English by Shakespeare and repeated as if it had taken place in Scotland; but Walter Scott . . . denies it happened there. Where then would it have happened? In our own country” (88). As Sirku Aaltonen points out, the English source text of Shakespeare’s plays occupy a subordinate role in early Finnish renditions (4), and this is true of Lagervall’s translational approach. While the play itself follows the major events of *Macbeth*, Lagervall heavily draws from nuanced Finnish dialects and Old Karelian (a dialect comprised of Finnish and Russian) to create a work which aims to represent the Finnish people: “one must avoid foreign words” asserts Lagervall, “[Shakespeare] belongs in clear Finnish words” (88).

At the time of its publication, *Ruunulinna* was met with rave reviews from the local press, however over time these reviews changed. What was once viewed as a landmark accomplishment was now lacking due to Lagervall’s fast and loose interpretation of *Macbeth*. “If we call this little [play] representative,” writes one reviewer, “it has happened because it is “the only and best,” and as with any other representation, represents nothing.” The issue of adaptation, and ultimately, seeking (or rejecting) fidelity to Shakespeare is one that is pressing for Finnish intellectuals of the nineteenth century. Importantly, Finland did not achieve postcolonial nationhood from Russia until 1917. Finnish was not the language of government but rather of the illiterate poor (Coleman 48), and so Lagervall’s translation of *Macbeth* can be viewed both as a way to “confer legitimacy” on Finnish nation building (Litvin 4), and also create a Finnish national identity through adaptation. For Lagervall, adaptation is a way “vouch for the existence of a people” (Brisset 341). This paper proposes to read Lagervall’s *Ruunulinna* with “fidelity” in mind in order to explore shifting attitudes towards Finnish national culture in the nineteenth century.

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Hamlet's Lethal Weapons:  
The Power of Male Tears from Shakespeare to Zeffirelli

In December of 1990, Franco Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* was released to mixed reviews. Zeffirelli's choice to cast Mel Gibson, one of the world's most famous actors, to play the lead role in this major motion picture adaptation of Shakespeare's most famous tragedy was widely perceived as a liability due to Gibson's previous genre work. Gibson gained notoriety not as a serious dramatic actor, but as an 80s action star who played Max in the *Mad Max* trilogy and Officer Martin Riggs in the very successful *Lethal Weapon* franchise.

In my attempt to rethink fidelity in relationship to Zeffirelli's adaptation of *Hamlet*, my essay focuses on two critiques of the film: 1) that *Lethal Weapon*, which Zeffirelli invoked in justifying his casting of Gibson, is an inappropriate paratext for *Hamlet* and, 2) that Gibson is an actor whose modes of performance and values do not register or count as "Shakespearean" enough. Here, I draw upon Anna Blackwell's study of "Shakespearean celebrity," where the descriptor "Shakespearean" implies conformity or fidelity to a specific mode of performance, set of values, or physical embodiment that "evades definition even as it wields considerable cachet" (4).

In my essay, I argue that a paratextual reading of *Lethal Weapon* reveals how Gibson's performance of grief, or male tears, are likewise Hamlet's lethal weapons. The celebrity, filmography, and physical body that marks Gibson as un-Shakespearean distracts from the arguably faithful representation of powerful male grief that cuts across the centuries. Just like Gibson's Riggs, Hamlet's distinctly male grief becomes impetus for audience empathy as well as justification for immeasurable violence against the self and others.

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“A Walking Shadow”:  
Race Fidelity and White Guilt in *Macbeth*, *Breaking Bad*, and *Barry*

My analysis of the white Shakespearean protagonists of HBO’s *Barry* (2018–2023) and its primary televisual model, AMC’s *Breaking Bad* (2008–2013), proceeds from the premise that all appropriations of Shakespeare’s plays manifest some degree of what I call *race fidelity*: adherence to and reproduction of racializing elements in the Shakespearean source text. In this way I build upon Christy Desmet’s concern with the ethics of fidelity, or “fealty” – “an acceptance of responsibility for the bond that binds disparate narratives.” As L. Monique Pittman points out, such responsibility entails the obligation to confront the racist structures present in Shakespearean texts and so often perpetuated in acts of appropriation.

Both *Breaking Bad* and *Barry* have inspired comparisons to *Macbeth*, with each featuring a white male antihero driven by personal ambition and cultural prescriptions of race and gender. Drawing on David Sterling Brown’s concept of Shakespeare’s “white others,” I examine key scenes in each series in which the protagonists transition from proper whiteness to white otherness through acts of racially coded violence. Counterintuitively, race fidelity proves stronger in the appropriation in which Shakespeare’s presence is less explicit. *Breaking Bad*’s considerable awareness of race – its protagonist, after all, is a high school chemistry teacher turned meth kingpin named Walter *White* – fails to extend to its appropriations of Shakespeare, which, by virtue of their unmarked nature, reinforce white privilege. In contrast, *Barry* explicitly invokes *Macbeth*, having its title character – a disillusioned hitman seeking legitimacy as an actor – perform scenes from the play on stage.

This self-conscious engagement enables *Barry* to interrogate race in *Breaking Bad* and *Macbeth* alike, presenting whiteness as a dynamic interplay between concealing and exposing the “stain” of racial guilt. By juxtaposing Shakespeare’s elusiveness in *Breaking Bad* with its overt presence in *Barry*, I consider how the latter may remediate the racist fidelity inherent in its forerunner, even as it still risks amplifying the insidious power of whiteness.

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### Fidelity as a Flaw / The Burden of Shakespeare

The word “faithful” brims with positive connotations; when used to valorize an adaptation (particularly one from literature to a popular medium, such as film) it is given as the utmost accolade. For the past decades, critics such as Robert Stam or Thomas Leitch have specifically addressed the issues with fidelity as a guiding criterion for categorizing adaptations. Stam asked “Fidelity to what?”, while Leitch decried fidelity stating that “adaptations will always reveal their sources’ superiority because, whatever their faults, the source texts will always be better at being themselves” (161).

Fidelity as a concept brings with it a series of important questions (regarding the “essence” of a text, or the nature of the act of adapting, or what the purpose of the adapted text is). But what about infidelity? What about being explicitly “unfaithful” to the originating text? Shakespeare offers us the unique opportunity of investigating how new versions can gain by steering away from (rather than remaining close to) their originating texts. Global screen Shakespeares allow us to compare adaptation strategies—“freer” international tradaptations to “faithful” English-language versions. Using particularly Bollywood Shakespeares (specifically the films of Vishal Bhardwaj and Sanjay Leela Bhansali) I will make the case of how the oft-maligned infidelity to the text produces films that are full of creative force that, paradoxically, illuminate latent aspects of the Shakespearean plays by steering far away from the originating texts, unburdening themselves from Shakespeare’s constraining language.