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## Shakespearean Constellations

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## Introduction

All criticism can be theorized as the creation of a constellation. As critics, we draw connections or trace ties between discrete objects of study, for the purpose of creating a broader image, or argument.<sup>1</sup> The metaphor of a constellation is particularly appropriate given the constructed nature of constellations: though the elements each exist individually, the images are entirely of our own creation. *Shakespearean Constellations* reflects my own interests and critical lines of inquiry surrounding Shakespeare, collaboration, and adaptation. There is an infinite variety of Shakespearean constellations, depending on what elements we choose to include and what image we hope to appear. Not only does the concept of a constellation help to theorize the critical work I am undertaking here, choosing distinct entry points and foci to explore the shaping of Shakespeare's legacy over time, but is deeply connected to the argument of this thesis, that we need to shift our understanding of "Shakespeare" to understand the influence of these works to be the result of a collaborative effort, rather than an individual genius. By changing our perspective of Shakespeare to a broader, collaborative construct instead of one brightly-shining star, we can begin to notice the many agents who have participated in carrying Shakespeare's works forward through the past 400 years.

The goal of this thesis is to theorize Shakespeare's legacy as a collaborative constellation that is constantly evolving and will continue to do so as new ideas and connections are created, shifting what "Shakespeare" is and means for different people, cultures, and contexts. In other words, this study explores how different agents—critics, adaptors, collaborators—influence our understanding of Shakespeare. I believe the longevity of his works is intrinsically tied to the ways in which people make Shakespeare relevant for their times and cultures, in which case

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<sup>1</sup> "Criticism is the art of knowing the hidden roads that go from poem to poem" (Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, 96).

analyzing the adaptation and collaboration inherent in these works may help define Shakespeare's genius, rather than diminish it. Each of these agents adds to Shakespeare's legacy through two crucial processes: collaboration with the past and with the present. As adaptors, Shakespeare and those after him are engaging with earlier authors and artists—this is collaboration with the past. Yet each adaptor must then connect the inherited text to their new environment, which results in collaboration with their own context, purposes, and agents in the present moment. In this way, I am attempting to make our language less about conflict: adaptors as collaborators, not creative opponents; not page *versus* stage, but page, stage, and screen all present as elements within Shakespeare's constellation.<sup>2</sup>

Before we dive in, I need to define a few of the most central terms I will be using throughout this thesis. The first is “constellation.” I propose this image of individual stars collaboratively constructing a broader picture as a way of theorizing Shakespeare's shifting cultural purpose and presence over time and the many influences at work in this legacy. I take my critical bearings on this term from Walter Benjamin. Benjamin uses the analogy of a constellation in different ways throughout his writings, but the defining characteristics remain the same: a constellation is a larger image or idea that is created and defined by its internal elements. Benjamin uses the constellation in his efforts to define “ideas” from a philosophical perspective in the Epistemo-Critical Prologue to *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* and in his reconstruction of history as a malleable concept, both of which I find to be applicable and valuable in my analysis of Shakespeare's legacy. Ideas, as “timeless constellations,” are created by the individual elements or objects that exist within this larger, intangible product: “The set of concepts which assist in

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<sup>2</sup> The concept of haunting is also remarkably prevalent throughout Shakespearean criticism. This language may provide another lens through which to view collaboration and Shakespeare's legacy, as a haunting implies dual presences, atemporality, and transgressing boundaries and barriers.

the representation of an idea lend it actuality as such a configuration” (Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 34). In this thesis, “Shakespeare” operates as the idea, and it is the sources for, readings, and depictions of his texts that act as the concepts, creating a “configuration” or “constellation” that is Shakespeare’s legacy. In other words, “Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars” (34). While stars, or objects, retain a sense of individuality and can be studied on their own, ideas are constructed out of these individual aspects and it is only through pulling these smaller units together that we can begin to see or project the larger image. In this instance, Benjamin uses the constellation metaphor to explain that language cannot accurately describe general terms, as ideas are far greater and more obscure than language can represent. It is my argument that Shakespeare does not produce the sum of the objects, or stars, within his own constellation alone, but that the idea of “Shakespeare” is influenced by the many other stars at work within this legacy, all the sources, criticism, and adaptations that shift how we understand “Shakespeare” today.

In Benjamin’s essay “On the Concept of History,” he challenges historical materialism and the concept that history is static in a way that elides my interests in the constellation and collaboration between the past and present. “History is the subject of a construction whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled full by now-time” (Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” 395). While for Benjamin, his work relating to the constellation is about reframing how we understand history and temporality, I believe we must also foreground the agents creating this history. In other words, if history for Benjamin is a mixing of the past and present, then the next step is to consider how we influence the history we tell—in this case Shakespeare and his legacy—as much as it influences us. An easier way of saying this might be to adopt Diana Henderson formulation of “collaborating with the past” (Henderson, 11), to better understand our

relationship to history and our artistic ancestors as one that is constantly being redefined and renegotiated, as we will discuss in more detail below. Benjamin criticizes the historical materialist tendency to view the past as concrete:

Universal history has no theoretical armature. Its procedure is additive: it musters a mass of data to fill the homogeneous, empty time. Materialist historiography, on the other hand, is based on a constructive principle. Thinking involves not only the movement of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly comes to a stop in a constellation saturated with tensions, it gives that constellation a shock, by which thinking is crystallized as a monad. The historical materialist approaches a historical object only where it confronts him as a monad. (396)

What Benjamin is encouraging—and what I hope to reflect here—is rather a reading of history as flexible, influenced and influencing, which connects to the concept of collaborating with the past and the influence of our ancestors.<sup>3</sup> We cannot afford to let “Shakespeare” become crystallized—this legacy is too saturated with productive tensions to not view it as a malleable and continuously forming construct. Criticism of Benjamin frequently picks up on his remarkable understanding of how the past and the present interpenetrate each other, which is invaluable in terms of this project. In their introduction to *Constellations of a Contemporary Romanticism*, Jacques Khalip and Forest Pyle offer a fantastic description of the historical view Benjamin encourages as a “two-way street.”

According to Benjamin, any ‘document of culture’ from any historical epoch may be redeemed in the constellations that crystallize between past and present... The task of the critic, according to Benjamin, is to make good on the terms of that agreement and, in the process, to conjure something mutually illuminating in the two-way street of past and present. (Khalip and Pyle, 1)

I believe the phrase “mutually illuminating” is vitally important in this thesis and any exploration of Shakespeare and his adaptations, and is what the image of a constellation enables us to take into consideration. The “idea” of Shakespeare—the encompassing, shifting concept—is defined

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<sup>3</sup> I am fascinated by how the concept of the constellation mixes historicism with atemporality, which may be a tension that the notion of haunting might help us to explore in future study.

by what elements we consider to be present within this image, while the broader perspective we apply to Shakespeare will undeniably influence how we read and understand these unique objects or elements.

Though we have already begun to explore collaboration with the past in terms of a historical perspective, there has been some invaluable criticism on this topic that I would like to introduce as a groundwork for the kind of collaborations I will be emphasizing throughout the following chapters. Collaboration itself is a vast concept, particularly when we consider how many people are needed in a theatrical or cinematic performance. Each of the following sections will consider a different lens of collaboration in the creation and expansion of Shakespeare's legacy. The first section focuses on how a specific text was made and Shakespeare's role as a collaborator, the second on critics exploring how a text is read collaboratively and in a new environment, and finally on how film adaptations depict these texts in new contexts. Henderson provides a remarkably visual description of how critics and adaptors "remake" Shakespeare, as I take up in the second and third sections of this thesis. "Using his plays as a kaleidoscope, modern artists shake up Shakespeare, cutting his glassy essence to bits in order to create newly evocative patterns. They turn back to Shakespeare in order to remake him in our own image—often with spectacular results. But they also teach us to see that image and the past anew" (Henderson, 2). My formulation is a little different. There is a transience to Henderson's kaleidoscope image, that as soon as you shake it again the image disappears. Yet I believe the remaking of images done by adaptors has the potential to make lasting impacts—each new adaptation or critical reading of a Shakespearean texts adds another star to the constellation, and the larger image is shifted.

In addition to the collaboration implied in a constellation where new depictions have the ability to influence Shakespeare's legacy, all adaptations are inherently collaborative as works

that embody the meeting of multiple artistic visions. Part of the complexities of adaptations—particularly Shakespearean adaptations—lies in the fact that the dual authorities of author and adaptor are inevitably and emphatically present. I am going to focus on Henderson’s “collaborating with the past” (Henderson, 11) in the creation of new texts, while a consideration of present collaboration will help to illustrate how adapted texts are placed in new environments. In a way, I am expanding on T. S. Eliot’s influential argument challenging the concept of the “individual talent,” that poets are not defined in isolation but rather in relation to the “dead poets.” “No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone” (Eliot, 44). While this formulation may be mapped onto the collaboration between contemporaneous artists, Eliot is actually addressing the relationship between an artist and the “dead poets.” Eliot argues that when we look beyond our constant search for the individuality of a creator reflected in their art, we find the places “in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously” (43). Without using the term “collaboration,” Eliot is referring to precisely the same exchange of ideas in the creation of a new adaptation or artwork that I believe is at the heart of the Shakespearean constellation. The “poets” of this study—the Romantic critics discussed in the second section and the adaptors of the *Hamlet* films I will analyze in part three—are undoubtedly engaging with or making use of Shakespeare, whether through his language or cultural capital, in a way that defines their products through the relation of artist and predecessor. In addition, “No author is more stubborn [than Shakespeare]...in pushing back against the idea that creative genius is discoverable in the clear distance between an individual artist and his influential predecessors or historical context” (Semenza, 363). It is crucial to remember that Shakespeare himself was a collaborator as well as an adaptor, which is what we will explore in the first section of this thesis, and the adaptive work present in the production of the *King Lear* text.



In contrast to Eliot's efforts to define the relationship between present poet and past ancestor as constructive, both W. J. Bate and Harold Bloom offer lengthy analyses of the agonistic burdens and anxieties they see weighing on the shoulders of poets from the eighteenth century forward. "Whatever he may say, or not say, about his predecessors," according to Bate, "the poet from Dryden to Eliot has been unavoidably aware of them, and never so much as when he has tried to establish a difference" (Bate, *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet*, 4). Whether Bate and Bloom are intentionally responding to Eliot or not, clearly Eliot had his finger on the pulse of an anxiety about influence that has defined our understanding of originality since the eighteenth century. Both Bate and Bloom are exploring tensions and pressures they see in artists attempting to differentiate themselves from those who came before, and offer formulations and studies that depict this relationship as fundamentally agonistic. In a sense, both of these critics may offer a counter example to collaboration with the past. They are far more concerned with a contested battle-ground view between artists and ancestors than the collaboration I believe is a present and defining characteristic of Shakespeare's legacy. Rather than focusing on the "nagging apprehension" of how a poet is unable to attain "the scope and power of the earlier poetry that he so deeply admires" (Bate, *English Poet*, 9), I consider how adaptors and critics engage Shakespeare directly, using him and shifting him based on their own needs.

Unlike Eliot's intentional efforts to move us away from needing to define new works in terms of difference, Bate presents the argument that "the very existence of a past creates the necessity for difference" (31). Similarly, in Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*, he uses terms such as "swerve," "homage," and "wrestling with the past" in an effort to describe the "poetic influence, or the story of intra-poetic relationships" as "immense anxieties of indebtedness" (Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, 5). Shakespeare does not feature in Bloom's study, as Bloom

identifies him as an author who came before what Bloom calls the “anxiety of influence, each poet’s fear that no proper work remains for him to perform” (Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence*, 148).<sup>4</sup> He declares his concern to be “only with strong poets, major figures with the persistence to wrestle with their strong precursors, even to the death. Weaker talents idealize; figures of capable imagination appropriate for themselves” (5). I would argue that the agents I am considering here (including Shakespeare) all qualify as strong poets, as though there are elements of bardolatry inherent in many if not all of the later “poets,” they undeniably “appropriate for themselves,” which I consider to be one of the fundamental elements of a successful adaptation. Yet for Bloom, this repetition with variation, the presence of the unique voice of the adaptor, is once again defined in the most negative way possible:

*Poetic Influence—when it involves two strong, authentic poets,—always proceeds by a misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misrepresentation. The history of fruitful poetic influence, which is to say the main tradition of Western poetry since the Renaissance, is a history of anxiety and self-saving caricature, or distortion, of perverse, wilful revisionism without which modern poetry as such could not exist. (Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence*, 30)*<sup>5</sup>

Rather than as a “misrepresentation” and a “perverse...revisionism,” Eliot and Henderson’s understanding of collaboration with the past is a far more constructive and valuable way of theorizing a Shakespearean constellation.

Eliot’s essay reminds us that no artwork is created in a vacuum, whether we choose to focus on the collaboration between contemporary artists or their “ancestors.” Henderson labels adaptors “the bearers of Shakespeare,” and immediately establishes a two-way exchange of

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<sup>4</sup> Sharing Bloom’s perspective and in contrast to the collaborative view of Shakespeare I encourage here, Alexander Pope once claimed, “if ever there was any author who deserved the name of an *Original*, it was Shakespeare. Homer himself drew not his art so immediately from the fountains of Nature” (qtd. Bate, *English Poet*, 44). Bloom’s justification for excluding Shakespeare is discussed on pg. 11 of *The Anxiety of Influence*.

<sup>5</sup> “Every young man’s heart...is a graveyard in which are inscribed the names of a thousand dead artists but whose only actual denizens are a few mighty, often antagonistic, ghosts...The poet...is haunted by a voice with which words must be harmonized” (Malraux qtd. Bloom, 26). Haunting is a theme that pervades all of these discussions, but I believe the concept of harmonization once again returns us to collaboration.

meaning, as the transportation of the plays “helped transform both him [Shakespeare] and it [modern Anglo-American culture]” (Henderson, 1). This formulation recalls Benjamin’s two-way street, and acknowledges the historical flexibility he encourages in “On the Concept of History,” which contrasts starkly with Bloom and Bate’s conflict-centric understanding of poetic influence. Henderson provides a counter to the concept of a progression in a linear direction, saying, “the point is not that later artists have altered a static object” because the plays were never stable in the first place (11). For Henderson, collaboration “lies at the heart of the artistic process, both modern and early modern, more accurately capturing the practice of Shakespeare and his inheritors than does the notion of isolated genius” (2). This is not the last time Henderson refers to the Eliot essay; later she uses his language of the “individual talent” in her own distinction between contemporary (Shakespeare and his early modern setting) and timeless collaboration (adaptors today engaging with Shakespeare). Eliot reminds us that for all artists the relationship to their ancestors creates meaning, but he is not oblivious to the other side of the coin: “the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past” (Eliot, 45). It is the first half of this formulation that Courtney Lehmann zeroes in on, lingering on the same concept that Henderson used of the inheritor or inheritance to reconceptualize how the ancestor is equally defined by the descendent. Lehmann chooses the word “remains” to define what we have of Shakespeare today, as it “impl[ies] a peculiar inheritance, one that is both permanent and unfinished” (Lehmann, 234). “[F]or, as Derrida reminds us, inheritance is not about the passive reception of a gift; rather, it is about the active construction of a legacy”—precisely how I encourage our analysis of Shakespeare’s legacy as constellation, and the importance of adaptation in constructing this constellation (234). I believe it is this negotiation between source and adaptor, what Henderson calls “Shakespeare’s collective construction in

time,” that brings home the need for theories emphasizing the importance of collaboration, especially for adaptations (Henderson, 4).

Henderson’s formulations are, in general, somewhat different from my own, due in large part due to our differing emphases. While for Henderson the focus is on how collaboration informs our understanding of Shakespeare’s setting, I argue we need to introduce collaboration into our understanding of Shakespeare’s *legacy*. That being said, there are many ways in which our endeavors align. For instance, it is important to acknowledge here that my focus in this thesis is not on William Shakespeare the historical figure, but rather what “Shakespeare” has come to mean over time. As Henderson would say, “a man died and ‘Shakespeare’ lived on and kept growing, becoming, as centuries passed, the bearer of English history, an encyclopedia of phrases, a source of profound inspiration, and fodder for many professions” (2).<sup>6</sup> Henderson also usefully incorporates key terms into her analysis that are central to my own, as we can see in her discussion of legacies and reshaping meanings: “Better to struggle...with the legacies of a troublesome history; better to imagine, as have filmmakers and Shakespeare himself, selective glimpses of a past that art can and cannot represent, even as we indubitably reshape its meaning” (1-2). It is vital to remember the agency of the artists undertaking their adaptive and critical work, particularly when these agents have so much influence on Shakespeare’s constellation: “later artists reshape our perceptions of what came before, with each ‘individual talent’ (in the words of Eliot’s famous essay) affecting our reception of the entire ‘tradition.’” (11). Jonathan Bate also explores Shakespeare’s influence as extending beyond the historical figure, describing

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<sup>6</sup> “To some, this notion of collaborating with a dead man may still seem odd, but we speak of the literary present tense for a reason: the textual traces, oral traditions, and now screen images that adhere to ‘Shakespeare’ keep him alive and accessible, and it is in this sense that theatrical artists often speak of collaboration” (Henderson, 8). Perhaps one way of thinking about collaborating with the past is that each new adaptor or critic creates the “Shakespeare” with which they are working.

his genius in terms of an afterlife and providing a useful introduction to my reasoning behind choosing the three periods of early modern, Romantic, and the twentieth century to focus on.

For by “Shakespeare” we mean not an individual, but a body of work, and that body was...shaped by many individuals—by the dramatist’s education and his precursors, by the actors of his company, but the audience without whom no play can be completed. Furthermore, because of what happened in the eighteenth century, the meaning of “Shakespeare” cannot be restricted to William Shakespeare’s lifetime: it also has to embrace his afterlife as the “presiding genius” of later cultures. His friend Jonson claimed that he was “Not of an age, but for all time”. The eighteenth-century elevation of him to the very image of creative genius fulfilled this prophecy. It allowed his communality to extend to his influence on the lives of subsequent readers, writers, and playgoers. (Bate, *Genius of Shakespeare*, 185)

Though Bate forgets to include adaptors on his list of those impacted by Shakespeare’s “afterlife,” I believe his summary lays a useful groundwork for the importance of studying these three periods as defining moments within the establishment and development of Shakespeare’s legacy.

In the pages to follow, I will explore the roles of adaptation and collaboration in the creation of Shakespeare’s text, criticism in the Romantic period, and depictions of these texts in the more recent medium of film. In this way, we will cross temporal and textual boundaries to establish a Shakespearean constellation that is defined by collaboration with both the past and the present. The first chapter will consider Shakespeare himself as an adaptor, rather than an “individual talent.” Constellation and collaboration therefore begin at the source, and theorizing “Shakespeare” begins in this period. I will be focusing on the creation of *King Lear*, due to its long history of retellings. The next essential point in the construction of “Shakespeare” is the Romantic period: as Bate mentions elsewhere, “The rise of Romanticism and the growth of Shakespeare idolatry are parallel phenomena” (Bate, *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination*, 6). As the period in which literary analysis as we have come to know it was established, “the Romantic period also occupies a significant position in the transmission of

Shakespeare's text, the construction of the canon of his works, and the assumptions about authorship underlying that canon's construction" (Fuller, 5). In my own consideration of this period, I will focus most on Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Hamlet* criticism. As Bate says, "Coleridge's solitary Romantic genius is the inheritor of Hamlet" (Bate, *Genius of Shakespeare*, 184). Not only was Hamlet as both play and character crucial to Coleridge's understanding of Shakespeare, his own identity as a thinker, and philosophical speculation, but it is undeniably vital to discuss Hamlet's role in Shakespeare's legacy. An element intrinsically tied to "Shakespeare" and the cultural capital of this term, "Hamlet has become a universal dramatic character because he is an icon of human consciousness" (257). Though a tale with a long history before Shakespeare, it is to his play that most audiences return, reading within it a universality of the human experience. "If there is a key to Hamlet, it is the fact that so many people have tried to find a key. Generation upon generation of new interpreters—directors, actors, readers, critics—feel compelled to have their say about the mystery. That is what keeps Hamlet alive. More than any other work of Western literature, the Prince's play is both iconic and elusive" (265). It is because of this that I choose to not leave Hamlet behind after my discussion of the Romantic period but continue to examine cinematic adaptations of this play in the twentieth century, as well. This period introduces film, a new medium for depicting Shakespeare as well as a new set of adaptors and "authorities." In this section, I will be exploring the relationship between cinematic auteurs and Shakespeare, attempting to resituate collaboration at the heart of a typically fraught power dynamic. To do so, we will continue to analyze collaboration with both past and present as we will have seen since the first section on the early modern period. With a focus on the language of the texts, I present Shakespeare himself, Romantic critics responsible for establishing Shakespearean criticism as we practice it today (Coleridge, Hazlitt, Schlegel),

and film adaptors returning to Shakespeare in times of significant cultural upheaval (Nielsen, Olivier) as artists and thinkers collaborating with their pasts and presents to adapt Shakespeare into new settings. This collaborative (re)theorization will be more work—certainly not as easy as chalking up Shakespeare’s legacy to his inherent genius—but it will help us to think about the Shakespeare phenomenon constructively and collectively.

## Shakespeare as Collaborator

Shakespeare fundamentally challenges the notion of an individual genius or the process of solitary creation as an author himself in the early modern period. Through his works, Shakespeare embodies Eliot's understanding of engaging with the "dead poets": while for later critics and adaptors Shakespeare is the dead poet with whom they collaborate, Shakespeare was just as much of an adaptor and textual collaborator himself. By diving into Shakespeare's *King Lear*, we will be able to trace his collaboration with both the past and his present, through the manipulation of source texts and an understanding of his repertory context. As Henderson reminds us, "Even more overtly than in the case of the nondramatic poet, a playwright's art comes to us filtered and reshaped by the productions, performance traditions, and editions that try to recapture evanescent events" (Henderson, 11). Therefore, distancing Shakespeare from his inherently social environment and mode of production limits our understanding of the plays and Shakespeare as an author. My hope is to bring contextual analyses to an understanding of the text itself, not just considering collaboration in the broader scheme of theatrical production but at the level of the words, as well. I will attempt to restructure our conceptualization of Shakespeare not as what Eliot would refer to as an "individual talent," but a collaborator whose works are tied to the influence of many.

Shakespeare was far from the first to tell the story of King Lear and his three daughters. In fact, it is remarkably difficult to pin down an "original" version, and Shakespeare, like many earlier writers, had his hand in revising the tale. Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* from 1135 offers one of the earliest written versions of the Leir story with all the recognizable features—the "love-test," the two elder sisters, the reunion of the youngest and best loved daughter with the father at the end. Raphael Holinshed includes this story in his chronicles



of the history of Britain published in 1577 (though Shakespeare likely would have used the 1587 reprint), and the story entered theatrical repertory in the 1590s as something of a historical-comedy performed by the Queen's Men.<sup>7</sup> Kenneth Muir has already provided a detailed overview of Shakespeare's sources, so I am going to focus on how Shakespeare knits a few main texts together—Holinshed's *Chronicles*, the *Leir* play of the 1590s, and Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* (1580). Jonathan Bate provides useful context for many of the themes we will trace through Shakespeare's adaptation of these three sources:

Grammar school techniques of composition, and in particular the emphasis on rhetorical elaboration or copiousness, stayed with Shakespeare throughout his career. He learnt in school to read a 'source' and embellish it, expand upon it; sometimes he would have to turn prose into verse. This is exactly how he worked as a playwright. He would take a history book—the English chronicles of Holinshed, the classical lives of Plutarch—and turn passages of it into a history play. He would take a prose romance or a novella and turn it into a comedy or a tragedy...Or he would simply borrow the plot of an old play from the existing repertoire—*The True Chronicle History of King Leir* or *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*—and make it his own by greatly complicating it. (Bate, *Genius of Shakespeare*, 10)

We will explore ways in which Shakespeare takes inspiration from passing phrases or comments, stitches sources together, and “greatly complicat[es]” the *Leir* story. In this way, I emphasize Shakespeare's work as an adaptor to offer a more wholistic understanding of the work he was doing in the early modern period. Bate explains how Shakespeare's adaptive work would have been viewed as highly successful to his contemporary audience: “Our modern conception of genius makes creativity synonymous with originality...But to the Elizabethans, this procedure would have been admirable, not reprehensible. For them, there was no higher mark of artistic excellence than what they called the *lively turning* of familiar material,” and that “The genius is in the embellishment” (12). Therefore, while the prevalence of this story suggests that an early

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<sup>7</sup> Though there is still some question over the authorship of *The True Chronicle History of King Leir, and His Three Daughters, Gonorill, Ragan, and Cordella*, it has been commonly attributed to Robert Greene, a playwright for the Queen's Men and he of the “upstart crow” publication.

modern audience would have been familiar with Lear's plight, I will explore the ways in which Shakespeare synthesizes and manipulates earlier materials to create an emphatically new product, that is nevertheless closely tied to both his sources and theatrical context.

Jeffrey Masten offers an analysis of early modern play text authorship as "pre-anonymous," that texts were created by multiple authors and in a collaborative environment without the crediting of a single author.<sup>8</sup> "In a scholarly field dominated by the singular figure of Shakespeare, it is easily forgotten that collaboration was the Renaissance English theatre's dominant mode of textual production" (Masten, 14). It is important in this analysis to acknowledge the inherently collaborative nature of the early modern theater. As Masten proceeds to explain,

In a broader sense, theatrical production was itself a sustained collaboration... That is, the construction of meaning by a theatrical company was polyvocal—often beginning with a collaborative manuscript, which was then revised, cut, rearranged, and augmented by book-holders, copyists, and other writers, elaborated and improvised by actors in performance, accompanied by music and songs that may or may not have originated in a completely different context. (Masten, 14)

Even before we consider influences on our understanding of Shakespeare throughout the intervening 400 years since he lived, defining Shakespeare as an individual talent (in Eliot's sense of the term) seems to be an erroneous and narrow view of the creation of these texts. In Tom Rutter's overview of contemporary criticism in repertory studies, he expands a collaborative analysis approach to include a remarkable array of participants and influences:

Repertory studies can broadly be defined as an approach to the study of drama that takes the acting company—rather than, say, the individual dramatist or play—as the subject of its enquiry... The playwright is considered alongside other contributors to a company's dramatic output, such as actors, sharers, playhouse owners (and the buildings themselves), audiences and patrons, whereas the play itself is understood both as the company's basic commodity and as one of many plays that together constituted its repertory. (Rutter, 336)

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<sup>8</sup> "... 'pre-anonymous'—that is, 'anonymous' only in a sense that existed before the word itself emerged with the author to describe their condition" (Masten, 13).

Though many of the elements Rutter identifies as contributing to the creation of a theatrical performance fall beyond the purview of my analysis here, it is valuable to note that the reconceptualization of Shakespeare as a collaborator is already happening. It is now my goal to bring this kind of contextual analysis into literary studies as we return to the text itself.

Kenneth Muir offers the possibility that Shakespeare's "original inspiration" for writing *King Lear* "came not from the Lear story at all but from Sidney's story of the Paphlagonian King in *Arcadia*" (Muir, 141).<sup>9</sup> Though this offers a compelling reversal of expectations, I am going to begin my analysis of *King Lear* with Holinshed's *Chronicles*, to establish what is equally familiar and surprising in Shakespeare's adaptation. One of the most noticeable shifts in Shakespeare's text is in its emphatically tragic nature. The "historical" versions of the King Lear tale from Geoffrey of Monmouth and Holinshed include both Lear and Cordeilla's deaths, but Shakespeare drastically alters the timing of their fateful ends. In these sources, Lear and Cordeilla are reunited and successful in their war against Goneril, Regan, and the husbands. Lear reigns peacefully for a few more years before dying, leaving Cordeilla as queen. In Holinshed's *Chronicles*, Cordeilla's death comes in the next chapter; after she has reigned for some time, she is imprisoned by her nephews where, "being a woman of a manlie courage, and despairing to recouer libertie, there she slue herself" (Holinshed, 448).<sup>10</sup> Though Geoffrey introduced this "unhappy sequel" (Perrett, 27), it is omitted from the Lear play from the 1590s, proving that Shakespeare was working from multiple sources for his own play in 1608. Not only does Shakespeare make use of elements from different versions of the Lear material, but as Muir

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<sup>9</sup> Muir also argues there are possible historical allusions built into the text, with the case of Sir Brian Annesley in 1603 mirroring the betrayal of Lear's older daughters and the fidelity of the youngest.

<sup>10</sup> I am using the 1808 reprint of Holinshed's *Chronicles*, but Shakespeare most likely would have used the 1587 second edition, as previously mentioned.

notices, he incorporates new plotlines and tensions from other sources. In the section to follow, I will dive deeply into a consideration of Shakespeare's marriage of Holinshed's *Chronicles* and Sidney's *Arcadia* for the explicit purpose of mirroring the Lear and Gloucester storylines.

Holinshed is possibly the most cited source as inspiration for Shakespeare's *Lear*.<sup>11</sup> This is neither surprising nor far-fetched, considering the influence of the *Chronicles* across his history plays, *Macbeth*, and even *Cymbeline*. Beyond the more general plot points regarding the betrayal of Lear's eldest daughters, looking for crucial language that may have encouraged elements of Shakespeare's play offers a fascinating glimpse into Shakespeare's adaptation of minutiae. For instance, though no material presents Lear's degenerative loss of sanity as Shakespeare does, it is possible to see the source of this characteristic in a passing phrase in Holinshed: "When this Leir therefore was come to great yeres, & began to waxe vnweldie through age he thought to vnderstand the affections of his daughters towards him, and preferre hir whome he best loued, to the succession ouer the kingdome" (Holinshed, 447). I suggest this "unwieldiness" may have been the initial inspiration for Lear's madness, which becomes a major theme in Shakespeare's play, reflected back upon Lear through the Fool and Edgar/Poor Tom.<sup>12</sup>

While certainly not repeating Holinshed's dialogue word for word, Shakespeare's reference to specific language within the love-test furthers this consideration of an incredibly

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Adger Law provides an analysis of how Holinshed relied on both Fabian's *New Chronicles of England and France* as well as *The Brut, of the Chronicles of England* (no known author) in addition to Geoffrey of Monmouth, as certain elements of the story are added and adopted across sources. One of the more useful examples is the Gallia storyline (introduced in Brut) that *Leir* keeps but Shakespeare removes. In a surprising claim, Law argues that Holinshed should not "to be regarded as in any wise a source of [Shakespeare's] tragedy" (Law, 50). Claiming that Shakespeare doesn't pay as much attention to Cordelia as in the Holinshed and the 1590s play (which used Holinshed exclusively)—an argument I would dispute given Cordelia's asides and frequent reference throughout Shakespeare's play—Law posits the focus of *Lear* to be on the suffering of the titular character as opposed to the familial emphasis in Holinshed's version. I would argue, rather, that while Lear's suffering is certainly at the center of this play, Shakespeare's adaptation is far more about family, filial obligation and betrayal, forgiveness and the bonds of blood, than the emphasis Holinshed places on succession or the focus Greene gives to marriage may suggest.

<sup>12</sup> Mad scenes are particularly common in Shakespeare's canon, and may relate to his collaboration with specific actors. Richard Burbage was particularly well-known for his acting of mad-scenes in Shakespeare's plays.

close knowledge of his sources. In the *Chronicles*, the responses of the flattering children are presented as follows:

Wherevpon he [Leir] first asked Gonorilla the eldest, how she loued him: who calling hir gods to record,<sup>13</sup> protested that she ‘loued him more than hir owne life, which by right and reason should be most deere vnto hir. With which answer the father being well pleased, turned to the second and demanded of hir how well she loued him: who answered (confirming hir saiengs with great othes) that she loued him more than toong could expresse, and farre aboue all other creatures of the world.’ (Holinshed, 447)

Shakespeare does not divide Goneril and Regan’s responses so simply, between “more than life” and “more than words,” but both ideas feature in his text. Goneril begins her answer with, “Sir, I love you more than word can wield the matter” (1.1.60), and includes the crucial phrase, “No less than life” (1.1.64). Regan follows, and while Goneril used her answer about “more than toong could expresse,” Regan reminds us of the second half of Holinshed’s answer: “I am made of that self mettle as my sister / ...Only she comes too short...I am alone felicitate / In your dear Highness’ love” (1.1.76-84). While neither is a direct quotation of the Holinshed, both answers reference this source material in specific language and tone, as each sister attempts to outdo the other. Cordelia, on the other hand, seems to be a creature almost entirely of Shakespeare’s own devising. In both the Holinshed and *Leir* materials, she speaks her mind; while her answer is not satisfactory to Leir, it is significantly more verbose than Shakespeare’s resounding “Nothing” (1.1.98).

While for Polonius brevity is the soul of wit, in *Lear* brevity seems to further emphasize tragic proclamations. Though contrasting with Cordelia’s “Nothing” in terms of where our allegiance lies, a similar instance of Shakespeare revising the Holinshed source material to pack a more significant emotional punch occurs in the elder daughters’ rejection of Lear’s servants

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<sup>13</sup> I am interested in the reference to “calling hir gods to record” (Holinshed, 447), as this will feature prominently throughout Shakespeare’s text, perfectly summarized by Kent’s “Thou swear’st thy gods in vain” (1.1.184).

and symbols of state. After being shunted back and forth between them, the king is reduced to only one servant in both the *Chronicles* and *Lear*, though Holinshed's account takes more time.

But the greatest griefe that Leir tooke, was to see the vnkindnesse of his daughters, which seemed to think that all was too much which their father had, the same being neuer so little: in so much that going from the one to the other, he was brought to that miserie, that scarslie they would allow him one seruant to wait vpon him. (Holinshed, 447)

Shakespeare's choice to cull this back and forth down to only one visit to each daughter effectively streamlines their betrayal. By developing the phrase "that scarslie they would allow him one seruant" into a bartering exchange, Shakespeare is able to then provide the effective and heart-wrenching synthesis of Holinshed's description in Regan's "What need one?" (2.4.303).

The rest of Holinshed's story recounts Leir's travel to Gallia (France) where he is received warmly by Cordeilla and her husband, through the raising of the army and Cordeilla being named "the rightfull inheritour after his [Leir's] dicesse" (Holinshed, 448). During the battle, Gonerilla and Regan's husbands are killed and Lear is restored to the kingdom where he reigns for two more years. The next chapter begins with the rest of Cordeilla's life offered in one long sentence:

This Cordeilla after hir fathers decease ruled the land of Britaine right worthily during the space of fiue yeeres, in which meane time hir husband died, and then about the end of those fiue yeeres, hir two nephewes Margan and Cunedag, sonnes of hir aforesaid sisters, disdainig to be vnder the gouernment of a woman, leuied warre against hir, and destroied a great part of the land, and finallie took hir prisoner, and laid hir fast in ward, wherewith she tooke such griefe, being a woman of a manlie courage, and despairing to recouer libertie, there slue herself, when she had reigned the tearme of fiue yeeres. (448)

While five years may not seem like many, it is significantly longer than what Shakespeare gives both Cordelia and her father, who die by the end of the battle—offering a succinct and undeniably tragic ending to their stories. In a fascinating revision of the Holinshed, and possibly Geoffrey of Monmouth as well, Shakespeare does not have Cordelia kill herself. Edmund explains that the plan had been to make it *look* like a suicide: "To hang Cordelia in the prison,

and / To lay the blame upon her own despair, / That she fordid herself' (5.3.303-306). Lear then kills the man who killed Cordelia, before dying himself only seven lines after Albany gives him back his power. Neither is able to rule the kingdom for any length of time after the war, which leads to the despairing attempts of Albany to establish a successor in the last lines of the play.

In addition to exploiting minute details of the Holinshed material, Shakespeare heightens the tragic elements of Lear's situation through the addition of the Gloucester subplot, which mirrors thematic elements of the Leir narrative though derived from an entirely different source. The story of Gloucester and his two sons comes from Sir Philip Sidney's prose pastoral romance entitled *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, published in 1593. The brief interlude with the Paphlagonian king is adopted by Shakespeare to act as a reflection on the Lear storyline, running parallel to the main plot with another presentation of flawed fathers and misplaced punishment.<sup>14</sup> All the same themes of family, betrayal, and reunion are present here, while what is more succinct in Shakespeare's depiction of the Lear story makes room for expansion in the Gloucester plotline. In Sidney's romance, the young princes find the displaced Paphlagonian king being led by his loyal son, resting under a "rude canopy" that might remind one of the hovel on the heath where Edgar is first discovered (Sidney, 159).<sup>15</sup> In what I believe to be a remarkably important distinction, Sidney has his Edgar figure retell their story, whereas the audience is forced to watch these events unfold in *King Lear*—which depicts the reversals and recognitions of the narrative in the present rather than past tense, heightening the tragedy of Shakespeare's play. In *Arcadia*, Leonatus (the Edgar character) summarizes the main plot points that Shakespeare will adopt:

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<sup>14</sup> In addition to the similarities in the story lines, Muir notices that a giant, Gogmagog, falls of the cliffs of Dover in Holinshed's *Chronicles*, potentially implying a further marriage of the Holinshed and Sidney sources on Shakespeare's part considering the emphasis Gloucester places on being taken to Dover.

<sup>15</sup> My edition is a reprint from 1898, hence the standardized spellings.

This old man whom I lead was lately rightful prince of this country of Paphlagonia, by the hard-hearted ungratefulness of a son of his deprived not only of his kingdom...but of his sight, the riches which nature grants to the poorest creatures, whereby and by other his unnatural dealings, he hath been driven to such grief as even now he would have had me to have led him to the top of this rock, thence to cast himself headlong to death, and so would have made me, who received my life from him, to be the worker of his destruction. (160)

The only major revision Shakespeare makes is changing Gloucester to a duke, a necessary shift to establish Gloucester as a loyal follower to Lear and to connect the plotlines. It will be Gloucester's loyalty to Lear that results in his harsh punishment, but there is no question that Edmund is the orchestrator behind all, just as he is in *Arcadia*. Interestingly, the Paphlagonian king adds certain details to Leonatus' retelling that Shakespeare is somewhat more judicious about incorporating. "I was carried by a bastard son of mine...first to dislike, then to hate, lastly to destroy, or to do my best to destroy, this son—I think you think—undeserving destruction... the conclusion is, that I gave order to some servants of mine, whom I thought as apt for such charities as myself, to lead him out into a forest, and there to kill him" (161). Shakespeare omits an attempted murder of Edgar by Gloucester, possibly considering that while Lear and Gloucester are not infallible, both are meant to represent suffering of the acutest kind. Both groupings of father and punished child—Lear and Cordelia, Gloucester and Edmund—are meant to invoke our pity, which would be somewhat more challenging if either father was depicted as an attempted murderer.

That being said, it is possible that Shakespeare reframes Gloucester's wrong not as against Edgar but against Edmund. Shakespeare begins the play with Gloucester accepting Edmund as his son in the most ungracious way possible, "His breeding, sir, hath been at my charge. I have so often blushed to acknowledge him that now I am brazed to 't" (1.1.9-11).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> This interaction beginning the play represents a literal meeting of the two storylines, as Kent is introduced to Edmund.



Gloucester's abashed acceptance of Edmund as his bastard son will establish a reason for Edmund's fantastic villainy throughout the rest of the play and retains the feeling Sidney evokes for Paphlagonia—that while he may not be wholly innocent, he is punished too much. Shakespeare provides shades of nuance to his characters that are overlooked or denied elsewhere, considering in *Arcadia* we are never encouraged to sympathize with Plexirtus, the Edmund character.<sup>17</sup> Though Edmund is certainly villainous like the bastard son of Paphlagonia, Shakespeare devotes a significant amount of time to Edmund's soliloquies—if not justifying his actions, at least inspiring a remarkably close relationship between him and the audience.<sup>18</sup> Whether sympathetic or not, the root of his manipulation remains the same: Plexirtus manages to convince Paphlagonia that the “natural” son is disloyal, all for the sake of replacing both father and brother and inheriting the crown, or in Edmund's case, the dukedom:

...drunk in my affection to that unlawful and unnatural son of mine, [I] suffered myself so to be governed by him that all favours and punishments passed by him...so that, ere I was aware, I had left myself nothing but the name of a king, which he shortly weary of too, with many indignities, if anything may be called an indignity which was laid upon me, threw me out of my seat, and put out my eyes, and then, proud of his tyranny, let me go, neither imprisoning me nor killing me, but rather delighting to make me feel misery,—misery indeed, if ever there was any; full of wretchedness, fuller of disgrace, fullest of guiltiness. (Sidney, 162)<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Joel Altman offers a compelling explanation for Shakespeare's facility and tendency to present both sides of an argument or of a character in *Tudor Play of Mind*. “Several important questions arise when we consider the impact of a rhetorical education like the one enjoyed by the young grammarians of Tudor secondary schools...First, what happens to a mind conditioned to argue *in utramque partem*—on both sides of the question—as Renaissance students were trained to do? Surely one result must be a great complexity of vision, capable of making every man not only a devil's advocate but also a kind of microcosmic deity...can see all sides of an issue” (Altman, 3-4). Perhaps this is one reason why Shakespeare is able to depict such human villains. In connection with Bate's explanation of Shakespeare's ability to adapt sources, clearly the education system of the period offers an additional perspective on Shakespeare's collaboration and adaptation.

<sup>18</sup> Perrett notices in a footnote that Shakespeare's choice to rename the Paphlagonian character “Gloucester” is a conspicuous one, as this name would have been tainted by Richard III. This connection therefore reflects back upon Edmund an ominous and dangerous quality (Perrett, 26).

<sup>19</sup> Interesting to note that in Shakespeare's version, Edmund is not the one to put out Gloucester's eyes—that lot falls to Regan and Cornwall. I am not sure what to make of this, considering Edmund is in all other ways the epitome of a villain. Perhaps it is an example of how he inflicts damage through words, rather than blows; throughout the play Edmund uses letters (both falsified and true) to turn people against each other, which Edgar will use against him in turn.

Beyond plot similarities, the Paphlagonian king's episode was certainly chosen by Shakespeare for the thematic overtones present in both Lear and Gloucester's storylines. Already we can see the commonality of Paphlagonia's "nothing but the name of a king," and feelings of "wretchedness," "disgrace," and "guiltiness" with Lear's character. As Muir illustrates,

In both plots we have a credulous father who believes the evil child and disinherits the good. In both plots the father receives ill from the favored child and good from the disinherited. Lear's madness is suitably balanced with Gloucester's blindness; for, whereas Lear was mad when everyone thought him sane and acquired wisdom only when he was apparently mad, Gloucester was spiritually blind when he possessed his eyesight and only learnt to see clearly when he had lost both his eyes. In a sense, then, the scene which has been blamed as dramatically unnecessary and inorganic—the meeting of the blind Gloucester with the mad Lear—is the symbolic climax of the play. (Muir, 146)

In this way, the play is framed by moments of connection between these two plotlines, beginning with Edmund and Kent being introduced (and Gloucester's guiltiness being established), climaxing with the meeting of the fathers after they have lost everything, and finally resolving with Edgar being brought forward as the only possible successor to Lear's throne.

By adopting Henderson's formulation of collaboration with the past as a way of theorizing Shakespeare's engagement with earlier literary texts, we can begin to reformulate his authorship as rooted in adaptation and collaboration. That being said, we have also noted a few key ways in which Shakespeare's *Lear* is distinctive from other versions of this story. The Holinshed and Sidney sources—and more—strongly influenced Shakespeare's adaptation of the old Leir tale, though he was certainly not shy about revising and reworking them to suit his own purposes. While this illustrates his knowledge of the literary sources and his collaboration with the past, the source most recognizable to an audience at the time would have been the *Leir* play, performed by the Queen's Men. Though not published until 1605, this play would have most likely been performed throughout the 1590s, and may have been more accessible to a broader audience than Latin texts such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*.

One way of thinking about the relationship between past and present collaboration in Shakespeare's production of this play (and others) is through the concept of memory. As a theme, memory defines not only Lear's descent into madness, but also how Shakespeare tells this story. Tribble and Sutton discuss the complex temporality of memory through the systems of theatrical production at the time:

Early modern theatre was engaged in memory work across multiple dimensions. It has often been noted that Shakespeare's plays are anachronistic, in that they seem pointedly to display the gulf between the plays' settings and their moment of performance... Such moments, however, should not be seen as error, indifference, or ignorance on Shakespeare's part, nor indeed as peculiar to him, but instead as symptomatic of the promiscuous array of memory work afforded by a new form of theatrical enterprise dependent on a loosely affiliated and polytemporal world of actors, spaces, material texts and objects, and audiences. (Tribble & Sutton, 592)

I am fascinated by the connection between Tribble and Sutton's concept of memory work and how I have adopted Benjamin's concept of the constellation. Not only does memory work enable us to trace patterns and discussions across time as Benjamin encourages, but Tribble and Sutton offer a web as a similar theoretical image to the constellation. "Within a coupled system involving internal processes, social interaction, and cognitive artefacts, all changing at different rates and in webs of continuous reciprocal causation, the traces of these interactions are not erased as the system moves into new states, or as some of its elements migrate" (594). With this notion of memory work as a connection between collaboration with the past and present in the "polytemporal" world of the theater, I will now turn to Shakespeare's use of the *Leir* play text.<sup>20</sup>

In Rutter's overview of the field of repertory studies, he provides a useful starting point for analyzing Shakespeare through the theater. He emphasizes the fact that Shakespeare's company, The Lord Chamberlain's Men and later the King's Men, was successful because it staged plays on popular subjects, capitalized on successful stories, and revived old favorites.

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<sup>20</sup> Haunting is also deeply tied to memory work and polytemporality.

Though Rutter sees a difference between the “mixed” nature of the Queen’s Men plays—where clownage intermingles with historical subjects—and the “more literary, psychologically acute plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare,” it is possible that Shakespeare started out with this troupe (Rutter, 342). As McMillin and MacLean discuss in their study of the Queen’s Men, this theory is made possible by the complete lack of evidence for where Shakespeare was in the years between 1584 and 1592. As the Queen’s Men was the most prestigious of the professional companies to visit Stratford-upon-Avon, there would have been a certain draw for a young Shakespeare to join, though more useful evidence of his connection with the troop for our literary analysis is the fact that “The plots of no fewer than six of Shakespeare’s known plays are closely related to the plots of plays performed by the Queen’s Men” (McMillin & MacLean, 161). There is no way of knowing whether Shakespeare acted in the plays he adapts (*King John*, *King Lear*, *Richard III*, and the Henry IV and V plays), saw them in performance, or was working from printed texts. Though there isn’t significant evidence of Shakespeare’s distinctive style in the Queen’s Men plays,

Shakespeare could well have begun his career as a collaborator with other writers, and his close knowledge of their plays makes the Queen’s Men the likely company in which such collaboration could have occurred. The evidence we have is circumstantial and indirect, but it does indicate an unusually substantial and detailed knowledge of the Queen’s Men plays on the part of Shakespeare. (164-5)

This is all to say that there is a clear connection between Shakespeare and the Queen’s Men play texts, offering contextualization for his use of the *Leir* play and the many different forms of collaboration at work in the production of *King Lear*.

*The True chronicle of King Leir, and his three daughters, Gonerill, Ragan, and Cordella*—attributed to Robert Greene and performed by the Queen’s Men—was registered by 1594 and most likely performed throughout the 1590s. Intended as a history play, Perrett’s label

of a “lamentable comedy” is perhaps more appropriate (Perrett, 27). Though Leir’s betrayal by his children and the suffering he must endure at their hands is certainly “lamentable,” there is never any question that this play is a comedy. No character dies in Greene’s play, as the story ends with the two sisters and their husbands running away during the battle and Cordella and her father being restored to the kingdom. Though there are scenes that bear remarkable similarity to Shakespeare’s—such as a heath scene—they are emphatically comedic, with wordplay, amusing manipulation, and not nearly as much mortal or mental peril. While the comedy/tragedy divide is a stark one, certain elements are undeniably shared. Particular characters from Greene’s play may be easily mapped onto Shakespeare’s roles, such as Perillus—the right-hand man to the king and his loyal servant will become Kent in the later play. Perillus, like Kent, often ends scenes with an aside to the audience reminding us of Leir’s folly: for example, “Thus fathers think their children to beguile, / And oftentimes themselves do first repent, / When heavenly powers do frustrate their intent” (*Leir*, 1.1.91-93). Skalliger, Gonerill’s lackey, and the messenger sent between Gonerill and Ragan will converge to become Shakespeare’s Oswald, dedicated to the wicked sisters. As with Holinshed, even the level of words and phrases yields some interesting insights into Shakespeare’s adaptation. Perillus questions Leir in Act 2, “Ah, who so blind, as they that will not see / The neere approach of their owne misery?” (2.3.106-107). This will become a vital theme in Shakespeare’s play, as Kent advises, “See better, Lear” (1.1.181) and Gloucester comes to realize that he “stumbled when [he] saw” (4.1.20). In this way, Shakespeare continues to draw inspiration from the minutest of details and make them of utmost importance.

Throughout the *Leir* play, the focus is centered on marriage, and it is Cordella’s refusal to marry without love—her refusal to submit to her father’s will—that results in her loss of a dowry. This coincides with an interesting element of this play that often goes unmentioned:

Leir's love test is a way to marry off his daughters because of his need of a male heir, whereas in every other version of the story the daughters themselves are the heirs. Regardless, Greene seems to rely heavily on Holinshed's *Chronicles*, as we can see through Gonerill's response to the love-test, saying she loves Leir more than her own life and would kill herself for him, while Ragan says she hopes her words suffice (1.3.16-74). Cordella's asides begin in this play, with comments such as "O, how I doe abhorre this flattery!" going unnoticed by her father (1.3.55). After Cordella's loss of a dowry (not outright banished as in Shakespeare's *Lear*), Greene does not include Leir's intention to split his time between the two remaining daughters. This is not in the Holinshed source, so it makes sense for it to be missing from Greene's play, yet proves that Shakespeare had to look elsewhere for this detail, most likely adapting it from Geoffrey of Monmouth.

While Muir's focus is on comparing the endings of the plays, I believe an equally useful example of Shakespeare's revision of the Queen's Men text occurs at a crucial turning point earlier in the plays: the heath scene. In 4.5 of *Leir*, Leir and Perillus are tricked into waiting on the heath for Ragan's Messenger to murder them, but they are able to successfully talk their way out of the situation and continue their journey to France. Vitally, no one is insane in this moment, which provides a stark contrast to Shakespeare's analogous scene (3.2), while small details of Greene's play will become central elements of Shakespeare's. Though madness is not present in any of the Leir sources, other than the "unwieldiness" mentioned in Holinshed, this becomes a crucial aspect of Shakespeare's tragedy, as Lear loses everything—including himself, which he begins to acknowledge within this scene; "My wits begin to turn" (3.2.73). Even though Lear's loss of sanity is of Shakespeare's own devising, Greene's heath scene introduces Lear's speaking to the elements, or the gods. While Greene's play is emphatically Christian, Shakespeare has his

characters reference the pagan gods of ancient Britain. Lear's strongest invocation of these silent gods may be in the cursing of Goneril and Ragan, though they do not go without appeal in this scene—"Let the great gods / That keep this dreadful pudder o'er our heads / Find out their enemies now," is just one example (3.2.52-54). That being said, when Leir in the Queen's Men play tells the Messenger not to swear by hell, thunder is heard, causing the Messenger to think that Leir is a magician. I believe this is where the apostrophe in Shakespeare's play comes from, though Lear's attempts to call on the gods are far more nihilistic, garnering no response at all. After the scene in the heath, Leir and Perillus have an interaction that will present itself elsewhere in *Lear*: Perillus says, "Courage, my lord, the worst is overpast; / Let us give thanks to God, and hie us hence" to which Leir replies, "Thou art deceived; for I am past the best" (4.5.311-313). This will be referenced in Edgar's distraught recognition of his father on the heath, culminating in his line, "The worst is not / So long as we can say 'This is the worst.'" (4.1.30).

Rather than as the seed that will flower into Lear's apostrophe, Muir briefly mentions the thunder on *Leir's* heath as only one of many sources for the tempest midway through *King Lear*. "The storm, for which there is in the source-play only a rudimentary thunder-clap—dissuading Ragan's emissary from the murder of Leir—may have been suggested by the 'extreame and foule storm' and the 'fury of the tempest' in the *Arcadia* episode" (Muir, 147). Beyond the thunderclap in *Leir* and storm in *Arcadia*, there is even thunder and lightning in the source Muir is most interested in, Harsnett's *Declaraton of Egregious Popishe Impostures*, which may also introduce the word "rage," which features prominently in Lear's first line of 3.2, "Blow winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow!" (3.2.1). Harsnett's book may provide an interesting perspective on collaboration with the present, providing accounts of witch trials and exorcisms,

from which Muir believes Edgar's madness, the tempest, and a surprising number of details within *Lear* are drawn. As Muir summarizes, "Shakespeare created *King Lear* from the most heterogeneous materials. As was his custom, he amplified and complicated his original fable by using incidents, ideas, phrases, and words from a variety of books" (Muir, 162). In addition to the literary collaboration at the heart of this analysis, there are yet other sources Shakespeare draws on in the creation of *King Lear* that are not as rooted in text.

Shakespeare introduces into the *Lear* narrative the character of the Fool, offering a strange mixing of tones as this court jester provides both comedic relief and reflects upon the events a further solemnity through his biting criticisms of Lear. In a section of their article dedicated to *King Lear*, Tribble and Sutton emphasize the connections between the character of the Fool and a famous clown of the era, Richard Tarlton.

In addition to marking out Armin [Robert Armin, the actor playing the Fool] as a performer, thus catapulting the audience into the present, this moment [the Fool's anachronistic prophecy on the heath] would have irresistibly called to mind the immediate *theatrical* past in its invocation of the most famous of Elizabethan clowns: Richard Tarlton. Tarlton had been dead for years by the time *King Lear* was written, but more than any other actor he haunted the English stage. (Tribble & Sutton, 599)

By analyzing the similarities between the Fool in *Lear* and the character Derick in an earlier Queen's Men play, Tribble and Sutton argue that "The Fool's speech at this moment recalls the function that Derick-Tarlton performed in the earlier play: Tarlton straddles the English past and the performative present" (601). This is a brilliant example of the complex collaboration at work in any Shakespearean or early modern theatrical production. Not only is Shakespeare bringing in a new character that will act as a mirror to Lear, but he is creating a remarkable link between the English past he is presenting and his present day, with both theatrical and political meanings. Tribble and Sutton provide an explanation of Tarlton's relationship with Queen Elizabeth, in which "The adept combination of amusing, chiding, pleasing, instructing, and



distracting...recalls the similarly structured, yet much more fraught, relationship between the fictional Fool and the fictional Lear” (602). In this way, Shakespeare is grounding the play in a present that would have particular resonances and meanings for an early modern audience, which is the same kind of adaptation work we will see happening with both Romantic critics and twentieth-century film adaptors.

In yet another instance of haunting appearing in a discussion of Shakespearean adaptation, Price notes that “The early modern repertory system entailed a great deal of recycling and enabled a great deal of recollection... The memory of the old haunts the experience of the new. But what counts as a new experience depends on the individual playgoer” (Price, 177). Therefore, it is possible such a haunting lent a greater emphasis to the tragedy of Shakespeare’s play—for those expecting a happy ending as they would have come to anticipate from the *Leir* play, the power of the tragedy could have been that much greater. In Rutter’s overview of repertory studies, he mentions a critic who argues in favor of precisely this mixing of past and present through Shakespeare’s appealing to the system of theatrical production. “Disputing Robert Bridges’ view that Shakespeare’s responsiveness to popular taste had a detrimental effect on his plays, Harbage asserted that it was precisely from this inclusiveness that their greatness derived” (Rutter 337). Clearly, collaboration is present and crucial in Shakespeare’s creation of the *King Lear* text, through his adaptation of literary sources, reliance on the popularity and success of other early modern plays, references geared toward the audience of the time, and more. Masten provides a thoughtful reflection on the relationship between literary and repertory studies, offering both wariness of and support for the challenging work of reintroducing collaboration to our analysis of Shakespeare.

Including theatrical production in a discussion of ‘collaboration’ may risk an excessive broadening of the term, but it is important to suggest (as I think the play-texts themselves

do) the inseparability of the textual and theatrical production of meaning in a context that did not carefully insulate the writing of scripts from the acting of plays. (Masten, 15)

Masten's "excessive broadening" once again strikes me as a negative take on a necessary process. Discussion of the collaboration at work within Shakespeare's plays will undeniably take more effort than claiming Shakespeare's genius is entirely of his own making. Yet the complexity of Shakespeare's legacy is perfectly illustrated in the concept of the constellation: not only does a focus on adaptation and collaboration offer a way of enhancing and exploring what Shakespeare's genius actually means, but it is through the image of a constellation that we are able to define our points of entry. As critics, we will all focus on our own interests within Shakespeare's expanding legacy, and rather than "excessive broadening" we should consider the constellation as an opportunity for defining what objects or elements within the larger idea of Shakespeare we wish to explore while understanding the freedom this perspective brings to how we study Shakespeare. Part of the beauty of Benjamin's constellation is that there is no finish line, and by broadening our study of Shakespeare in this way we encourage the introduction of other fields and studies into our approach to these texts.

Shakespeare's *King Lear* is a marvelous adaptation, pulling together sources from poetry to prose, from the twelfth century to the sixteenth. The mix of revision, repetition, and unprecedented creation is at the heart of what makes a collaboration-oriented analysis stronger and more complex than a passive nod to Shakespeare as an "individual talent." By diving into the sources and influences essential to the creation of this text, we open new doors for analysis and offer new questions: why mix the story of the Paphlagonian king with King Leir? Why make the story a tragedy? How does Shakespeare marry the past with the present, adapting a far older narrative to serve new purposes in his modern day? By considering how Shakespeare adapted not only broader plot structures and events but drew inspiration from passing comments, adapting

details of language into larger themes within his own work, we are able to make more informed claims about how Shakespeare broke from tradition, introduced new concepts, or forced us to reckon with the folly and suffering of the Leir story. If we want to consider how Shakespeare's legacy is influenced by critics and auteurs collaborating with him as a "dead poet" and an ancestor, the work must begin here, to find the root of the hauntings that come to define this legacy.

## Criticism as Collaboration

When tracing the expanding Shakespearean constellation, it is essential to linger on the Romantic period and literary criticism abounding at this time. As mentioned earlier, Jonathan Bate recognizes this period as a pivotal moment in our conception of Shakespeare's "genius," as "The rise of Romanticism and the growth of Shakespeare idolatry are parallel phenomena" (Bate, *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination*, 6). Introducing not only influential readings of the play texts but developments in criticism itself, artists and poets entered into sustained critical conversations in which they engaged with and responded to both their ancestors—such as Samuel Johnson—and each other. While Shakespeare came to represent something different for political entities and nations during this period, Bate argues that Shakespeare's range of characterizations and individual voices within his plays lends a "renewability" to his works and enables him "to speak to many later dispositions" (330). Due to the Romantic's influential interpretations of Shakespeare's legacy and individual works, in addition to their lasting impacts on literary criticism as we continue to practice it today, this period is a crucial point in the development of Shakespeare's constellation.

Many poets and critics during this time shared their thoughts on Shakespeare, but there are three in particular Bate identifies establishes as having the greatest impact. "In the decade between 1808 and 1818 three men produced some of the finest Shakespearian criticism ever written...[which] has continued to exert enormous influence on our manifold ways of thinking about Shakespeare" (Bate, *The Romantics on Shakespeare*, 1). The men he refers to are A. W. Schlegel, S. T. Coleridge, and William Hazlitt, and in taking my cue from Bate I will focus primarily on the relationships between these thinkers' criticism, with the addition of a smattering of other critics' work to illustrate the prevalence and importance of *Hamlet* during this period.

Hamlet as both play and character functions as a crucial touchstone in Shakespeare criticism, both at this time and beyond. Coleridge in particular discusses Hamlet at length, as this character is central to his understanding of Shakespeare and to “methodical” thinking in general. In this section, I will explore the beginning of Shakespeare’s utility in new and different contexts through the ways in which Coleridge thinks about thinking through Hamlet.

There are a few important justifications for my focusing primarily on Coleridge in the latter half of this section. Not only was Coleridge’s *Hamlet* criticism vital to his own understanding of Shakespeare, but as Bate reminds us, these critics have had lasting impacts on how we read and interpret these plays. The father of what he deemed “hypercriticism,” a form of analysis which emphasized connecting detail-oriented “practical criticism” entering into the minutiae of a text with larger interpretive claims, Coleridge has influenced not only Shakespeare criticism but all literary study. Introducing the perspective that “New and more interesting criteria for understanding Shakespeare’s aesthetics could be discovered through the works themselves,” Coleridge’s process has become just as—if not more—influential as his analyses (Fuller, 14).<sup>21</sup> In terms of his analyses themselves, Coleridge’s close attention to *Hamlet* established him as both celebrator and inheritor of Shakespeare in this period: “Coleridge’s solitary Romantic genius is the inheritor of Hamlet” (Bate, *Genius of Shakespeare*, 184). He adopted Hamlet’s characteristic choice of thinking over action, as we will discuss in more detail below, but crucially paved the way for future study, rather than attempting to be the last word on the subject. “One aim of Romantic criticism is... a *fermenta cognitionis*—Lessing’s phrase, taken

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<sup>21</sup> Fuller describes Coleridge’s legacy in more detail: “as a critic of Shakespeare he is almost as much a construction of those who wrote down what he said as is Socrates of Plato or Christ of the evangelists. Nevertheless, his elusive words and ideas were profoundly creative for Shakespeare criticism over the following century, and they continue to offer individual insights and general principles from which any reader can learn. With character, poetry, dramatic form, convention, history—while he does not discuss all of these equally, they are all part of his critical programme—Coleridge invented many of the major forms of Shakespeare criticism of the following century and beyond” (Fuller, 13).

over by Friedrich Schlegel: provoking independent thought, nurturing attitudes of mind that stimulate the reader's own reflections" (Fuller, 8-9). Though attributed to Lessing, the concept of teaching readers to think for themselves was a main tenant and goal of Coleridge's many lecture series on Shakespeare from 1808 to 1819.<sup>22</sup> Coleridge even established terms to differentiate the goals of criticism, "'commonplace' criticism may be said to teach auditors (or readers) *what* to think, 'philosophical' criticism provides instruction in *how* to think" (Mahoney, footnote 7, Lecture 5 of the 1813 series). Therefore, these critics not only operate as crucial subjects of study within Shakespeare's constellation but set the stage for further Shakespearean criticism.

Before diving in, I must point out that I find Bate's description of his three most central Shakespearean Romantic critics somewhat reductive: "Schlegel was a powerful analyst of structure, Coleridge of language, Hazlitt of theatre and of politics" (Bate, *Romantics*, 2). While this schema seems to establish the three thinkers as focused on disparate topics, we must consider the collaboration inherent in criticism at the time—and since. As with Shakespeare's production of the plays, none of these critics were studying and attempting to understand these plays in a vacuum. Though Hazlitt broke from Coleridge on political grounds, he was initially a great admirer of Coleridge's criticism and looked up to him as a mentor. Where Hazlitt is indebted to Coleridge, Coleridge's readings of Shakespeare are potentially derived from but undeniably allied with Schlegel's. These thinkers were constantly in conversation with other critics and texts—embodying collaboration with the present.

In addition to their collaboration with present environments and participants, these critics collaborate with the past as well, both through their engagement with Shakespearean texts and earlier critics. I believe collaboration implies a conversation, and may not necessarily reflect only

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<sup>22</sup> Coleridge specifically addresses *Hamlet* in lectures during the 1812, 1813, 1818, and 1819 series.

agreement. As Bate explains, “A. W. Schlegel, Coleridge, and Hazlitt all set up their own critical practice in conscious opposition to Johnson’s” (Bate, *Romantics*, 4).<sup>23</sup> By intentionally attempting to distance themselves from Johnson’s earlier writings on Shakespeare, the Romantic critics are acknowledging him as a silent partner in their critical work. Bate presents this relationship to the past through the idea that “Romantic Shakespearean criticism synthesizes and refines what has gone before” (Bate, *English Imagination*, 14). This sounds remarkably similar to Shakespeare’s work in the creation of his *Lear* play, and once again reminds us of the use and importance of reframing adaptation—and now criticism, as well—through the lens of collaboration. By theorizing these connections through the concept of a constellation, we open ourselves up to analyses exploring the influences and legacies of collaborators across time. For instance, whether or not Coleridge’s understanding of organic unity begins as an intentional borrowing of Schlegel’s concept, Coleridge is placing himself, Schlegel, and Shakespeare all in conversation, mirroring the amalgamation of collaboration with past and present as we saw in Shakespeare’s adaptation. While Bate frames this kind of work as a matter of “Coleridge’s criticism shift[ing] uneasily between historicism and atemporality,” I would argue such a movement is fostered by Shakespeare himself, as we saw through the memory, haunting, and atemporality of the early modern stage (Bate, *Romantics*, 17). Furthermore, it is such a mix of historicism and atemporality that is at the heart of the constellation theory I propose, and I hope we can begin to move away from the unease Bate detects in Coleridge’s work. As critics, according to Fuller, we must be

both attending to the work as it really is and allowing the interaction with that of an idiosyncratic living intellect and imagination—this is what for Hazlitt leads to real meaning, meaning negotiated between the work, the reader willing to probe his or her

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<sup>23</sup> This is most usefully illustrated through Coleridge’s critical focus: “Johnson’s dogged attention to the surface of the text could not be in greater contrast to Coleridge’s probing for a psychological subtext and a hidden unifying essence” (Bate, *Romantics*, 6).

own reactions, and the wider cultural situation in relation to which new perspectives are revealed. (Fuller, 27)

In this view, meaning is tied to a source, a reader, and a context—exactly what I have been encouraging for our understanding of adaptation and criticism. By understanding the negotiation fostered between the Romantic readers and a Shakespearean text, we can explore how their analyses open new dimensions in Shakespeare criticism and collaboration. As Charles Lamb would say, the concept of a constellation encourages a reading of Shakespeare’s plays as “*imaginary work*...where the spectator must meet the artist in his conceptions half way” (qtd. Fuller, 46).

Similar to Henderson’s understanding of adaptations giving new life to Shakespeare, Bate offers a parallel formulation for the work of criticism: “The prose of these critics lives and makes Shakespeare live” (Bate, *Romantics*, 3). Not only do these critics and adaptors shift our conception of Shakespeare based on their own times, cultures, and contexts, but this shifting is what keeps Shakespeare relevant and *alive*. Eliot remarks that if these critics “do not give us the real Shakespeare—if there is one—they at least give us several up-to-date Shakespeares” (qtd. Bate, *Romantics*, 3). In this way, we can begin to see how the concept of Shakespeare is just as open to adaptation as his works are. These Romantic critics began doing what we have done ever since: making use of their source text to serve their own purposes. For some, this had a political dimension, as illustrated most strongly through Schlegel or Hazlitt. For Coleridge, Hamlet becomes the way through which he can theorize the thinking process, making use of Shakespeare to serve his own philosophical and critical interests.

Romantic critics in general related intensely to Hamlet as a character. Bate even goes so far as to claim that “The Romantics’ reinvention of Hamlet as a paralysed Romantic was their single most influential critical act” (Bate, *Romantics*, 2). Evidently, there was a powerful give-



and-take between this play and the Romantic critics, and a malleability around their concept of Hamlet's character. Each critic used Hamlet for their varying purposes, and Shakespeare's characters have the remarkable ability to foster statements such as Coleridge's, "I have a smack of Hamlet myself" (24 June 1827, qtd. Bate, *English Imagination*, 18), or Hazlitt's argument that Hamlet's speeches "are as real as our own thoughts. Their reality is in the reader's mind. It is *we* who are Hamlet" (*Characters*, 232).<sup>24</sup> Tieck provides a different formulation from Coleridge and Hazlitt, but one that emphasizes the connection between Hamlet and the audience just as much: "in no other work has Shakespeare taken his audience more completely into his confidence and actually touched them, so to speak" (reprinted in Bate, *Romantics*, 326-327). Empathy, as defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is "the quality or power of...mentally identifying oneself with an object of contemplation, and so fully understanding or appreciating it" (OED, *empathy* 2a). As evidenced through these statements eliding Hamlet with the self, Hamlet's mind, thoughts, and world become our own when we engage with his meditations in a similar way: notice Hazlitt's use of the word "reader" rather than "viewer." Hazlitt's reality is fostered by intellectual identification—it is through our shared thoughts that we can empathize with Hamlet. It is precisely this mental connection that Coleridge is exploring when he traces the internal thought processes he sees reflected in Hamlet's speeches. Coleridge connects with Hamlet not through action, but thinking structured by an overexuberance of method.

Beyond the emphasis placed on connecting with Hamlet (as with any of Shakespeare's characters) through reading, it is in this period that we can begin to see the crucial elision of "Hamlet" and "Shakespeare." Hazlitt deemed *Hamlet* "if not the finest, perhaps the most

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<sup>24</sup> This relates to a Romantic understanding of Shakespeare's characters in general, which is part of what Bate discusses in relation to Shakespeare's genius: "On the stage we see nothing but corporal infirmities and weakness, the impotence of rage; while we read it, we see not Lear, but we are Lear,—we are in his mind" (Lamb, *Tragedies*, 298).

inimitable of all [Shakespeare's] productions" (Hazlitt, *A View of the English Stage*, 185), while "Friedrich Schlegel...maintained that the spirit of Shakespeare was visible in the character of Hamlet" (Bate, *English Romantic Imagination*, 19). Not only was *Hamlet* considered the seminal work of Shakespeare's output, but Friedrich Schlegel—A. W. Schlegel's brother—provides a crucial synecdoche that factors into *Hamlet* adaptations of any form (critical, theatrical, or cinematic). Hamlet during this period became a stand-in for Shakespeare himself, further emphasizing the collaboration at work in the Romantic critic's fascination with this character. Such an elision between author and creation is illustrated in Elizabeth Inchbald's comments on Hamlet:

This tragedy is a work of such intellectual magnitude, that every comment, which has been written upon it, is too well known to be quoted, either for amusement or instruction; and as the celebrity of a work naturally excited contemplation on its author; this, one of the most popular amongst Shakespeare's plays, leads to a few remarks on the great poet himself. (Inchbald, 3)

A. W. Schlegel provides a compelling qualification of Inchbald's claim that the play and its criticism is too well known to be of use, but her move from the play itself to Shakespeare's biography is fundamentally tied to the use of Hamlet as a synecdoche for its author. Schlegel does not share Inchbald's opinion that nothing more need be said on Hamlet, arguing rather that "Much has been said, much written, on this piece, and yet no thinking head who anew expresses himself on it, will (in his view of the connexion and the signification of all the parts) entirely coincide with his predecessors" (Schlegel, 404). I believe this adds a valuable constructive element to our concept of collaboration and constellation. In Schlegel's view, there is always something more to be said about Hamlet, and while he calls attention to the predecessors, or ancestors, they do not provide the kind of anxiety Bloom imagines. Schlegel's formulation may also be practically applied to Coleridge's own indebtedness to Schlegel's understanding of

organic unity, or “the connection and the signification of all the parts” (404). Bate deems Coleridge’s astonishment in discovering the similarities between his work and Schlegel’s as “to some extent misplaced, given that Coleridge and Schlegel had travelled over much of the same intellectual ground and that the central conception of organic form was not actually ‘original’ to either of them” (Bate, *Romantics*, 15). Not only are they perhaps thinking parallel to each other, in which case collaboration is a far more appropriate term than plagiarism, but Coleridge goes into minutiae in a way that Schlegel does not. Therefore, just as with Hamlet, nothing these critics have to say will “entirely coincide with his predecessors” (Schlegel, 404).

That being said, we can undoubtedly trace both similarities *and* differences in lines of inquiry across criticism of the time. For instance, Schlegel does not valorize Hamlet to the extent Coleridge and Hazlitt do, rather calling attention to Hamlet’s lack of action as a failing; “his weakness is too apparent...he is a hypocrite towards himself; his far-fetched scruples are often mere pretexts to cover his want of determination” (Schlegel, 405). Though Coleridge will challenge the idea that Hamlet lacks determination—arguing rather that “There was no indecision about Hamlet: he knew well what he ought to do & over & over again he made up his mind to do it” (Coleridge, Lecture 12, 1811-12, 1.387)—and Hazlitt will take on anyone who thinks Hamlet is less than morally perfect,<sup>25</sup> Ludwig Tieck picks up on Hamlet’s hypocrisies and complexities as Schlegel does. Yet Tieck redefines these seeming hypocrisies: “these beautiful contradictions from which nearly every gifted individual suffers to a greater or lesser degree—in short, what is here combined and summed up is certainly the reason why this character and this

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<sup>25</sup> In Hazlitt’s *Characters of Shakespear’s Plays*, he says “The moral perfection of this character has been called in question, we think, by those who did not understand it... We confess we are a little shocked at the want of refinement in those who are shocked at the want of refinement in Hamlet” (Hazlitt, *Characters*, 235). While most would agree Hazlitt is likely referring to Johnson here, I think it is certainly possible that he is also referencing Schlegel’s critique of Hamlet’s character.

tragedy have had such universal success” (reprinted Bate, *Romantics*, 335). Tieck’s formulation once again reminds us of the Romantic critic’s urge to connect Hamlet to a self or an audience—here, both more generally and more specifically in “every gifted individual”—which in turn brings us to the preference during this period for engaging with Shakespeare through the page, rather than the stage.

It was a common and popular opinion for many of the Romantic critics that Shakespeare could not be best appreciated on the stage, and it is on the basis of this perspective that Coleridge’s close connection with Hamlet’s mind is fostered. While perhaps surprising, considering the fact that he was a professional theater critic, Hazlitt forcefully declares, “We do not like to see our author’s [Shakespeare’s] plays acted, and least of all, HAMLET. There is no play that suffers so much in being transferred to the stage. Hamlet himself seems hardly capable of being acted” (Hazlitt, 237). Paradoxical as it may seem, the Romantic’s distaste of seeing *Hamlet* acted goes hand-in-hand with their idolatry of the play. Many critics agree with Hazlitt that Hamlet is not a character who can be portrayed accurately on the stage. Hamlet’s defining duality is one of thinking versus action: what Schlegel condemned is a crucial part of Hamlet, he is ruled by the mind and constantly chooses rumination over action. It is precisely this interiority that suffers in a Romantic theater.<sup>26</sup> Lamb refers to the titular character as “shy, negligent, retiring Hamlet!” (Lamb, 293), not exactly a character which lends himself to public performance. In Hazlitt’s words, “This character is probably of all others the most difficult to personate on the stage. It is like the attempt to embody a shadow” (Hazlitt, *View of an English*

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<sup>26</sup> I make this distinction here as we will see Hamlet’s interiority be presented rather successfully through the medium of film, and we must remember that Shakespeare was writing for this play to be acted. The theater during the Romantic period, however, was not what many critics would deem the appropriate space for experiencing Shakespeare’s plays. This has to do with many elements which I do not have the space to go into here, but which include a push toward spectacle and extravagance in addition to textual revision for political and aesthetic purposes.

*Stage*, 186). The best way to express the conflict of interest that arises in attempting to depict Hamlet, a character ruled by thought, through action and appearance in the theater is to return to his own language: “The interest depends not on the action, but on the thoughts—on ‘that within which passeth shew’” (Hazlitt, *View*, 187). Lamb argues along the same lines, saying that the theater is concerned with “not what the character is, but how he looks; now what he says, but how he speaks it” (Lamb, 293).<sup>27</sup> While the theater—like Claudius’s court—is concerned only with appearances, the Romantics’ close relationship with this character is based on his interiority, his personality, and above all, his thinking. In an impassioned manner and referencing Hamlet’s own language, Lamb asks us how can “[t]hese profound sorrows, these light-and-noise abhorring ruminations, which the tongue scarce dares utter to deaf walls and chambers...be represented by a gesticulating actor, who comes and mouths them out before an audience, making four hundred people his confidants at once!” (Lamb, 293). We must pay careful attention to Lamb’s language here; Hamlet takes us into his confidence, enabling us to overhear his thinking, but this cannot be fully appreciated when publicly announced. Therefore, the only way to truly experience Hamlet’s meditation is to join him in thinking, as we will explore through Coleridge’s analysis of Hamlet’s mental processes.

The necessity for reading over seeing this play may partly be justified by the fact that *Hamlet* is not about a character fulfilling revenge. It is, in many ways, a comment on the revenge-play or revenge in general, asking the audience what goes into taking justice into your own hands and reflecting this question through the mirror of a main character who is philosophically opposed to action. It is not a play about taking action, but a play in which four

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<sup>27</sup> In all fairness to Lamb, he makes a compelling distinction which does not mitigate the use of the theater entirely: “I am not arguing that Hamlet should not be acted, but how much Hamlet is made another thing by being acted” (Lamb, 293).

acts are spent thinking about death, life, and action, and in which the violence finally resolving Hamlet's revenge is not brought about by his own hands but in which "he becomes the victim of circumstances and accident" (Coleridge, *Lecture 3* 1813, 544). This is the division at the heart of both the character and the play, which Hazlitt views as separate worlds: Hamlet "may be said to be amenable only to the tribunal of his own thoughts, and is too much occupied with the airy world of contemplation, to lay as much stress as he ought on the practical consequences of things" (Hazlitt, *View*, 186). This dichotomy between the internal and the external worlds is of preeminent importance to the Romantic critics' understanding of Hamlet, and while it may seem evident or commonplace now, it was these critics who gave such a reading its prominence.

The division between internal and external is crucial in Coleridge's analysis of this play and his use of Hamlet in understanding thinking minds. As mentioned above, Coleridge operates as both critic and inheritor of Hamlet, taking on his persona in the lecture room and establishing readings of this character that have been far reaching in their influence. As a character defined by thinking, an inherently relatable trait, Hamlet is readily appropriated and adapted since the early modern period and it is precisely the universality of thinking that Coleridge uses Hamlet to challenge, categorize, and define—differentiating between sterile, methodical, and exuberant minds. For Coleridge, Hamlet is "a man living in meditation...continually resolving to do, yet doing nothing but resolve," therefore operating as an ideal example of a mind with an excess of method—Hamlet thinks too much (*Lecture 12* 1811-1812, 390). Throughout the play, Hamlet prefers to comment on the world of actions he sees around him, retaining a sense of detachment as every thought leads to yet more thinking. If lack of action defines Hamlet, then it is impossible to comprehend the genuine struggles of his character without empathizing with his mental turmoil. As with Hazlitt and Lamb, Coleridge felt that Shakespeare was best experienced

on the page, where the imagination had free reign to foster mental and emotional connections between the reader and the characters, rather than be distracted by the spectacle of the stage. Coleridge defined Shakespeare's "proper place" as "in the heart and in the closet,"<sup>28</sup> emphasizing the importance of Coleridge's remarkably personal connection with this text (Raysor, 2.230, qtd. Fuller 24).<sup>29</sup> As Coleridge wrote in January 1819, at the time of his final lectures on *Hamlet*, "Hamlet was the Play, or rather Hamlet himself was the Character, in the intuition and exposition of which I first made my turn for philosophical criticism, and especially for insight into the genius of Shakespear[e]" (Coleridge, *Marginalia*, 836).<sup>30</sup> Therefore, Hamlet is not only the gateway to Shakespearean criticism for Coleridge, but to all criticism. Zimmerman explores how Coleridge assumes a Hamlet-like identity in his presentation of Shakespearean criticism in the lecture room. "Hamlet was a tantalizing figure for Coleridge to identify himself with publicly...Audiences seem immediately to have recognized Coleridge's self-portrait" (Zimmerman, 54). Composing himself as a man of thought rather than action, Coleridge presents his criticism similarly to Hamlet's own philosophical ruminations, through the performativity of language. "If readers saw Shakespeare through Coleridge, they also watched Coleridge create an image of himself: a lecture on the genius of Shakespeare, under these particular conditions, was an occasion for the performance of contemporary genius" (Manning qtd. Zimmerman, 54). If Hamlet becomes a synecdoche for Shakespeare, Coleridge becomes a metonym for Hamlet—genius is therefore transferred from Shakespeare to Coleridge. Offering a fascinating take on

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<sup>28</sup> Zimmerman challenges this formulation somewhat by calling attention to the fact that the effect of driving Shakespeare from the stage into the closet "depended on an audience forgetting, if only temporarily, both Shakespeare's and his own stages," referring to the performativity of Coleridge's lectures (Zimmerman, 56).

<sup>29</sup> Raysor's compendium edition of *Shakespearean Criticism* published in 1930 has been updated by Foakes's *Coleridge on Shakespeare* from 1971, which corrected many of Raysor's incorrect citations. The quotation here comes from Lecture 5 of the 1813 series.

<sup>30</sup> See above for differentiation between "philosophical" (how to think) and "commonplace" (what to think) criticism.

collaboration between past and present, Coleridge's mind and body in the lecture room become objects of transference and he symbolizes the meeting of Shakespeare, Hamlet, and himself. Coleridge sees this embodiment as a connection between minds not as performers but as thinkers: "According to Coleridge, all three parties involved in his reading of *Hamlet*—Shakespeare, Hamlet, and himself—were 'Philosopher-poets,' rather than playwrights, actors, or public lecturers" (Zimmerman, 55-56). While we shouldn't forget these additional elements, for Coleridge they take a back seat and it is through thinking that he relates most strongly to Hamlet.

Coleridge's analysis of this crucial Shakespearean and Romantic figure is defined by a sense of imbalance—the same disparity we have already touched on between the internal and external worlds, thought versus action. Coleridge offers an amusing, though cynical, view of what he imagines Shakespeare's process to have been in creating this character and his fatal flaw, conceptualizing "Shakespear[e]'s mode of conceiving characters" to be "out of his own intellectual & moral faculties, by conceiving any one intellectual or moral faculty in morbid excess and then placing himself thus mutilated and diseased under given circumstances" (Coleridge, *Lecture 3 1813*, 1.539). The excess in Hamlet is his own thought, and though Coleridge valorizes and emulates this character, he is aware that there should be a balance between thought and action that is missing in Hamlet. "In Hamlet I conceive him [Shakespeare] to have wished to exemplify the moral necessity of a due Balance between our attention to outward objectives, and our meditation on inward Thoughts—a due Balance between the real and the imaginary World—In Hamlet this Balance does not exist" (1.539). I believe it is through soliloquies and asides that we are able to most clearly see not only this character's dedication to and preference for thinking but also what Coleridge will call his "method"—or lack thereof—the mental path through which we can see Hamlet's overabundance of thinking.



Upon Hamlet's first appearance in 1.2, he immediately establishes his tendency to comment on the world around him through asides and plays on words—a device that bears similarity to his longer soliloquies through the reflection of an inward thought, spoken aloud to the self but which is overheard by the audience or reader. Without specifically addressing the role of soliloquy or aside in this paradox between inward and outward and the verbal presentation of thought, Coleridge provides a formulation perfectly encapsulating this relationship:

the aversion to externals, the betrayed Habit of brooding over the world within him, and the prodigality of beautiful words, which are as it were the half embodyings of Thought, that make them more than Thought, give them an outness, a reality sui generis and yet retain their correspondence and shadowy approach to the Images and Movements within. (1.540)

In acknowledging the inherent “outness” of speaking aloud, Coleridge still stresses the importance of Hamlet's meditation as personal and internal. Once again, we see the term “shadow” appear, emphasizing the intangible aspects of thought rather than visible and unquestionable action.

I believe Hamlet's first line is most effectively read as an aside that goes unnoticed by those around him, which provides an ideal example of the meeting of reality and the shadowy movement of his own mind: “A little more than kin and less than kind” (1.2.65). For Coleridge, these first words illustrate Hamlet's “superfluous activity of mind” (Coleridge, *Marginalia*, 540). Hamlet is already seeing the relation between things, which will become a key aspect of Coleridge's understanding of method, as the path between thoughts is created by the relation of ideas rather than the amalgamation of disconnected details. Here, Hamlet meditates on the relation not only between himself and Claudius (which he clearly finds distasteful and mocks) but also between words. Wordplay is as much a defining characteristic of the play as digression

is for the titular character. Hamlet plays on the similarities between “kin” and “kind” in a succinct but biting criticism of his uncle’s marriage to his mother and how dissimilar he and Claudius are. His punning continues in his following line, “Not so, my lord. I am too much in the sun,” both contradicting his king and calling attention to the uncomfortable relationship he now has with his uncle-father (1.2.67). He even responds in this same way to his mother, replying, “Ay, madam, it is common”—taking her own use of the word “common” and twisting the meaning to reflect on her vulgar relationship with his uncle (1.2.74). Within Hamlet’s first lines of dialogue, we are introduced to his realm of the mind through his rhetorical connections and have become an accomplice. Only we attend to this form of digression, witnessing Hamlet’s satirizing and criticizing of the world around him. Coleridge emphasizes the importance of Hamlet’s critiques: “all the digressions and enlargements consist of reflections, truths, and principles of general and permanent interest, either directly expressed or disguised as playful satire” (*Essay IV*, 452). Not only is Hamlet ruminating on the relations between ideas, but the relation between the real world and the world of his mind.

Hamlet’s choice to live in his mind and shun the physical world is a concept he is aware of and to which he returns throughout the play. As early as his reunion with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in 2.2, Hamlet considers his own distaste for the physical world in a monologue that barely seems to address his scene partners. After giving a wonderful description of the world—“this most excellent canopy, the air, look, you, this brave o’erhanging firmament, this majestic roof fretted with golden fire”—Hamlet says that he sees nothing “but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors” (2.2.308-311). All that is remarkable in men—reason, action, beauty—is nothing more to Hamlet than the “quintessence of dust” (2.2.317). The corporeal world means nothing to Hamlet: it is not rich, or beautiful, or complete. Coleridge believes

Shakespeare intended “to pourtray a person in whose view of the (external) world and all its incidents (and objects) were comparatively dim, and of no interest in themselves, and which began to interest only when they were reflected in the mirror of his mind” (1811-1812, *Lecture 12*, 386). This is Hamlet’s great cross to bear: he exists in a world of “thought and sentiment,” and, as Hazlitt reminds us, is “incapable of deliberate action, and is only hurried into extremities on the spur of the occasion, when he has no time to reflect” (Hazlitt, *Characters*, 234). It is reflection, rather, that defines his engagement with the world around him, passing everything through the mirror of his mind, always ruminating instead of taking action.

It is Hamlet’s “thinking too precisely on th’event” that cripples him, no more brilliantly exemplified than in his attempt to murder Claudius at prayer in 3.3 (4.4.40). “Now might I do it,” Hamlet begins (3.3.73). “And now I’ll do it [*Draws sword.*]—and so ‘a goes to heaven, / And so am I revenged!” (3.3.74-75). The pause halfway through this line stops Hamlet, and allows the time and space to reflect. The full stops on either side of “That would be scanned” in the following line act as powerful caesurae, stopping both his thoughts and action (3.3.75). Twenty lines follow, where instead of acting, Hamlet considers the possibility that Claudius will go to heaven after being killed at prayer—which only the audience will discover was in no real danger of happening as Claudius ends the scene with the confession, “Words without thoughts never to heaven go” (3.3.98). By stopping himself and succumbing to a consideration of the ramifications, Hamlet prevents himself from fulfilling his revenge, once more choosing the world of the mind over that of physical action. Hazlitt uses this scene to illustrate that “when [Hamlet] is most bound to act, he remains puzzled, undecided, and skeptical, dallies with his purposes, till the occasion is lost, and finds out some pretence to relapse into indolence and thoughtfulness again” (Hazlitt, *Characters*, 234). Hamlet’s “pretence” or excuse comes in his

resolution to kill Claudius at a time when he is sinning, so that damnation will be assured. This moment is vitally important to the Romantic critics, and for many, Hamlet's resolution poses a moral conundrum that must be addressed. Coleridge's main comment on this scene has to do with directly contradicting Johnson's earlier reading of Hamlet's decision as intentionally malicious: "Dr Johnson's mistaking of the marks of reluctance & procrastination for impetuous horror-striking fiendishness! Of such importance is it to understand the *Germ* of a character" (Coleridge, *Marginalia*, 855). Understanding that Hamlet's decision is more of an excuse than an intentional damnation, a reading which returns to the "germ" of the character being his choice of thought over action, is crucial to the Romantics. Tieck, for instance, strongly emphasizes Hamlet's innocence of any malicious intent: "When he finds the King in prayer he again hesitates to perform the decisive deed, imagining rather a more that inhuman vengefulness—an explanation by which he explains away any reason and excuses himself" (reprinted Bate, 334). Schlegel also uses the word "excuse" in describing this moment (Lecture XXV, 404), all of the instances of which may imply both the Romantic's collaborative production of critical readings and their intentional contrast to Johnson. Though Coleridge defines this moment as "merely the excuse Hamlet made to himself for not taking advantage of this particular moment to accomplish his revenge," it also crucially represents once again the powerful and debilitating exuberance of Hamlet's mind (1811-1812, *Lecture 12*, 1.389).

Coleridge dives into Hamlet's inner world by analyzing the (lack of) method he sees reflected in his thought processes. Hamlet exemplifies an excess of method because of the enormous intellectual activity fostered directly by his lack of balance between the real and imaginary worlds. The germ, perhaps, of Coleridge's method may appear in his marginalia, where he comments on Hamlet's "ratiocinative meditateness" (Coleridge, *Marginalia*, 844). In

its noun form, “ratiocination” is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “The action or process of reasoning” or “The power or faculty of reasoning; capacity to reason” (*OED*, “ratiocination,” 1a, 2). Hamlet undeniably has powerful and excessive powers of reasoning, though it is the *process* element of ratiocination that will become of preeminent importance to Coleridge’s understanding of method.

Method, derived from the Greek for path, or way of transit, “demands a knowledge of the relations which things bear to each other” (*Essay IV*, 650). Coleridge does not provide an example of true method in thought but rather the two opposing ends of immethodical minds, the sterile and the exuberant, for which he finds examples in Shakespeare. For Coleridge, Hamlet is the embodiment of an excess of method due to his own self-proclaimed flaw of “thinking too precisely on th’event,” which translates into digressions within and qualifications of his own thinking (4.4.40). “We have asserted that Method results from a balance between the passive impression received from outward things, and the internal activity of the mind in reflecting and generalizing; but neither Hamlet nor the Hostess hold this balance accurately” (*Essay IV*, 652). Hamlet serves as an ideal example for Coleridge in his presentation of the extremes of immethodical natures, contrasted starkly with Mistress Quickly, from *Henry IV Part I*. The uneducated mind, as exemplified by Mistress Quickly, recounts stories wherein “memory alone is called into action; and...the objects and events recur in the narration in the same order, and with the same accompaniments, however accidental or impertinent, as they had first occurred to the narrator” (449). This is an undeniably accurate summarization of the example of Mistress Quickly’s language Coleridge provides:

Thou didst swear to me upon a parcel-gilt goblet, sitting in my dolphin chamber, at the round table, by a sea-coal fire, on Wednesday in Whitsun week, when the prince broke thy head for likening his father to a singing-man in Windsor—thou didst swear to me

then, as I was washing thy wound, to marry me and make me my lady thy wife. (*Henry IV Part I*, 2.1, qtd. 450).

Mistress Quickly's story is overrun with details that have no bearing on the present matter, which itself is impossible to ascertain from this sentence alone: Falstaff had simply asked her how much money he owes her, and the short version of Mistress Quickly's response is "thyself and thy money, too" (2.1). While Hamlet's speech is likewise overrun with digressions, the commentary he includes is nothing like Mistress Quickly's disparate and unconnected details, reflecting rather what Coleridge understands as his pre-disposition to generalize, *after* "the events, with the circumstances of time and place, are all stated with equal compression and rapidity" (*Essay IV*, 452).

Up from my cabin,  
 My sea-gown scarf'd about me, in the dark  
 Grop'd I to find out them; had my desire;  
 Finger'd their pocket; and, in fine, withdrew  
 To my own room again: making so bold,  
*My fears forgetting manners*, to unseal  
 Their grand commission; where *I* found, Horatio,  
 A royal knavery—an exact command,  
*Larded with many several sorts of reasons,*  
*Importing Denmark's health, and England's too,*  
 With, ho! such bugs and goblins in *my* life,  
 That on the supervize, no leisure bated,  
 No, not to stay the grinding of the axe,  
 My head should be struck off! (5.2, qtd. 452)

In his quoting of this section, Coleridge italicizes the digressions that make more general comments on his story. Though Hamlet is "meditative to excess," "all the digressions and enlargements consist of reflections, truths, and principles of general and permanent interest, either directly expressed or disguised as playful satire" (452).<sup>31</sup> It is this kind of thinking in terms

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<sup>31</sup> "Hamlet's running into long reasonings—carrying off the impatience and uneasy feelings of expectation by running away from the *particular* in the *general*. This aversion to personal, individual, concerns and escape to Generalization and general reasonings a most important characteristic" (Coleridge, Lecture 3 1813, 541).

of connections and relations, beyond the superficial details, that exemplifies what Coleridge is defining as method, the relation between things and the pursuit, path, or movement between ideas. Therefore, Hamlet's way of thinking is "distinctive of every powerful and methodizing intellect," if only "with due abatement and reduction" (452). It is not that Hamlet lacks method, as Mistress Quickly does, but rather that he has too much method, spending so much time thinking and digressing that it becomes detrimental to the necessary balance between action and thought.

In 4.4, Hamlet reflects on his tragic flaw, which Coleridge defines as his "continually resolving to do, yet doing nothing but resolve" (1811-1812, *Lecture 12*, 1.390).

How all occasions do inform against me  
 And spur my dull revenge. What is a man  
 If his chief good and market of his time  
 Be but to sleep and feed? A beast—no more.  
 Sure he that made us with such large discourse,  
 Looking before and after, gave us not  
 That capability and godlike reason  
 To fust in us unused. Now whether it be  
 Bestial oblivion or some craven scruple  
 Of thinking too precisely on th' event  
 (A thought which quartered hath but one part wisdom  
 And ever three parts coward) I do not know  
 Why yet I live to say this thing's to do,  
 Sith I have cause and will and strength and means  
 To do't. (4.4.31-45)

This is the first half of Hamlet's soliloquy, and the section most centered on thinking. There is undoubtedly a progression to Hamlet's soliloquy here: he begins with a question (as almost all of the soliloquies do), and ruminates on how it is the thinking process itself that sets man apart from beasts. Yet after recognizing that he has more justification than anyone to fulfil a bloody revenge, Hamlet continues only to fall into the same trap that he is criticizing, digressing and commenting on his own thoughts before getting hung up once more on thinking about death—the theme that quite literally haunts him throughout the play. As Hamlet both recognizes and

once more illustrates, thinking will always lead to further digressing for him. He begins by making a similar connection as Coleridge between sterile and exuberant minds: “What is a man / If his chief good and market of his time / Be but to sleep and feed? A beast—no more” (4.4.32-34). The beast is Hamlet’s version of the sterile mind (Coleridge’s example being Mistress Quickly) and the answer to his own question reflects the thinking this mind would be capable of—an identification and “no more.” Questions call our attention to the relationship between inward and outward, as they must all be rhetorical—no one else is there to answer them—and often act as what Coleridge refers to as the “Initiative,” the starting point from which all methodical minds proceed. It is through the attempt at systematically answering these questions that the method, the path, of a thinking mind becomes clear. While Hamlet may use questions to organize his thoughts, he will invariably digress from his point, falling into that which makes him immethodical—or perhaps excessively methodical.

It is this thinking, reasoning, and connecting of ideas that sets Hamlet apart as something more than a beast: “Sure he that made us with such large discourse, / Looking before and after, gave us not / That capability and godlike reason / To fust in us unused” (4.4.35-38). Similar to how the beast-like language reflects the beastly mind, Hamlet uses his own reason to justify man’s capacity for discourse and thinking. Now that Hamlet has established the two ends of the spectrum, he makes the same move as Coleridge in passing beyond the thinking mind into the mind that thinks “too precisely on th’event”—in other words, the mind representative of himself.

Now whether it be  
Bestial oblivion or some craven scruple  
Of thinking too precisely on th’event  
(A thought which quartered hath but on part wisdom  
And ever three parts coward) I do not know  
Why yet I live to say this thing’s to do,  
Sith I have cause and will and strength and means  
To do’t. (4.4.38-45)



This reflection illustrates what Coleridge calls “the perfect knowledge of his [Hamlet’s] own character” (1811-1812, *Lecture 12*, 1.388). Within Hamlet’s consideration of what he recognizes as his fault, he continues to digress in his comments on the inherent cowardice in choosing thinking over action. As Coleridge illustrated through italics in 5.2, the parenthetical here represents Hamlet’s generalizing on the particular thought he first expressed. Whereas Mistress Quickly provides no connective tissue in her sterile mind, recalling only disparate details, Hamlet pauses to reflect on what he is discussing, providing *too much* connective tissue: a remarkably relevant meditation on how he is ruled not simply by thinking but by thinking “too precisely,” and the lack of action inherent in his seemingly endless resolutions.

Hamlet’s soliloquy once again travels the well-worn paths of his incessant meditations on death. Though there was a clear progression in the first half of this soliloquy, it is “by the surplus of its own activity, [that] Hamlet’s mind disturbs the arrangement, or which that very activity had been the cause and impulse” (*Essay IV*, 454). Hamlet reminds the reader and himself—as if either party were ever allowed to forget—that he has more cause than anyone to risk his life in the pursuit of revenge. Yet even after witnessing “twenty thousand men / That for a fantasy and trick of fame / Go to their graves like beds” (4.4.59-61), those who take action without any of the cause he has, Hamlet’s final line proves that he is still ruled (perhaps trapped) by Coleridge’s chiasmus on his resolve: “O, from this time forth / My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth” (4.4.64-65). Hamlet has clearly resolved—but what has he resolved to do? To continue thinking: vitally, it is not “my *actions* be bloody or be nothing worth” but once more his *thoughts*. Coleridge is not the only critic to identify this moment as a remarkably self-aware comment on Hamlet’s tragic flaw. Hazlitt, in his analysis of Shakespeare’s characters, quotes the entire passage from 4.4, identifying both the kernel of Hamlet’s character and his constant urge to

digress within this soliloquy. “His ruling passion is to think, not to act: and any vague pretext that flatters this propensity instantly diverts him from his previous purposes” (Hazlitt, *Characters*, 235). Hamlet must continue reflecting, and his excess of method is illustrated most powerfully in moments such as 4.4 where thinking leads to further thinking, resulting in diversions and digressions.

Beyond the words themselves, the form of the speech in 4.4 is quite revealing. The section quoted above is 8 lines long, but only one sentence. Hamlet’s ruminations take time—he is verbose, even when considering about how thinking is cowardly compared to action. The sheer volume of his words is the ideal way to present a character for whom the exuberance of his mind is paramount. Even his thinking on thinking is complex and must contain digressions, as his parenthetical in the section quoted above qualifies his own statement. It is not a sterility of mind and a lack of method that proves the fatal flaw for Hamlet, but rather his overabundance of thinking, the excessive connecting of ideas.

Not only does Coleridge emulate Hamlet’s identity as a man of thought as a public lecturer (as Zimmerman argued), but Bate’s discussion of Coleridge’s essay on method reflects a remarkable similarity between Coleridge’s path, or method, and Hamlet’s. As we have just discussed in terms of Hamlet’s digressions offering broader generalizations, Coleridge’s essay—and much of his criticism in general—makes a similar movement. “The essays on method move from the particular to the general, from a reading of dramatic poetry to an extended philosophical discourse” (Bate, *English Romantic Imagination*, 17). This transition within Coleridge’s writing is also vital in understanding the importance of Shakespearean criticism for Coleridge and the Romantics: it was through their thinking about Shakespeare that they were able to address political, philosophical, and artistic issues of their day. Shakespeare was not only their artistic

ancestor and idol, but a malleable concept onto which they could project what they needed him to be. “For Coleridge, the reading of Shakespeare leads straight to the central questions of philosophy. Hamlet, Shakespeare’s most philosophical tragic creation, is especially important in this respect” (18). Hamlet is a useful tool through which Coleridge can consider the human experience and intangible philosophical questions. Yet as this close analysis of Hamlet’s own language has shown, the Romantic critics—and Coleridge in particular—paid clear and careful attention to the language of the text, introducing to literary studies the importance of close readings and then the connection to broader theoretical conclusions. What was true for the Romantics remains true for studies such as the one I am undertaking here: “Literary theory is inseparable from the practical criticism of Shakespeare’s verse” (20). That being said, it is *Hamlet* that defines Shakespearean criticism for Coleridge and the Romantics, and the meeting of critic, Hamlet, and Shakespeare offers a valuable perspective of collaboration for us to carry with us when we turn to twentieth-century film productions.

An essential element of the Romantics’ reliance on Hamlet is their ability to relate this character to the self. Whether using the terms “spectator” or “reader”—implying the stage or the page—it is an emotional and mental connection that is fostered between the character defined by an overly methodical mind and the similar mental experience of the audience. “*Hamlet* is singular in its kind: a tragedy of thought inspired by continual and never-satisfied meditation on human destiny and the dark perplexity of the events of this world, and calculated to call forth the very same meditation in the minds of the spectators” (Schlegel, Lecture XXV, 404). I would argue that a justification for Hamlet’s overexuberance of method may be that it enables precisely this mental connection with Schlegel’s “spectators”—by thinking along the same lines as Hamlet, we connect on a mental, internal level beyond the physical depiction of an actor. The

generality of Hamlet's ruminations—his thinking along questions about death, the soul, destiny or fate—is present in both Schlegel and Hazlitt's understanding of this play.

It is one of Shakespear's plays that we think of the oftenest, because it abounds most in striking reflections on human life, and because the distresses of Hamlet are transferred, by the turn of his mind, to the general account of humanity. Whatever happens to him we apply to ourselves, because he applies it so himself as a means of general reasoning" (Hazlitt, *Characters*, 233).

Hazlitt's "general reasoning" recalls Coleridge's marginal note about Hamlet's "ratiocinative meditation," and Hazlitt's formulation here supports my claim that it is through Hamlet's method and reasoning that we are able to apply his thought process to ourselves.<sup>32</sup> In addition, it is this relation, renewability, and "reappropriable" nature that defines not only the Romantic's understanding of Hamlet, but of Shakespeare, as well. Bate connects this universality with Shakespearean idolatry, which becomes prominent during this period.

...[B]y 1800 he [Shakespeare] had become England's chief cultural icon. It was in the course of the eighteenth century that he rose through the ranks of poets and assumed his status as supreme 'genius'. This journey—which was, as I have suggested, a typically eighteenth-century ascent from humble origins to great exaltation—is the most important sub-narrative within the overall plot of his afterlife. Once Shakespeare was identified as a genius, he became infinitely exportable, infinitely reappropriable. (Bate, *Genius of Shakespeare*, 166)

Not only have we examined some of the ways in which *Hamlet* was "exportable" during the Romantic period, through Coleridge's appropriation of the character to serve his critical and philosophical purposes, but the same concept of exportability will carry through adaptations of this play in film in the following section. The synecdoche of Hamlet and Shakespeare that we

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<sup>32</sup> "The presence of Hamlet in Romantic discourse usually indicates that the artist is examining his own self; the presence of Hamlet's creator is often indicative of an attempt to 'annihilate' the self (the term is Keats's). The self was a central problem for the Romantics; Shakespeare was thus brought to the centre of their thinking...Authority and influence are the keys to Romantic Shakespeare" (Bate, *English Romantic Imagination*, 19). For the Romantics, Hamlet criticism was deeply connected with an understanding of the self, while the key terms of authority and influence will appear again in the third section.

will explore through actor-auteurs begins during the Romantic period, as well as Shakespearean criticism and idolatry as defining characteristics of Shakespeare's legacy, or constellation.

As evidenced by the Romantics, all criticism is collaboration with an earlier text, while the Romantics also establish criticism as a collaborative process through their engagement with each other, past critics, and even the characters under scrutiny. This analysis has centered on Hamlet as a crucial area of study for the Romantics, a synecdoche for Shakespeare, as well as the central Shakespearean figure for Coleridge's practical and philosophical criticism. The Romantics made literary (and Shakespearean) criticism what it is today, introducing close reading or "hypercriticism," character analyses, and most importantly, criticism as a conversation. As with adaptations and films, criticism is defined by establishing conversations between texts, authors, and readers. The Romantics established literary critical discourse as a way to simultaneously address both past and present, as we continue to do, as well. Whether intentional or not, I believe the communication of ideas and readings of Shakespeare during this period can and should be considered collaboration, and this perspective should influence our own understanding of criticism today, as well as the concept of a Shakespearean constellation.

## Adaptation as Collaboration

All films are inherently collaborative when we consider how many individuals participate in their creation. Yet the tendency of critics and audiences alike to appoint an auteur, one creative authority, has been present since before François Truffaut coined the term in 1954 and still influences how we read film texts today. Though Truffaut may have put a name to this artistic authority in an effort to provide the cinematic creator the same prestige as a literary author, Eliot's discussion of the "individual talent" from 1921 illustrates that the tendency to elect one governing artistic body existed before Truffaut's term. Therefore, while it may seem initially anachronistic to refer to artists such as Shakespeare, Asta Nielsen, and Laurence Olivier as "auteurs" (as each comes before Truffaut's theory), I am using this term in an effort to counteract our tendency to honor one single participant as the creator of a work which relies on collaboration to be made. The perils of electing one authority in either the production or reception of a film are automatically more prominent when considering adaptations, works that embody the meeting of multiple artistic visions. I believe establishing a hierarchy between creative participants limits our ability to analyze the complexities of film adaptations. The prioritization of an individual is particularly problematic when discussing Shakespearean cinematic adaptations, where the dual authorities of author and adaptor are emphatically present. I argue that Shakespeare and his adaptors should be viewed as collaborators—not creative opponents—constructing works that explore influences across time, media and historical context.

I will use two *Hamlet* films from the twentieth century to demonstrate the role of collaboration in adaptation and the need to revise our theories to better account for its presence. Though the joint product of two directors, Svend Gade and Heinz Schall, the 1921 silent *Hamlet* is often referred to as the "Asta Nielsen Hamlet," establishing the main actress as the auteur.

Laurence Olivier's 1948 film, which he referred to as his "translation" and "interpretation" of *Hamlet*,<sup>33</sup> features Olivier as both director and titular character, and is one of the most frequently cited "auteur" films. A limited reading of auteur Shakespeare adaptations leads to the oft-repeated claim that auteurs use Shakespeare for prestige, and while this may answer the question *what can Shakespeare do for auteurs*, it overlooks the equally essential question of *what can auteur adaptations do for Shakespeare?* It is only through an emphasis on collaboration in our Shakespearean constellation that we can begin to ask questions in both directions, to analyze and investigate the presence of multiple authors and the role of adaptation in Shakespeare's expanding legacy.

Auteurism itself is helpful (if not vital) in defining the key players at work within a film. I am not suggesting that it be completely ignored by encouraging a focus on collaboration, but suggesting that we should reframe the term as a synonym for collaboration rather than authority—especially when discussing adaptations. Semenza and Hasenfratz's definition provides a less constrictive understanding of auteurism: "From our perspective, the key issue in identifying an auteur *adaptation* would be the degree to which one's knowledge of the director...clarifies something important about the adaptation" (Semenza & Hasenfratz, 258). I would like to open this definition up a bit more, however, to take into consideration the fact that there may be other participants who influence the creation of a film enough to be deemed "auteurs" beyond the director. For instance, Nielsen, as leading lady, is arguably more of an auteur than either Gade or Schall, and for my purposes here I shall focus on Nielsen and Olivier respectively, to explore how understanding their goals and intentions "clarifies something important about the adaptation" and how they utilize *Hamlet* in different contexts, media, and for certain purposes,

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<sup>33</sup> Olivier uses these terms in his Introduction to Alan Dent's *Hamlet: The Film and The Play*.

whether personal or cultural. In this way, we will be able to consider how their influence informs elements of these adaptations, while remembering that these artists were not creating their films in a vacuum. It is not my intention to entirely dismantle the auteur theory by embracing a view of film creation that is more oriented toward collaboration than individual talent, but rather to alter the language we use in our theorization of the concept.

Bortolotti and Hutcheon's biological theory of adaptation is best equipped to enable a shift in our language and theories surrounding auteurism in adaptation, as it already encourages the interplay of adaptation and adapted work. Similar to Eliot's understanding of the "dead poets" but from a more scientific direction, Bortolotti and Hutcheon identify the source text as an ancestor from which other stories descend. "Stories, in a manner parallel to genes, replicate; the adaptations of both evolve with changing environments" (B&H, 444). By defining that which is adapted as a "replicator," and the adaptation itself as the "vehicle," Bortolotti and Hutcheon valuably theorize the relationship between the two, encouraging a productive view for how to be aware of the adapted source material without letting the judgement of fidelity impair our understanding of the work of the adaptation.

It is obviously important to the understanding of an adaptation *as* adaptation that we investigate where it has come from...By revealing lineages of descent, not similarities in form alone, we can understand how a specific narrative changes over time. If we take this history into consideration, suddenly it is the success of the narrative itself, as well as that of its adaptations, that can be considered in a new light...giv[ing] us a way to think anew about the broader questions of *why* and *how* certain stories are told and retold in our culture. (445)

Bortolotti and Hutcheon's concept of lineages of descent is valuable as it reminds us not only of the relationship between adapted work and adaptation, but the interaction and exchange between texts and contexts. As Bortolotti and Hutcheon's focus is on revising the discourse surrounding fidelity in adaptation, they emphasize the necessary shifts driving an adaptation, as "replication



is not repetition without change” (448). In their useful equation, “narrative idea + cultural environment = **adaptation**,” where the bold refers to an adaptation as a product, Bortolotti and Hutcheon illustrate the inherent presence of both the source and the new situation within any adaptation—the text and the context (448). That being said, I believe there is an essential factor missing from this equation. Though the authors briefly claim that “it is people who change stories and do so with particular intentions,” on the whole this theory prioritizes a discussion of adaptations as products, which calls for some revision when considering the influence of auteurs in Shakespeare adaptations (453).

To establish the central importance of collaboration in adaptation, I intend to borrow Bortolotti and Hutcheon’s idea of textual evolution to establish a new perspective, expanding agency in the process of adaptation and reminding us of the necessity of engaging with the “dead poets.” Rather than framing adaptations as passive creations, we need to consider the agency of the adaptors as artists in the creation of their works, and that to fully appreciate the act of collaboration we must consider the presence of multiple artistic voices. I propose reconceptualizing an adaptation—what Bortolotti and Hutcheon would refer to as a “vehicle”—as the product of an agent or agents, the adaptors who carry with them their own purposes and intentions for creating this new work. In this way, the adaptor becomes the agent through which the text and context interact, just as we saw through the meeting of these three entities in Romantic criticism. As Hutcheon claims, “I’m interested in the people as well as works doing the shifting” (Henderson, footnote 2 page 2). While I may be manipulating other theories in an attempt to inspire new directions, this is merely a first step and much of the work in redefining adaptation through collaboration I leave open to anyone willing to take up the mantle. As Henderson explains, “by suggesting the ways in which particular choices deny or acknowledge

their participation in Shake-shifting, we make the ethical stakes involved in artistic collaboration more apparent” (28). I am undertaking a similar goal here, trying to move us in a direction where acknowledging both collaboration and agency in adaptation becomes part of our vocabulary.

Throughout this study so far, the concept of haunting has appeared again and again in the criticism of adaptation and textual collaboration, beginning with Eliot and the “dead poets.” These films are no different, and may even bring this ghostly relationship between past and present to the fore. Shakespeare’s constant haunting of these *Hamlet* films challenges the sole authority of the auteur, while auteurs prevent Shakespeare’s authority from dominating by introducing the source to different contexts. This could make these films battlegrounds similar to Bloom and Bate’s view of ancestral influence, but I encourage a reading of these films as critical collaborations, made possible through the use of Hamlet as a metonym for both author and auteur. While in our earlier discussion of *Hamlet*, we explored the play as a synecdoche for Shakespeare (substituting a part for a whole), in these films specifically, Hamlet the character becomes a metonym, substitute, or referent for both Shakespeare *and* the actor/actress in this role, creating a slippage similar to what we saw with Coleridge being associated with Shakespeare’s genius. It is this slippage on which I intend to base my description of these films as “criticism,” through Tieck’s argument that “only the enthusiastically inspired person, who can entirely take the poet into himself, should pronounce as a critic” (qtd. and translated Fuller, 99). I believe that regardless of what Tieck envisioned in this quote, these auteur/actor/adaptors undeniably “take the poet”—embodied through Hamlet—into themselves, and it is through their interpretations of the source text and the introduction of their (borrowed) theses that they become Shakespearean critics in their own right. I aim to focus on how the collaboration between the adaptors and Shakespeare is marked through their engagement with both texts and contexts.

### Asta Nielsen's *Hamlet*

Asta Nielsen undeniably qualifies as “any major collaborator on a film whose influence seems to have been decisive in creating its quality of lasting impact,” which is how Petrie defines one of his many categories of auteurs (Petrie, 34). As the first film made through Nielsen's production company, *Art-Film*, her influence is present through her roles as producer, lead actress, and cultural icon of the 1920s “New Woman,” adding another layer to the remarkable depiction of a female Hamlet pretending to be a man. Nielsen's role as a producer for this film was grounded in her desire to have greater control over the product, as the German film industry became more “director-centric” than “actor-centric” after World War I (Allen, 180).

Additionally, her career-long interest in challenging gender norms through her films played a key role in her depiction of Hamlet. Though other films featuring female Hamlets had been in the works, Nielsen presented a revolutionary version of the story, not just as a woman playing Hamlet but as Hamlet herself as a woman (Buchanan, 221). Through the introduction of gender politics in the 1920s, Nielsen emphatically modernizes the *Hamlet* source material: “Although *Hamlet* was hardly a modern subject even when first dealt with by Shakespeare, in Nielsen's hands it becomes an uncompromising exploration of contemporary issues of sexuality, gender, politics, and nationalism” (Allen, 189). Clearly Bortolotti and Hutcheon's theory not only applies but *thrives* in relation to Nielsen's *Hamlet*, as the adaptation responds to a new environment and context through the hands of an agent with purposeful goals.

Nielsen's auteur collaboration with Shakespeare is illustrated by Judith Buchanan, as she calls attention to the slippage—or what she calls the collision—between Nielsen as an actor and as Hamlet, the synthesis of the two collaborative authors (if Hamlet is in turn a metonym for

Shakespeare, a recognizable stand-in for Shakespeare's genius—something we have seen since the Romantic period).

[W]hen screen star 'Asta Nielsen' plays Shakespearean character 'Hamlet', there is a collision and coalescing of *two* prior known 'entities'—that of the player with that of the part played. One of the pleasures such films afford is observing how actor and character accommodate themselves to the other's previous identities and help to mould each other's current and future ones. (Buchanan, 224)

Though she may not be using the same vocabulary as I have been, Buchanan's "encounter," "collision," and mutual accommodation are all examples of the kind of language we should be refocusing our study of adaptation through. Buchanan is doing exactly what I am calling for, a deep consideration of all that is going on in the film and its historical moment while still remaining aware of how deeply Nielsen influenced the film.

As Nielsen was far from the only creative participant in the creation of this film, however, it is crucial not to overlook Gade's hand in the sets and interest in the growing German expressionism movement, the political environment, or the return to the Saxo Grammaticus version of the Amleth myth. Though both Gade and Nielsen were Danish (Hamlet, as well), this film is emphatically German. Shakespeare and *Hamlet* had been adopted by Germany since the Romantic period, while Nielsen herself "was the first superstar of German silent cinema," claimed by the Germans on "emotional, artistic, and economic grounds" (Allen, 178).<sup>34</sup> In addition, "neither the American nor British film industry...made another Shakespeare feature film until the sound era. In the 1920s, therefore, the centre of Shakespeare film production shifted to the artistically ambitious German film industry" (Buchanan, 217). The growing style of German expressionism during these same years was tied to the isolationism and nationalism

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<sup>34</sup> David Fuller provides an entire chapter in his book *Shakespeare and the Romantics* on "Germany, Our Shakespeare," where he discusses claims such as August Wilhelm Schlegel's that "because in Germany Shakespeare is read so frequently, studied so deeply, loved so passionately, and admired with so much insight he is 'ganz unser', totally ours" (Fuller, 82).

following the first World War, while common expressionist and melodrama themes such as the *Doppelgänger* (split-personality) may be present in Hamlet's gender duality.

Not only does the expressionistic imagery of the film place it within a cultural trend and period, but it reminds us of another layer of collaboration present in the film. "The intimacy of the collaboration between set, cinematography and acting must have been helped by the fact that Gade, who directed, also designed the sets. He was, therefore, uniquely well placed to draw out their potential import as part of the overall interpretive conception" (Buchanan, 232). The sets in this film are almost as striking as Nielsen's performance as Hamlet, with the brain-like motifs reminding the audience of both the German expressionist and Shakespearean preoccupation with the interiority of the titular character, while liminal spaces emphasize Hamlet's gendered middle-ground as a woman passing for a man, and the recurring vertical shapes resemble bars trapping her in this pretense. Both Buchanan and Allen have provided immensely useful close readings of this film and the contemporary elements of collaboration present within it. What I aim to contribute is to return us once more to Eliot's "dead poets," or ancestors, and incorporate a discussion of the collaboration across time that is just as important in the analysis of any adaptation. This analysis is precisely what my constellation theory enables us to do, tracing the shifts within Shakespeare's legacy that each new adaptation and object of study inspires.

Allen offers a fantastic synthesis of the film's narrative as a "pastiche of Saxo, Vining, Shakespeare, and Nielsen's own notions," which illustrates just how complex the webs of textual collaboration are in this film.<sup>35</sup> Taking certain elements from Saxo Grammaticus' twelfth century version of the Scandinavian tale, such as Hamlet's successful murder of Claudius by locking him in a burning building, this *Hamlet* also makes use of Edward P. Vining's 1881 notion that

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<sup>35</sup> Ewin Gepard also deserves acknowledgement here as the screenwriter.

Hamlet was effeminate, but takes it significantly further to actively declare Hamlet a woman in the opening title cards. Semenza and Hasenfratz argue that this film

begins with criticism of Shakespeare's play through quotation of its sharpest critics, appropriates a bizarre modern intertext in Vining, and advances a radical new interpretation. In a bold stroke, *Hamlet* jabs at the heart of British cultural imperialism by Danifying and Germanizing England's most prized literary work, boldly offering up to audiences the 'real' Hamlet story. (Semenza & Hasenfratz, 127)

As revisionary as it may be, the silent *Hamlet* is crucially not a complete rejection of the original tale or the Shakespearean source, but rather applies a thesis—that Hamlet was a woman—and frequently returns to the language of the play both through title cards and visual depiction to support this claim. Much as Olivier will do with his borrowed Oedipal reading of *Hamlet*, Nielsen finds a new center for her story: Hamlet's tragic success at playing a boy and the gendered tension of the failed romance between Hamlet and Horatio.<sup>36</sup> “Anne Jerslev points out that Nielsen's Hamlet wears a tight bodysuit throughout the film, which both emphasizes the boyishness of her figure and the fact that she is a woman, thereby situating the duality of Hamlet's gender at the visual center of the film” (Allen, 192). Nielsen's frequent clasping of her chest and immense, expressive eyes further prevent the audience from ever forgetting the secret Hamlet must hide. In this way, Nielsen's interpretation and depiction of Hamlet establishes a powerful dramatic irony, where the audience is constantly faced with a truth that is hidden from the characters of the film.

Beyond Nielsen's take on the character of Hamlet, the language of Shakespeare's play is evoked throughout. Though the structure of the story is reworked, beginning long before Hamlet's return to Denmark and her father's death, the film is divided into acts, directly recalling the structure of the Shakespearean source rather than the Saxo Grammaticus chronicle. Buchanan

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<sup>36</sup> Though most critics acknowledge how appropriate the cross-dressing theme is for Nielsen's career, none take note of just how well it fits in a Shakespearean setting and *oeuvre*, as well.

focuses on the ways in which the film “departs from, or rewrites,” the Shakespeare, through omissions such as the grave-digger and the ghost, while calling attention to the “paradoxical” use of direct quotation of the play through title cards (Buchanan, 238). Buchanan argues that examples such as “O my prophetic soul—Mine uncle!” or “to sleep perchance to dream” anchor “the production in the semblance of an authenticating relationship to the Shakespearean source” (239). Using Shakespeare for prestige and validation is nothing new and certainly a viable justification, but because these phrases are often extracted from their place in the play and used elsewhere in the film, Buchanan concludes that the “re-attributed or contextually transformed quotations serve less as the advertisement of a respectful intimacy with a Shakespeare source and, frequently, more as a means of illustrating this production’s resistance to it” (239). There is no question that Nielsen’s film pushes back against the *Hamlet* play—not least through the framing of Hamlet’s gender as the *truth*—but I believe Buchanan’s focus on how the actual text of the play is reproduced limits, and perhaps distorts, her understanding of just how much this film does adapt from Shakespeare. Certain images are emphatically Shakespeare’s, such as the Mousetrap as Hamlet’s way of proving Claudius’ guilt, Ophelia’s death by drowning in a woodland glade, or the final scene with its profusion of deaths.<sup>37</sup> Other details are taken as literal readings of the text, such as the funeral and the wedding actually happening at the same feast (as opposed to merely a reflection of Hamlet’s hyperbole born from grief). Therefore, even if Nielsen tried to downplay the connection with the Shakespearean source, this film recalls the language of Shakespeare’s text directly through title cards and imagery.

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<sup>37</sup> “Shakespeare did not only write memorable language. He also created memorable stage images, visible representations of the things he describes,” what Bate refers to as “Shakespeare’s visual memorability” (Bate, *Genius of Shakespeare*, 251).

That being said, Buchanan is still correct that “[e]ven as [the film] invokes the play...it also repeatedly liberates itself from too close an adherence to the specificity of Shakespeare’s dramatic vision” (Buchanan, 238). Within this film, Shakespeare, Saxo, Vining, Gade and Nielsen are all instrumental in the creation and depiction of this revolutionary *Hamlet*, while the contexts of WWI, the German appropriation of both Shakespeare and Nielsen, and the 1920s emancipated woman all factor in its production and reception. Because of this interplay of influences, the new take on Bortolotti and Hutcheon’s biological theory that I have established is evidently a more useful way of analyzing this film than falling into our overreliance on the auteur theory. Through our introduction of agency into the biological theory, we may acknowledge the crucial roles of Nielsen, Gade, and the other collaborators both past and present, in a way that relates back to our earliest discussion of Shakespeare’s own adaptation and collaboration in the creation of the *King Lear* text.

### **Laurence Olivier’s *Hamlet***

Olivier’s *Hamlet* bears some remarkable similarities to Nielsen’s 1921 film in terms of the critical work it undertakes, though its relationship to the Shakespearean source is significantly more foregrounded than in Nielsen’s interweaving of sources. The relationship between film and theatrical source is emphasized so greatly in this film that Bernice Kliman refers to it as “a *film-infused play*” which she argues Olivier devised as “the best possible for presenting the heightened language of Shakespeare” (Kliman, 305). It is important to note that while the silent *Hamlet* occasionally used a few phrases from the play in intertitles, Olivier’s *Hamlet* uses exclusively Shakespeare’s language within the body of the film (after Olivier’s own interjection offering the thesis at the beginning). In this way, Shakespeare’s presence is even



more unavoidable than in the Nielsen film, as we are constantly hearing Shakespeare's own language—though occasionally out of order, which reminds us of Olivier's role in shaping this new *Hamlet*.

By opening with the sound of a tuning orchestra, Olivier establishes within the first moments how much he intends to invoke the theater. Though he does not repeatedly return to the act breaks that structure the Nielsen film, the beginning shows the text, "scene—Elsinore," reminding us of the experience of *reading* the play. In fact, with the first lines Olivier speaks in voice over, the feeling that page, stage, and screen are all present sets up how deeply Olivier intends to engage with Shakespeare, while never fading into the background himself. The thesis adopted from Ernest Jones's Freudian / psychoanalytical reading of the play, "This is the tragedy of a man who could not make up his mind," has a great impact on the sets and visuals of the film through both the intended theatrical feeling and certain undeniably cinematic aspects. The twisting and turning of the corridors (an exploration of which is made possible by the incredibly mobile camera) reminds the viewer of a brain—Hamlet's brain in particular, as we are confined with him in the prison of his mind. Olivier's exploration of film as a way of getting inside Hamlet's mind is a central theme as the camera frequently passes through Olivier's head, presenting unprecedented glimpses into the titular character's mind's eye, in a remarkable modernization of the Romantic's connection with Hamlet through thought. In this film, we are encouraged not only to think with Hamlet, but to witness his own thinking through projections of his inner visions.

Related to this visual representation of being confined within Hamlet's mind is the way in which the film retains a sense of artificiality, never hiding the false nature of either the stage or the film. Whether through the intentionally theatrical sets (created by Carmen Dillon), the use of

spotlighting, or the way focus is manipulated as we pass in and out of Hamlet's head, we are continually reminded of either a theatrical space or the mechanics of film. "The camera movements...can be understood as a device to push against theatrical constraints and also to push against the naturalism of the film medium" (Kliman, 306). In this way, Olivier consistently references the collaboration present between his own vision and the Shakespearean source not only through the language but through visual cues.

When placing this discussion in the transitional period of post-World War II filmmaking in Britain, Barnes posits Olivier as a mediator between the theater and film, "The cultural status associated with the theatre is thus transposed to a new era of British cinema through *Hamlet* and—pertinently—through an evocation of Olivier as a cultural surrogate for *Shakespeare*, the ultimate function of the Shakespearean star" (Barnes, 63). This formulation of the "Shakespearean star" deserves some lingering on. Though in her article Barnes emphasizes the "surrogation," I don't see how the phrase "Shakespearean star" reflects such a replacement (489). Rather, I find this qualifier to emphasize how Olivier could not be what he is without Shakespeare, which sounds remarkably more like collaboration than surrogation. Surrogation implies a substitution, whereas by placing Shakespeare and the new agent in the same formulation of "Shakespearean star" we are encouraged to see their collaboration. While Barnes certainly demonstrates that one can focus exclusively on how Olivier as auteur supplants Shakespeare, I find it impossible not to be constantly reminded of Shakespeare's presence in Olivier's film. In fact, I would argue that collaboration is already inherent in a concept like the "Shakespearean star" or "Shakespeare auteur," and that we simply overlook it by focusing on one element of these clear dualities. With this in mind, I will now turn to the collaborative slippage between Olivier and Hamlet.

Olivier's thesis, a phrase that has haunted studies of *Hamlet* for decades, may not apply as well to his reading of the play as one might think, but it does serve a purpose in establishing the relationship Olivier will take toward the play throughout the rest of the film. "Partly to stave off criticism of his brave transformation of the roughly four-hour-long-play into a film...Olivier urged interpretation of the film as 'an Essay in *Hamlet*,' strengthening links between his own subjectivity and Hamlet's" (Semenza and Hasenfratz, 227). Semenza and Hasenfratz address three crucial aspects of Olivier's film here; the concept of cutting (and reorganization), Olivier's "Essay" as it relates both etymologically to *attempting* and its thematic relationship to criticism, and the slippage between Olivier and the titular character. Kliman provides a useful analysis of how the intense cutting of the language of the plays serves Olivier's more accurate purpose than the one he declares at the beginning of the film: "Hamlet's feelings about Gertrude and Ophelia are the centers of his motivation," while the cutting of characters such as Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and Fortinbras "serve Olivier well because these characters do little to intensify the woman-centered motivation. In fact, they would detract from his interpretation" (Kliman, 309). As well as these omissions, Olivier rearranges scenes of the play to create a more coherent progression that centers around these female characters. For instance, 1.3 comes before 1.2 so that Hamlet might see Ophelia's unintended rejection before Horatio and the Watch arrive, giving him cause for his depression. This same kind of shift occurs again later, when the nunnery scene passes straight into Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy—once again grounding his heartbreak in his failed relationship with Ophelia (not so much his inability to make up his mind). All of these choices in relation to how the language of the play is presented circle back to the idea of Olivier creating an "Essay on *Hamlet*," and though his thesis may not align with his interpretation, this work of manipulating the source text while keeping both Shakespeare and

Olivier present throughout establish this work as a collaboration rather than the product of an “individual talent.”

In addition, I believe Olivier’s famous slippage between his role as director, Hamlet, and even “Shakespeare’s interpreter” embodies the collaboration between Olivier and Shakespeare. Barnes offers a fascinating reading of the use of voiceover throughout the film as a way of reminding the audience of the presence of Olivier-as-director or narrator, putting himself in conversation with Hamlet. In fact, she sees these moments as an example of “Olivier’s authoring of Hamlet” which returns us to the idea of authority and a surrogation, but which she then follows with the accurate claim that Hamlet and Olivier are “underscored explicitly as co-existent and connected presences within the film” (Barnes, 71). Not only does this enable Olivier to make a film commenting on both theater and cinema and present readings of the play that will have lasting impacts (for better or worse), but this intense relationship between Olivier and Hamlet embodies Tieck’s idea of the critic as someone who takes the poet into themselves as well as Eliot’s collaboration with the “dead poets.”

Though I often challenge Barnes’s formulations in regard to Olivier, I find her assessment of his language surrounding this film appropriate: “Along with the other themes variously applied to the film by Olivier himself, such as ‘essay,’ ‘engraving’ and, indeed, ‘experiment,’ this emphasis works to enunciate the filmic production as a distinct entity that is nevertheless constructed around a sense of respect for—and impetus to preserve—‘the artistic integrity of the play’ ” (Barnes, 59). I wonder if we might be able to apply a similar critical eye to Olivier’s claims of being “Shakespeare’s interpreter,” which has often been read as Olivier’s claims to authority. While there is no question that Olivier’s language has been used as a touchpoint and prime example of auteurism for decades, I believe it also has the ability to be

reframed to serve the new version of auteurism I am calling for here. Olivier is not re-writing Hamlet, nor is he displacing Shakespeare as its author. Instead, he is translating it, doing the work of creating an adaptation in a new environment, while still acknowledging and respecting the source material. As Kliman ends her essay, “fortunately, we are not forced to make a choice between Olivier and Shakespeare. We have both” (Kliman, 313).

Through this overview of the work being done by these *Hamlet* cinematic adaptations, I hope to have illustrated how collaboration with both the present and the past defines the role of Shakespeare in film. Not only does the analysis I encourage lead us toward a definition of auteurism more rooted in collaboration than authority, but exemplifies the relationship between artists and the “dead poets” Eliot theorizes in 1921. Although critics attempt to define Shakespearean adaptations through antagonistic language, such as surrogation, deconstruction, or displacement, I believe these films play a crucial role in Shakespeare’s expanding legacy and can be read as collaborations between texts, contexts, and agents. In Kingsley-Smith’s analysis, she challenges the idea of a “Shakespeare apocalypse” by arguing that reinvention has always been a part of Shakespearean study—or what I call his legacy.

Shakespeare’s eminence has long been founded upon absences, the loss of his manuscripts, the lack of biographical information, and the ambiguities within the plays. These gaps have not only fueled debates about Shakespeare but have inspired reinventions of his work. That Shakespeare should again be threatened by absence in the cinema and other forms of popular culture is then no great cause for concern since our culture continues to respond to this absence by re-imagining Shakespeare. (Kingsley-Smith, 162)

The absence Kingsley-Smith is discussing here is the tendency to adapt Shakespearean texts, rather than presenting biofiction about Shakespeare as a person. I believe the negotiation between texts and contexts is central in her concept of “re-imagining Shakespeare,” while

retheorizing adaptations as the products of agents (rather than the more passive approach of Bortolotti and Hutcheon) keeps Shakespeare and his adaptors front and center.

As mentioned before, the notion of haunting has been present throughout this study of Shakespeare, adaptation, and collaboration--and Courtney Lehmann provides a compelling analysis of Shakespeare on film grounded in the concept of legacy and haunting. In fact, Lehmann succinctly answers the questions I posed at the beginning of this section, concerning the dual directions of what can Shakespeare do for adaptations and the equally essential reverse; “given the historic reciprocity that has existed between cinema and Shakespeare since the dawn of the motion picture industry, it seems likely that the destinies of both are intertwined. Whereas cinema once relied on Shakespeare for cultural legitimation, Shakespeare now needs cinema for cultural longevity” (Lehmann, 235). We continue to return to Shakespeare for inspiration and prestige, while these adaptations are keeping Shakespeare’s legacy alive—constantly shifting and changing based on new intentions, perspectives, and contexts. As Lehmann states, “the answer to the question of how to keep *this* auteur [Shakespeare] from becoming ‘dead again’ will always require assembly, for it will depend on the possible legacies that Shakespeare’s dramatic remains configure in a given cultural moment” (235). Shakespeare’s legacy is in constant motion, and—as with adaptations—is dependent on both texts and contexts.

As useful as I find many of Lehmann’s formulations, I do feel that they are still too rooted in a battle-ground view of legacy than a collaborative one. Her concept of inheritance can be incredibly influential if we consider a more supportive relationship between agents of adaptation, made possible through our constellation theory. Lehmann believes that “what both Shakespeare’s plays and recent film adaptations of them foreground is the contestatory nature of inheritance, leaving us with a struggle over remains, as we work to ‘filter, sift, criticize’ and,

ultimately, to control the ghosts that we are in a position both to exorcise and inherit” (236).

Authorship and adaptation become places of contestation, where the construction of legacy is fundamentally hostile. I fully support Lehmann’s relation of ghosts, inheritances, and legacies with concepts of authorship and adaptation, as I hope to have illustrated through the analysis of auteur adaptations that undeniably engage with Shakespeare, but this hostility is unnecessary.

These films are not battlegrounds but artworks, criticism in cinematic form that are essential in bridging the gaps between Shakespearean texts and new contexts. As Henderson describes,

The magic of creativity...is a social event, even when a genius is in the room. Especially but not only in collective art forms such as theater and filmmaking, artists are conscious that collaboration is messy, exhilarating, and inevitable. Awareness of this reality makes attribution and judgement of the artistic product more difficult and scholarship that ignores these complexities less useful to those who would analyze and understand art’s cultural work. (Henderson, 7)

A messy process, to be sure, but I would argue that Lehmann’s antagonistic premise prevents the kind of awareness of complexity in collaboration that Henderson draws our attention to. In this way, I aim to encourage and begin working toward what Henderson presents as a new focus in adaptation studies and scholarship, understanding that we will have to get our hands dirty in this push toward collaboration and studies that take into consideration the complexities inherent within the sites of authorship and adaptation. As I hope is evident at this point, adaptations and collaborations are vital aspects and themes present in Shakespeare’s legacy. Not only is it time to change our language surrounding auteurism to better account for the presence of collaboration *in* adaptation, but I suggest that a more complex, complete, and wholistic understanding of Shakespearean texts must also begin to foreground these elements.

A crucial first step is shifting our language around auteurs, whether they be film directors or Shakespeare himself. Adaptations above all deserve theories and studies that take into account the multitudes at work in their creation, not only in regard to contemporary collaborators but the

collaboration between the agents of the source text and the agents of the adaptations, as we have seen since the first section of this thesis exploring Shakespeare's adaptation of Lear source texts. We lose too much of the picture when we view adaptations as the product of a single individual, while Shakespeare, Coleridge, Nielsen, and Olivier operate as ideal examples for a new collaboration-centered understanding of auteurism. Nielsen is heavily influenced by her social context, and any discussion of her work as an auteur immediately encourages a conversation involving a greater input than solely an individual artist working in a vacuum. Olivier presents an outstanding engagement with the "dead poets," the artistic ancestors, both acknowledging Shakespeare's presence and working to create an exemplary new production. As crucial stars in our Shakespearean constellation, both Nielsen and Oliver's works are steeped in the long history of *Hamlet* and in turn establish long histories and influences of their own. Perhaps a first step toward defining a "new auteurism"—or a new term entirely—might be the same step that we are taking in relation to fidelity: if fidelity should be redefined as an element we engage with analytically but not a criterion of judgement, I don't see why we can't apply the same shift to auteurism—a present and important aspect of our analysis of a film, but no longer a concept on which we base our judgement.



## Conclusion

As readers and critics, we have been attempting to define Shakespeare's genius for centuries. Why do we continue to study his works today, and adapt them into disparate contexts and environments? Why has his influence on culture, language, and literature been so great? Jonathan Bate offers a question that attempts to get at the heart of the issue: what do we mean when we say Shakespeare is a genius?

Presumably we mean that there is something out of the ordinary about Shakespeare's plays. That his powers of invention were astonishingly wide and quick. We think of the range of his vocabulary—over fifteen thousand different words... We marvel at the process whereby the characters have taken on lives of their own... The plays have held the stage, the poetry is held in our minds, the characters have become archetypes. These phenomena, we will say, are proof of Shakespeare's genius. (Bate, *Genius of Shakespeare*, 157)

While this may all be true, I believe the elements of Shakespeare's writing that Bate points out here do not present the full picture. It has been my intention throughout this thesis to offer an answer to the question of Shakespeare's genius through an emphasis on collaboration and adaptation, encouraging a view of his legacy and influence that takes into consideration the agents responsible for expanding the Shakespearean constellation with new contexts, readings, and adaptations. As Bate himself illustrates, "A knowledge of the 'pre-life' and the 'after-life' of [Shakespeare's] art is essential to an understanding of his power" (xii). As I am most interested in the concept of legacy, it is Shakespeare's "after-life" that has been of greatest importance in this study—though perhaps our consideration of the *Lear* sources may also offer a glimpse of what Bate means by the "pre-life."

As Bate's terms of pre- and after-life remind us, haunting has been a remarkably prevalent theme throughout Shakespearean criticism. One next step in continuing this analysis of Shakespeare's constellation and legacy might be to explore in greater detail why haunting

language is so present. I believe that haunting, as a concept that foregrounds the meeting of past and present, ancestral influence, and even collaboration, may offer valuable insights into how we as critics interpret and perceive Shakespeare's legacy. In a similar way, Diana Henderson's exploration of collaboration posits adaptations as both objects and processes which bring Shakespeare back to life: "The later works provide the lens through which Shakespeare comes into view, and thus to life—and in that second life, Shakespeare (Will he, nil he) becomes a collaborator in conveying the opinions, visions, and emotions of the Shake-shifters" (Henderson, 11). As Henderson's analysis encourages, I have attempted to bring agency to the fore of this analysis of Shakespearean adaptations, as a consideration of adaptors as collaborators not only brings Shakespeare back to life, but provides a far richer background against which to study the goals and intentions behind each new adaptation. In *Shakespeare and the Romantics*, David Fuller offers a quotation from Novalis that beautifully encapsulates the work being done by the Shakespearean adaptors and critics we have studied: "Only then do I show that I've understood an author: when I can act in his sense, when I can translate him and transform in diverse ways, without diminishing his individuality" (Novalis, qtd. Fuller, 8).<sup>38</sup> As Fuller goes on to say, "Understanding art is active: it can be translated by the reader, and can transform the reader, in diverse ways" (Fuller, 8). I find these perspectives on art and adaptation inspiring, and have endeavored to bring this sense of action and agency back into our discussions of Shakespeare's shifting legacy, while maintaining—as Novalis encourages—a sense of Shakespeare's individuality.

This study has attempted to trace the growth of Shakespeare's legacy, as a constellation, from the early modern period through cinematic adaptation in the twentieth century. I have

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<sup>38</sup> Schlegel has a similar formulation, that "sympoetry," in which "the work, the critic, the reader together create meanings" (Fuller, 92).

focused on the three periods that I find to offer some of the most valuable shifts in Shakespeare's legacy, but I have traced only a small portion of the array of stars—objects of critical importance and discussion—that are present in the broad “idea” (in Benjamin's sense) of Shakespeare.

Harold Bloom offers a somewhat facetious perspective on the kind of tracing of connections inspired by an understanding of Shakespeare as adaptor and adapted: “Can the study of it [Poetic Influence] really be anything more than the wearisome industry of source-hunting, of allusion-counting?” (Bloom, 31). In a sense, this thesis has been a response to this question. Yes, I believe a study of Shakespeare's influence can certainly be more than Bloom's “wearisome industry,” and I hope that the analyses I have offered begin to illustrate the kind of conclusions that can be drawn from the study of influence. I feel strongly that we can and should continue to have “Shakespeare” courses and teach Shakespeare's works in school. They have had and *still* have a lasting impact on our culture and are a crucial touch point to which new artists, creators, and critics return. That being said, I believe it is time to discuss the legacy, influence, and impact of what we mean by “Shakespeare” in terms of a collaborative product, both during the early modern period and through its shifting over time and by new agents.

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