FISHY BIRTHS, FAKE DEATHS AND BEWILDERING AFTER-DEATHS: SHAKESPEARE AND OPERA

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Abstract: Four centuries after his death, Shakespeare thrives not only in the theatre, but also through what Bolter and Grusin call remediation. When transposed from one medium to the other, the plays travel transnationally, crossing cultural borders and establishing an intercultural dialogue. This article analyses the Bard's kaleidoscope of stratagems when handling the confines of human life by marking birth, death and the time span after death as exceptional: fishy, faked or bewildering, they are a fruitful source for psychoanalysis. The study demonstrates that opera and musical reread veteran Elizabethan drama – faithfully or not –, shifting emphases, changing meanings, eliminating scenes or simply replacing them according to the cultural area, the historical age and the mentality in which they were created.

Keywords: Adaptation, remediation, Shakespeare, opera, intercultural dialogue

Shakespeare's comedies, tragedies and histories teem with characters from all walks of life but, however menial or trivial their everyday life may be, Shakespeare takes care to place them in extraordinary situations in the course of his plays. As Alexander Atkins informs us, "During his career, Shakespeare wrote 43 plays and created 1,223 characters that strut and fret their hour upon the stage, delivering an impressive 34,895 speeches" (Atkins).

It stands to reason that birth and death, the confines of our individual life on Earth, are among the most exploited as sources of uniqueness, and these confines are sometimes extended to cover the existence of babes during pregnancy, as well as the survival of the soul after bodily extinction. This article gives a bird's eye view of the way Shakespeare's plays handle these two boundaries of life in a positively suspicious key, stretching both the extent of human existence and the limits of literary plausibility. It further explores the transnational migration of significances from the Bard's plays towards their musical remediations, which thus engage in an intercultural dialogue with their original sources.

The most widely known excerpt of the whole Shakespearean oeuvre is Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy, which ponders on the ever-elusive mystery of what expects us beyond the grave. As Simon Palfrey and Emma Smith remark, "Ignorance produces anxiety, bafflement and paralysis. We survive because we are afraid of what death will bring. If we knew death, implies Hamlet, no one would stay to live. Because we do not, yet because death remains, life is sustained. With deep irony, death becomes the parent of life" (2016, 9).

Therefore, death, "the parent of life," is explored in the greatest number of facets in the Bard's plays, and that is why in 2016 – the year that commemorated four hundred years since Shakespeare's demise – many cultural events were dedicated to this threshold. The Bodleian Library in Oxford organized the spectacular exhibition "Shakespeare's Dead", also marked by the publication of an album[1]. Tim Crouch and the Spymonkey troupe toured a new

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[1] Simon Palfrey and Emma Smith. *Shakespeare's Dead.* Bodleian Library. University of Oxford, 2016.

play, *The Complete Deaths*, staging all the "74 onstage deaths in the works of William Shakespeare – 75 if you count the black ill-favored fly killed in *Titus Andronicus*" (Spymonkey). The play was called "A fabulous bloodbath" by *The Observer* and "The funniest show about slaughter you'll ever see" by *Exeunt* – a review magazine (Spymonkey).

The humorous pie chart of Shakespeare's deaths popularised by Caitlin Schneider has become quite familiar by now, as well as other infographics on the same topic[2]. Thirsty for (possibly humorous) gory details, they are of course concerned with the instruments that kill and inform the readership and audience of the percentage of deaths due to different causes that happen on stage in the Bard's plays[3].

It is however interesting to have a look at *how and why* people die in Shakespeare. Some commit suicide (Romeo, Juliet, Othello, Antony, Cleopatra, Eros, Ophelia, Goneril or Lady Macbeth). Others kill each other, such as Hamlet and Laertes in their fencing duel. Murder by betrayal is very popular – see Old Hamlet, Duncan or Banquo. But accidental murder also exists in Gertrude's and Polonius's case, as does murder by eager ambition – in Richard II's case (killed by Exton). And the best kind is *plotted* murder, as in the case of Caesar and Young Hamlet (the first time a failure, the second time a success). Murder, of course, reaches the acme in *Titus Andronicus*, where the title character kills his own son Mutius and daughter Lavinia, also slaughtering Tamora's sons Demetrius and Chiron, grinding their bones into powder and baking them into a pie served to their now cannibalistic mother.

Characters may die heroically, like Richard III, or slain in rash teenage anger like Mercutio and Tybalt. Leprosy and old age kill Henry IV, but Hamlet's madness kills Polonius in an insane impulse. The tradition of revenge-killing is observed with Claudius and Emilia, but righteous retribution is also present with Macbeth and Richard III. However, *mistaken* retribution tragically befalls Desdemona.

Love is quite frequently associated with death, and Roger Stilling asserts that

> there can be no question but that Shakespeare felt tremendous poetic and emotional force in the juxtaposition of love and death and was determined to exploit both to the fullest. The nausea of bodily and psychological dissolution (…) is set against the beauty and strength of love" (1976, 72).

A common convention in Mediaeval and Renaissance literature, however, is to pair death with *sex*, metaphorically called "the little death" (*petit mort*)[4]. In Palfrey and Smith's words, "The experience of sex involves a renunciation of the singular self, giving way to the 'mutual flame' of two lovers, or to a condition of porous dissolution in which humanness

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[2] https://www.google.com/search?q=infographic+shakespeare+deaths&client=firefoxb&tbm=isch&source=iu&i ctx=1&fir=_B85WdRyRHpJM%253A%252Cni6R0fakKVvRAM%252C_&usg=__bpIA0UfrwlxbcSHa6wen4e EX2xk%3D&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwicqdzklPnaAhUDaQKHankCU4Q9QEwA3oECAAQPA#imgrc=5e6dbWR -92XqmM:

[3] Stabbing is by far the most popular (almost 50%). It is followed by beheading and poisoning, then by a combination between stabbing and poisoning. They are followed by the less popular hanging, baking in a pie, smothering by pillow, lack of sleep, grief, dismemberment then fire, buried to neck starvation, throwing oneself away, dropping dead, snakebite, being ripped apart by mob, blinding and – last but not least – mysterious disappearing.

[4] It is interesting to note that while the Middle Ages identify death and sex in this tradition, later on, at the beginning of the twentieth century, psychology will oppose them in the collocation "Eros and Thanatos". The death drive – a term coined by Sabina Spielrein in her 1912 article "Destruction as the Cause of Coming into Being" and taken over by Freud in "Beyond the pleasure Principle" (1920) – is the drive towards death and self-destruction. He interpreted this concept as the "opposition between the ego or death instincts and the sexual or life instincts" (Freud, 1991, 316).

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itself melts and liquefies" (2016, 91). Death-like coitus is described or suggested in *Troilus and Cressida*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Referring to *Romeo*, René Weis remarks:

> The paradoxes and dualities inherent in the lovers' rhetoric are echoed in the violatory images that are deployed to mediate their deaths, and particularly Juliet's. She 'dies' twice in the play (…). Throughout these scenes Shakespeare plays on the erotic possibilities of Elizabethan English in which both the words 'kill' and particularly 'die' carried undertones of sexual intercourse and ecstasy. Death has 'lain' with Juliet and 'deflowered' her, we learn, and Death will henceforth be old Capulet's son-in-law. (2009, 29-30)

But the similarity can go both ways, and if sex can be compared to death, death can also be like sex, and "The act of killing can garner a terrible sexual supercharge" (Palfrey and Smith, 2016, 93). Othello violently strangles Desdemona on their marital bed, where she had often devoured him with her famous appetite, and he kills himself dying upon a kiss. If all other bawdy allusions are decorously bowdlerized from prudish nineteenth century operas, the death-kiss is brilliantly and heartbreakingly taken over by Verdi, who will echo the spouses' kiss in the Act I love duet in the last touch of their lips in Act IV, using the same melodic motif for both.

In *King Lear*, Cornwall is killed by Goneril's servant as an act of justice, the servant dies killed by Regan as punishment, Regan is poisoned by Goneril as an effect of jealousy, while Edmund succumbs in trial by combat killed by his half-brother Edgar. There are, therefore, two fratricides, but neither follows the Abel and Cain model. Cordelia is executed, Gloucester dies of shock and joy to learn his son is alive, while Lear dies of grief to see his daughter dead.

Grief also takes the life of Enobarbus (in *Antony and Cleopatra*) and Mamilius (in *The Winter's Tale*), and appears to claim Hermione's life too. But at the antipode of this most personal of deaths, anonymous death by calamity also looms large due to the plague in *Romeo and Juliet*. Shakespeare was only too aware of the havoc it created, for as Palfrey and Smith point out, his "life was bracketed by the plague. Three months after the record of his baptism in April 1564 in the register of Holy Trinity Church, Stratford upon Avon, came the ominous inscription: *Hic incepit pestis* (Here begins the plague). The baby did well to avoid contagion, and to survive a mortality rate in Stratford that year that was four times that of the previous plague-free year" (73).

In comic mode, the most moving is the reported death – in *Henry V* – of one of Shakespeare's most beloved comic characters, Sir John Falstaff, who expires due to old age and the effects of a life of debauchery.

Possible death by mystery is present in *The Taming of the Shrew*, as Christopher Sly simply disappears, and Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari wrote a *tragic* opera – *Sly* – based on it. But, if Oliver escapes the attack of a lioness in the exotic forests of France (in *As You Like It*), no death is more fun in Shakespeare than that of poor Antigonus in *The Winter's Tale*, which might contain the greatest stage direction in the history of English theatre – "Exit, pursued by a bear" (III.3.57).

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

In the Bard's plays, birth is almost never an issue, but when it is mentioned, it is always cause for trouble. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, an Indian woman's pregnancy is

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described, and the son to whom she gives birth will be the cause of the conflict between Oberon and Titania.

Another pregnant lady, Hermione, appears in *The Winter's Tale*, but her husband, King Leontes, will suspect her of having been unfaithful with his best friend Polixenes, and Perdita, the unfortunate baby, will be abandoned in the mountains like Oedipus[5]. The theme of bastard children also appears in *Much Ado about Nothing* and *King Lear.* Giuseppe Verdi, whose unfulfilled lifelong dream was to write an opera based on *Lear*, must have found the topic quite operatic, as his *Nabucco* is centred round the same conflict between a legitimate and an illegitimate heir.

But the most significant birth mentioned in a Shakespeare play is positively fishy, as in the Scottish play the Witches prophesy that "none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth" (IV.1.80-81, Second Apparition). During the final confrontation between Macduff and the usurper, the former reveals that "Macduff was from his mother's womb / Untimely ripp'd" (V.7.44-45). So technically, he had come out of a corpse, not a live woman, and had not been born properly, but ripped from the womb through a rudimentary caesarean section. This confession comes to clarify the vision of the bloody child that accompanies the witches' prophecy in Act IV, which at the time Macbeth does not question or find in any way discrepant with the words which state that *no* human child can grow to hurt the king.

In Verdi's opera, *una Apparizione* warns Macbeth of the same invulnerability, and Francesco Maria Piave's libretto gives an exact translation of the English text: "Nessun nato di donna ti nuoce" (Act 3, Sc. 2). But in the opera, the apparitions' scene, from which Hecate is gone, is so powerful dramatically that it is repeated in order to prolong the effect, and Verdi and Piave, needing to enhance Lady Macbeth's part for musical reasons, added a duet between the spouses in which the queen avidly listens to her husband's account of the witches' predictions: "Te non ucciderà nato da donna" (Act 3, Sc. 4). This strengthens the symbiotic connection between the two and enhances the sense of their alliance and complicity. Both in the play and in the opera, the reassuring line is brought back to mind in Macbeth's monologue (Shakespeare V.3.3-7; Piave Act IV, Sc. 5), as he dismisses Malcolm's threat, since he was born of woman.

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If real deaths abound, while births are rarely mentioned, fishy and troublesome, fake death is a trick that Shakespeare relishes.

The most famous of instance is, of course, the potion drunk by Juliet, which makes her *seem* dead, plunging her into deathlike slumber. The opera adaptations of *Romeo* composed by Bellini, Vaccai, Gounod and Zandonai adopt Matteo Bandello's[6] ending and the lovers do not die separately, but together. Jules Barbier and Michel Carré[7], however, add a touching, if amusingly implausible touch, to the lovers' reunion: ecstatic to see Juliet come to life after he had thought her dead, Romeo momentarily forgets he has taken poison and in a soaring duet they make plans of eloping together, until ruthless reality reminds Romeo that his time is up.

The three Italian adaptations by Bellini, Vaccai and Zandonai also borrow Bandello's fate for Juliet, who dies of grief. Much more faithful to the Bard's play, Gounod's opera has

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[5] The play, whose action takes place in ancient Sicily when it was a Greek colony, is clearly influenced by the Sophoclean trilogy. The Delphos Oracle is also consulted, but the shift from the Antiquity is marked by the fact that Leontes does not believe the message of the Oracle.
[6] Matteo Bandello, c. 1480-1562. His novella "Giulietta e Romeo"was written in1554.
[7] Gounod's librettists.

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the lovers commit suicide. But, in an exquisite duet, they die together singing "Lord, Lord, forgive us!" (Barbier, *Roméo*) – imploring God's absolution for their capital sin, which, in nineteenth century Catholic France, lends the opera a Christian dimension entirely absent from its Elizabethan model.

In Berlioz's dramatic symphony *Roméo et Juliette* (1839), the protagonists also die together. In love with Shakespeare, the French composer was aware that a great number of operas had already based their libretti on the star-crossed lovers' story, so he decided to anchor his opus in another genre – that of programmatic vocal-symphony music, on which Masson says Berlioz pondered his whole life (185). Avoiding not so much the eloquence of his predecessors' characters as that of Shakespeare's, Berlioz decided to depict the two protagonists in an entirely innovative way – through the orchestra –, and built their voices from the tumult of this collective instrument. Thus, the strength of their love, the rush of their desire, the pangs of their heartbreak and sorrow are poignantly expressed through melody and harmony, reaching their climax in *Dernières angoisses et mort des deux amants*.

Bernstein's musical *West Side Story* is an appropriation that moves the action of *Romeo and Juliet* to New York in the mid-50's, replacing the Capulets and Montagues with rival Polish and Puerto Rican gangs. In it there is no potion, nothing *seems* to be, everything *is* painfully real and what you see is what you get. In the end, Tony – the American Romeo – is murdered, and Maria, his sweetheart, survives. Post-war America is a place and age in which no one dies for love anymore.

Presgurvic's much more recent adaptation into musical – *Roméo et Juliette: de la haine à l'amour* (2001) – preserves the deceit of the potion which postpones death, but introduces an element of aleatory script, as the nature of the lovers' deaths differs according to the production. For instance, the French version is faithful to Shakespeare's outline, while the Italian one features an allegorical character, Death, who kills Romeo.

In *The Winter's Tale*, Hermione fakes her death with Paulina's help. She pretends to die from the grief caused by her husband's wrongful accusation and from the news that Leontes has ordered her newly-born daughter to be abandoned in the wild. But then she hears the message that Perdita is alive, brought from the Delphos Oracle, and decides to live to see her daughter again.

King Lear plays with a totally different kind of fake death. Blind Gloucester asks 'Tom' to take him to Dover Cliff so that he might jump and commit suicide to atone for his moral cecity, which has long preceded his physical one. Edgar, disguised as Tom, takes him to a flat expanse and pretends to let him jump. Fake death thus functions as expiation, forgiveness and reconciliation.

In comic mode, Falstaff fakes his death in *Henry IV* Part 1 and delivers his famous speech on the truth of lies when he rises after having played dead during an assault, denying any allegations of counterfeit:

> I am no counterfeit. To die is to be a counterfeit, or he is but the counterfeit of a man who hath not the life of a man. But to counterfeit dying when a man thereby liveth is to be no counterfeit, but the true and perfect image of life indeed. (V.4.113-18)

This comes shortly after his famous Honour monologue (V.1.127-140), which inspired Boito and Verdi to adapt it and insert it into their opera *Falstaff*, which is however based on *The Merry Wives of Windsor.* Iconoclastically adopting the question and answer format of the catechism, Sir John declares that honour cannot restore a leg or an arm, or soothe a wounded man. He thus proves that in his "carnivalesque, down-to-earth view there is no room for abstract notions that cannot be circumscribed within a concrete embodied

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experience" (Nicolaescu, 2001, 139). Verdi and Boito sensed that this monologue was indispensable in pencilling Falstaff's character as the utmost panegyric on life, even if obtained at the cost of faking death.

Besides all these instances, there is also fake news of death (as for Juliet, Perdita, Helena in *All's Well* and Sebastian and Viola in *Twelfth Night*), which has an extremely powerful impact on the other characters.

In *Hamlet*, a faked letter brings about death by revenge and retribution upon Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and is also used by the prince to trick and thwart his own death. Although this is a highly operatic device, it is strangely skipped in the numerous adaptations of *Hamlet* into music. French composer Ambroise Thomas (1868) and Romanian composer Pascal Bentoiu (1969) eliminate the two secondary characters altogether, and with them Hamlet's exile to England. Hungarian composer Sándor Szokolay (1968), on the other hand, does preserve them, but the voyage to England does not take place, as a messenger brings the news that Hamlet has decided not to go! English composer Humphrey Searle (1968), however, does the opposite: he shows on stage the scene of Hamlet's switching the letters carried by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, which is only reported in the play (Kingsbury). The 1999 rock opera by Czech composer Janek Ledecký[8] (1999) also discards the two minor characters and their witless compliance with Claudius's murderous plot.

Hamlet also offers an instance of postponed death – Claudius's as he is praying, and whose murder would therefore send him straight to heaven, an undesirable outcome (III.3.35-72). The impact of historical context is clearly illustrated by the fact that Pascal Bentoiu suppressed this scene altogether, since religion was banned by communist ideology. Consequently, the act of praying could not be represented on stage in Romania, the idea of afterlife was denied, sin was reinterpreted in terms of moral trespassing or infringement of the law, while the possibility of a merciful God that might save souls was out of the question. No composer or librettist would have been allowed to include such a scene in their work; it had to be eliminated.

Cheated death appears with Fleance in *Macbeth*, and a sentence to death is revoked at the end of *Measure for Measure* and Wagner's *Liebesverbot*, the opera based on it. The same happens in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where a deft Theseus quickly realizes that Hippolyta, his wife-to-be, is attending in horror a discussion on the Athenian law that sentences to death any woman who will not comply with her father's choice of bridegroom for her. The duke will thus nimbly make up an alternative punishment – the convent – and by the end of the play he will make the enlightened decision to abrogate the law altogether and allow ladies to marry the man of their own choice. The only opera based on this play[9], however, written by Benjamin Britten on a libretto by the composer and Peter Pears (1960), eliminates Athens completely and sets the whole action in the woods with the double intention of making the plot altogether English and to emphasize the eerie supernatural atmosphere rather than the social realities subjacent in the plot. Thus, the debate on the Athenian law is absent from the opera.

A Midsummer Night's Dream also includes two instances of "fake" death, both in the play within a play – the rustics' performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe* at the final wedding.

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[8] Janek LedecKýis one of the most popular pop stars in the Czech Republic. He wrote the music, book and original Czech lyrics to *Hamlet.* He has recently finished his new musical *Iago* based on Shakespeare´s *Othello* ("*Hamlet* the Rock Opera").
[9]*The Fairy Queen* by Purcell (1692) is a semi-opera, while Felix Mendelssohn's *Ein Sommernachtsraum* (1842) and Carl Orff's homonymous score (1964) are instances of incidental music. Ambroise Thomas's 1850 *opéra comique* in three acts *Le Songe d'une nuit d'été* is not based on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* despite its title.

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One is an instance of mistaken impression of death, as Pyramus finds Thisbe's mantle stained with blood and readily assumes she has been killed by the lion. The other one is Pyramus's own suicide, which is 'fake' because it is only performed on stage and the actors painstakingly explain that nothing of what they depict is genuine. The scene engenders humour not only by stressing the bombastic and sub-mediocre text written by uneducated artisans as well as Bottom's ridiculous acting skills, but also by parodying the conventions of Elizabethan theatre, haunted by melodrama and gore, as well as by unnaturally lengthy death scenes of prolonged agony that offer a good pretext for a final monologue: "Thus die I, thus, thus, thus. / Now am I dead,Now am I fled; / My soul is in the sky: / Tongue, lose thy light;/ Moon take thy flight: / Now die, die, die, die, die" (V.1.294-300). The scene in the opera is a perfect musical counterpart of Shakespeare's strategy: Britten mirrors the play by parodying the conventions of nineteenth century Italian opera. Pyramus's death parodies the accumulation of tragic dramatism through the tuba glissandi in minor key combined with the tongue-in-cheek lyricism of the suave references to the moon. Thisbe's lament at finding Pyramus's lifeless body, inexorably accompanied by obbligato flute[10], is a parody of a Donizetti "mad scene", with roulades, trills, chromatic descents, repetitive simplistic motifs and bel canto melodicity.

But the best known instance of fake death in Shakespeare is Hero's in *Much Ado about Nothing* – which is a comic mode relative of both Juliet's and Hermione's. Hero is also wrongfully accused of infidelity and enclosed in a vault while alive. She is the victim of a plot that mimics that of Iago to persuade Othello of his wife's unfaithfulness, but is more superficial and doomed to failure. Hero is publicly humiliated and left at the altar by Claudio, but just as in *Romeo*, it is the friar who suggests that the family fake her death, underlining the idea that Shakespeare thought men of the cloth to be masters of deceit. A remorseful Claudio agrees to marry Hero's cousin, her spitting image, and at the wedding the bride reveals herself to be Hero, who had been presumed dead.

Shockingly, the only opera based on this play, Berlioz's *Béatrice et Bénédict* (1862), completely eliminates the whole fake death subplot. The composer confesses: "I have taken as my text *part* of Shakespeare's tragi-comedy" (qtd. in Cairns, 1978, 13). As David Cairns puts it, "Berlioz has taken one idea from the play and worked it into a divertissement as fleeting and mercurial as the love of which Benedict and Beatrice sing in the concluding number of the work" (Cairns, 1978, 13).

The later play, *All's Well that Ends Well*, takes over the same ruse of launching the fake news of a lady's death in order to secure a husband for her, a dramaturgic strategy that had already proved to be so successful. The Countess of Roussillon writes a letter to her son informing him of the rumor of his wife[11] Helena's death at Saint Jaques. This will lure Bertram back home and allow the unravelling of an intricate trick plot strikingly similar to that in *Measure for Measure*, supposedly written one year earlier. Once Helena reveals herself as alive and responsible for the whole entrapment, Bertram's love and respect are miraculously restored and the marriage is acknowledged unimpeded, even if the Epilogue casts the shadow of a doubt on the outcome, assuring the audience that all is well *if* Helena and Bertram speak truthfully.

Death seems to creep under even more subliminal and surreptitious guises in this play, and according to Carolyn Brown,

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[10] Flute/Thisbe is always introduced and accompanied by the Romantic, languishing, feminine harp[10] and flute – a gender cliché in Romantic bel canto opera, in which they are typically associated with women. In this case, the flute is also a humorous allusion to the character's name.

[11] Bertram is ensnared into marrying Helena, but he does not consummate the marriage and rejects her.

That the Countess does not respond to her [Helena] when she appears at the end must indicate her resentment and grief at being deceived by a woman with whom she has tried repeatedly to establish an affectionate relationship. Helena keeps Bertram all for herself, refusing to share him with her double [his mother and her professed mother – note ours]. She seems to embody Freud's 'criminal' death wish that he felt children with unresolved oedipal issues often feel towards the same-sex parent. (Brown[12], 2015, 124)

The wiles of the trick plot confirm Shakespeare's belief that in order to enfetter men, women are willing to fake anything, including death. This highly operatic plot is still waiting to be adapted into opera.

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If births can be fishy and deaths can be faked, after-deaths can be bewildering.

Hero's 'coming back to life' in *Much Ado* is quite clumsy and Leonato, her father, suggests that Claudio should marry her cousin, who is "almost a copy" (V.1.303) of the defunct! The theme of the double, when it comes to choosing brides or grooms, is associated with guile and the wisdom of choosing correctly, as in the Romanian fairy-tale "Harap-Alb". This guile makes this plot akin to *Othello*, where Desdemona artfully entices the general: "she wish'd / That heaven made her such a man; she thanked me, / And bade me, if I had a friend that loved her, / I should but teach him how to tell my story, / And that would woo her" (I.3.162-66).

The epitaph must be sung to Hero's *bones*. The definite article before the proper noun creates a pun, which equates the girl with a hero. The ephemerality of the 'bones' is contrasted with the immortality of fame:

Done to death by slanderous tongues
Was the Hero that here lies:
Death, in guerdon of her wrongs,
Gives her fame which never dies.
So the life that died with shame
Lives in death with glorious fame.
Hang thou there upon the tomb,
Praising her when I am dumb.
Now, music, sound, and sing your solemn hymn. (V.3.12-21)

It is significant that Claudio invokes music, as vocal mourning creates a sense of drama that stresses the fact that this is all a show.

The same thing happens in *The Winter's Tale*. Hermione's apparently miraculous resuscitation re-enacts Pygmalion's myth in which a statue comes to life through the power of human love and mercy of the gods. But here, fake death ensures survival, while continued life masquerades as supernatural resurrection, and the theme of the double appears again. There are no opera adaptations of this play, but it is striking that on the verge of performing her mock-magic, Paulina also invokes music, and her whole charade will be accompanied by music, which emphasizes the fact that this is an illusion – merely make-believe:

Paulina:

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[12] Brown makes a reference here to Julia Reinhart Lupton and Kenneth Reinhart's 1993 *After Oedipus: Shakespeare in Psychoanalysis*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 11.

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Music, awake her; strike!

Music

'Tis time; descend; be stone no more; approach;
Strike all that look upon with marvel. Come,
I'll fill your grave up: stir, nay, come away,
Bequeath to death your numbness, for from him
Dear life redeems you. You perceive she stirs:

HERMIONE comes down

Start not; her actions shall be holy as
You hear my spell is lawful: do not shun her
Until you see her die again; for then
You kill her double. (V.3.98-107)

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But if these are just *trompe l'oeil* effects, life in death is also a tool used by Shakespeare psychologically, mnemonically, to mark both the unfinished business of the ghosts (victims of violent death) as well as the guilt and turmoil of their murderers. As Palfrey and Smith remark, "We may get some feeling of the loneliness of death, a condition of sleepless, homeless, monomaniacal wandering" (2016, 167). In *Richard III*, the ghosts of Prince Edward, Henry VI, Clarence, the two princes in the Tower and others appear in dreams to the king and his challenger Richmond. In *Julius Caesar*, Caesar's ghost haunts Brutus's sleep, warning them they shall meet again at Philippi. In *Macbeth*,Banquo's ghost joins the party and sits in the usurper's seat, marking the beginning of the king's descent into insanity and signalling the fact that in the future the king's seat will be occupied by Banquo's kin. In their opera adaptation, Giuseppe Verdi and his librettist Francesco Maria Piave had the brilliant idea of setting the appearance of the phantom against the background of a drinking song performed by Lady Macbeth, who tries to mask her husband's weakness. The conventional carefree tune in major key collapses into a discordant disruption in minor key as Macbeth gets truly unsettled by his vision.

As against this instance of after-death, in the same play, the string of eight kings that will be Banquo's descendants gives us a taste of *before-birth*.

But the most bewildering wanderer of the night, with his "questionable shape" (I.4.22) and "all [his] imperfections on [his] head" (I.5.79), is Old Hamlet's Ghost, a part played by Shakespeare himself as proof of its complexity. This creature of the threshold, tributary to the tradition of revenge tragedy, is probably the character most variously portrayed in the whole Shakespearean oeuvre. In opera, Ambroise Thomas, basing his libretto (by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré) on Alexandre Dumas, *père*'s baffling 1847 'translation', has the Ghost come on stage during the final scene, pronounce the murder avenged and ask that Gertrude be sent to a convent. The Ghost tells Hamlet (who survives): "Live for your people, Hamlet! God himself is crowning you!"[13] (Barbier, *Hamlet*).

At the antipode of this ludicrous solution, Bentoiu comes up with an innovative and inspired version. The Ghost is interpreted by the same tenor who sings the part of young Hamlet and whose voice is recorded on magnetic tape, played alternately or together with the

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[13]My translation.

live orchestra and voices. This goes far beyond technological effect. The modernity of this artifice probes profoundly into the psychological depth of the characters. On the one hand, the homonymous characters, Hamlet the elder and Hamlet the younger, father and son, king and prince, have the same voice. Consequently the same blood, the same will, the same purpose, the same love of country and of justice. Across the barrier of time (of different generations) and of death, they sound the same. But the difference in volume and the uncanny air lent by the loudspeaker effect, by the echo and eerie quality of sonority, stress the otherworldly effect of the apparition.

On the other hand, the Ghost is only characterized vocally and does not appear in the flesh on stage. Corroborated with the sameness of the voice, this is an inkling of the strong possibility that the Ghost might be merely a figment of Hamlet's diseased imagination. This disambiguation, however, diminishes the complexity of the character, lending it a clearer interpretation.

As far as the ghost is concerned, Szokolay follows Shakespeare's play without innovation, as does Ledecký in his rock opera. Searle, on the other hand, considers that in the play the ghost scene acts as a prelude at the beginning of the play and decides to replace it with an atmospheric orchestral prelude in the opera (Kingsbury). Regarding the musical approach to the character, the composer reveals:

> I did consider [electronics] for the ghost. Electronics, though, are apt to sound too much like electronics. I felt the effect I wanted could be made just as well with normal orchestral sounds, though I have suggested amplification for the *profundo* voice of the ghost. My concern in general for clear dramatic expression in the music – without any gimmicks – should, I feel, be matched by a fairly direct presentation on stage. (Qtd. in Kingsbury)

Besides the troubled roaming of restless human spirits, Shakespeare spoils us with true immortality in the case of the fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but he cannot resist the temptation of faking immortality too with the mock-fairies in *The Merry Wives of Windsor.*

The cycle of life, therefore, is enacted in a kaleidoscope of facets in the Bard's plays. This study demonstrates that birth, rarely mentioned, is always either cause for bewilderment or cause for trouble; death can be genuine – violent and gory – or faked; while the time span occurring after death can be exploited in supernatural key or simply as the prolongation of life after having feigned death. Opera brings its own ingeniousness through what Bolter and Grusin call remediation, using means germane to music in order to enhance the dramatic effect of the plays. Libretti adapt the original by eliminating, adding or changing meanings according to the cultural area, the historical age and the mentality in which they were created. Social reality, political regimes, religious beliefs, gender, sexual orientation – all leave their stamp on the remediation strategy. Thus these opera scores and libretti contribute their own originality to the afterlife of Elizabethan drama, with which they establish a cultural dialogue.

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