Shakespearean Remediation in *The Simpsons*

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Abstract

The Simpsons is known for formulating cynical, irreverent social commentary, often engaging with other works from literature, film, and television to construct its narratives. Since the franchise's creation, William Shakespeare is one of many eminent literary figures who have been a target for parody and reworking, in both the television and comic book series. *The Simpsons* remediates, or translates, Shakespeare's plays into the media logics of the animated sitcom and comic book. The objectives of this thesis are to explore the process of remediating Shakespeare's plays in *The Simpsons,* which also involves a thorough examination of how Shakespearean themes, film adaptations and scholarly critiques are conveyed through animation's visual, verbal and auditory imagery. In addition, I examine how these remediated, parodic reworkings provoke a new appreciation for the genre. Throughout, I engage with the questions of why *The Simpsons* turns to Shakespeare in the first place, as well as how the relationship between the show and Shakespeare is structured in the adaptations. A key component of my methodology is interviews conducted with writers and directors of *The Simpsons*. Overall, I examine how *The Simpsons* engages with Shakespeare (old media of theatre), his source texts (old media of historical accounts), scholarly critique and later classic film adaptations to establish the validity of animation as a medium, all the while showing respect for the types of media which preceded it. These parodic reworkings provoke a new appreciation for the manner in which *The Simpsons* simultaneously demonstrates a deep understanding of Shakespeare's literary authority while seeking to challenge it.

Resumé

Les Simpsons est connus pour ses commentaires sociaux cyniques et irrévérencieux, s'appuyant souvent sur d'autres œuvres littéraires, cinématographiques et télévisuelles pour construire ses récits. Depuis la création de la franchise, William Shakespeare est l'une des nombreuses personnalités littéraires éminentes qui ont été la cible de parodies et de remaniements, tant dans les séries télévisées que dans les bandes dessinées. *Les Simpsons* remédient les pièces de Shakespeare dans la logique médiatique de la sitcom animée et de la bande dessinée. Les objectifs de cette thèse sont d'explorer le processus de remédiation des pièces de Shakespeare dans *Les Simpsons*, ce qui implique également un examen approfondi de la manière dont les thèmes shakespeariens, les adaptations cinématographiques et les critiques littéraires sont articulés à travers l'imagerie visuelle, verbale et auditive de l'animation. De plus, j'examine comment ces remaniements parodiques provoquent une nouvelle appréciation du genre. Tout au long, j'aborde les questions concernant pourquoi *Les Simpsons* se tourne vers Shakespeare, ainsi que comment la relation entre la série et Shakespeare est structurée dans les adaptations. Un élément clé de ma méthodologie est les entretiens menés avec les scénaristes et les réalisateurs des *Simpsons*. Dans l'ensemble, j'examine comment *Les Simpsons* s'intéress à Shakespeare (ancien média du théâtre), à ses textes sources (anciens médias des récits historiques), à la critique scientifique et aux adaptations cinématographiques classiques ultérieures pour établir la validité de l'animation en tant que médium, tout en faisant preuve de respect pour les types de médias qui l'ont précédé. Ces remaniements parodiques provoquent une nouvelle appréciation de la manière dont *Les Simpsons* démontre simultanément une profonde compréhension de l'autorité littéraire de Shakespeare tout en cherchant à la contester.

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Introduction

The Simpsons is North America's longest-running, most popular animated television series. The franchise was created by Matt Groening in 1989 and has since expanded into film and merchandise, as well as printed publications with multiple contributing writers.[1] *The Simpsons* is known for its cynical, irreverent social commentary, often engaging with other works from literature, film, and television to construct its narratives. Since the franchise's creation, William Shakespeare is one of many eminent literary figures who have been a target for parody and reworking, in both the television and comic book series.

Michael Bristol writes that because Shakespeare's works initially emerged both as theatrical performances and in print, the competition between these media has contributed to his long-lasting presence in the Western cultural imaginary (30). Mark Fortier states "as long as there have been plays by Shakespeare, there have been adaptations of those plays" (1). Katherine Rowe highlights that "adaptation is now understood as an essential condition of transmission of Shakespeare's texts" (35), though this was not always the case, especially for screen adaptations. Rowe explains that these types of adaptations "inherit all the antitheatricalism and suspicion of low culture that splits off the literary from the realm of the stage, intensifying a general iconophobia toward the translation of classic texts from print into audiovisual forms" (36). This attitude toward "low culture" engagements with Shakespeare is evident; though *The Simpsons*

[1] Because *The Simpsons* is the recognizable product of multiple authors over several decades, for most of this thesis I will draw upon Michael Foucault's concept of the "author function," which replaces the idea of the author with the "discourse" that characterizes and constitutes *The Simpsons* franchise, instead of referring individually to the specific authors of the works involved (149). However, when speaking directly about specific parodic reworkings, I will name their authors.

has garnered a vast amount of scholarship since it first aired, the show has only attracted a scattered amount of attention in the field of Shakespearean studies (Montironi 2).

Russian Formalist Theory: Syuzhet

Gregory Semenza has proposed a useful distinction between the term "fabula," meaning the form and content of a story, and the term "syuzhet," the way in which these stories are created and transformed on screen (Semenza 39). According to Semenza, literary scholars tend to focus their analyses of film adaptations on the "fabula," specifically the content that gets rendered from text to film or, alternatively, the "fabula" that gets cut in that rendering process. Semenza challenges the fidelity model by suggesting that we focus our analysis on the "syuzhet," thus reconsidering these films as "moving pictures rather than static, adapted texts" (Semenza 39). Semenza applies Russian Formalist theory focusing on the syuzhet with regard to 1992's *Shakespeare: The Animated Tales*, discussing how the *Tales'* varied modes of production illuminate aspects of Shakespeare's tendency to mix media (38). In addition, Semenza discusses how critics view cutting Shakespeare's text as equivalent to reducing complexity, or "dumbing down" (64) the plays for a teenage or pre-teen audience who are presumed to be unable to grasp a multi-layered text (64). Semenza demonstrates that *Shakespeare: The Animated Tales* employs an expressive visual language that compensates for the removal of dialogue in contrast to the illusory realism of mainstream animation techniques employed by Disney animators (50). Rather, *Shakespeare: The Animated Tales* trains its audience to focus their attention on the material processes, which is another technique to convey meaning and symbolism.

David Bolter and Richard A. Grusin: Remediation Theory

James J. Marino reminds us in *Owning William Shakespeare: The King's Men and Their Intellectual Property* that "it is not clear that Shakespeare ever finished Hamlet, or that Hamlet is finished" (79); it was meant to be continuously modified, from paper to stage, then stage to paper. Similarly, in the early stages of Shakespeare conceiving the plays, critics argue that he relied on poems, prose, historical accounts, and fables to structure his works. These processes are part of the practice which David Bolter and Richard A. Grusin call *remediation*, the representation of one medium in another (105). In addition, they note that remediation is a reciprocal process, meaning new media can remediate older media and older media can appropriate elements of newer media (Bolter & Grusin 105). This process is certainly present in *The Simpsons,* which represents, critiques and remediates nearly every form of media which came before and after it, as well as media forms it imagines will exist in the future, such as holograms. Paul Levinson in *The Soft Edge* uses the term "remediation to describe how one medium reforms another" (104-114). According to Levinson, humans invent new media that improve on the limits of prior media. For example, Levinson notes that "the VCR makes TV more permanent; hypertext makes writing more interactive; and so on" (107). The development that Levinson articulates is progressive. However, Bolter and Grusin argue that remediation can work in both directions. According to them, older media refashions newer media. Newer media does not always supersede older media since the process of reform and refashioning is mutual and reciprocal (59).

The Simpsons **and the Media Logic of the Animated Sitcom**

The Simpsons is part of the genre of contemporary adult-oriented television cartoon sitcoms. Before the program debuted on the FOX television network in December 1989, America had

been exposed to the Simpson family through a series of shorts on *The Tracey Ullman Show* from 1987 to 1990 (Feltmate 5). The then underground cartoonist Matt Groening created *The Simpsons*, an animated cartoon which was then developed into a twenty-two-minute format sitcom, where it was headed by producer James L. Brooks, known for shows such as *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (CBS 1970– 1977) and *Taxi* (ABC 1978– 1982) (Feltmate 5). Brooks knew of Groening's comic strip *Life in Hell* and enlisted the cartoonist to develop animated shorts that would appear at the end of *The Tracey Ullman Show*. However, instead of adapting his *Life in Hell* series, Groening created the Simpson family, which became known for their "overweight and dim-witted father Homer, mother Marge with her blue hair and devotion to family, the bratty troublemaker and eldest child Bart, Lisa the brilliant and talented middle child, and the non-verbal baby Maggie" (Feltmate 5). The series became an instant hit, in its first year making 1.4 billion dollars for FOX and becoming a massive popular culture sensation (Feltmate 5).

Animation

The Simpsons uses remediation in the same way as Bolter and Grusin define it. Bolter and Grusin adopted the word to "express the way in which one medium is seen by our culture as reforming or improving upon another" (59). In addition, Katherine Rowe explains that media scripts "incorporate a host of unspoken meanings: codifying attitudes towards different media, communications strategies associated with them, and norms governing the way we handle them" (37). *The Simpsons*' media logic comprehends both sitcom and the animated genres. *The Simpsons* remediates the traditional family sitcom in animated form; the characters are meant to represent "human beings," but since *The Simpsons* are "so stylized and abstract," they do not resemble "real human beings" (Sisk 243). Therefore, most of the characters who populate the

Simpsons universe do not accurately represent reality since they are animated, with yellow skin and bulging eyes. This aspect of cartoons has given the genre a history of being a source of subversion of the television medium. Michael Tueth, in his discussion of the family in animated television, references Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the "carnivalesque" which occurs when alternative attitudes are inserted into conventional life, or oppositional culture presented in a fun way (140). According to Tueth, "sitcoms have always been a source of social criticism and a form of emancipatory popular culture." Michael S. Daubs notes that animation's "aesthetic allows for an even more subversive view of family life presented within the nexus of network and commercial demands" ("Immediacy and Aesthetic" 170). George Meyer, a notable producer on *The Simpsons*, stated that the show aims to demonstrate that "moral authorities don't always have your best interest in mind" (Pinsky 134). The purpose is "to get people to re-examine their world, and specifically, the authority figures in their world" (Turner 56).

Sitcom Structure

According to William Miller, television's narrative structure focuses on a beginning, a middle, and an end. Miller notes that the beginning of the story "introduces the problem, conflict, choice to be made, objective to be attained—whatever hooks the interest of the audience and gets the story going" (36). The middle develops the "objective (conflict, choice, etc.) by sketching out its major plot points in a way that expresses the highlights of the complications" (Miller 36). The end of the story portrays the climax and resolution. Over time, the audience is exposed to many episodes, becoming familiar with how each character behaves and reacts to these conflicts. Television comedy is a little different. *The Simpsons* avoids depicting resolutions for their characters. Since they subvert the expectations of the traditional structure, the characters often

fail to achieve their goal or learn any lesson at the end of any given episode. This tendency to subvert the sitcom structure becomes a defining feature of *The Simpsons* and the media logic which they use to adapt old and new media.

Remediation in *The Simpsons*

Remediation is such a central idea to the show that it is evident in the show's recurring opening sequence. In the opening sequence of each episode, *The Simpsons* demonstrates their process of remediation by showcasing the different types of media the series can adapt and comprehend. Since the animated structure is compressed, and gags tend to occur at a rapid pace, the remediations can happen quickly. When Bart is first introduced, he is presented at his elementary school, writing lines on a chalkboard. *The Simpsons* therefore remediates the written word (here tied to punishment) into two-dimensional animation. See Figure 1 for an example of Bart writing on a chalkboard. While skateboarding through Springfield after his detention is over, Bart passes a bookstore, demonstrating that *The Simpsons* will remediate older texts, but also makes a critique of the older medium by having Bart skateboard past it, seemingly uninterested, only to be more fascinated with a new medium, television. See Figures 2 and 3 for these examples of *The Simpsons* demonstrating that their new media is more viable than prior media. In addition to remediating books, *The Simpsons* demonstrate what Bolter and Grusin mean by the reciprocal process of remediation between old and new media; they depict Marge in a grocery store reading a magazine titled "Mom Monthly," intended to appeal to a female audience. See Figure 4 for an example of *The Simpsons* remediating magazine publications. *The Simpsons* also remediate musical notes when portraying Lisa at school playing her saxophone. Not only do *The Simpsons* demonstrate that they are able to remediate older forms of media but, in addition, they

demonstrate that they are able to remediate the music as well, since they portray Lisa playing the very musical notes that they remediated. To demonstrate that they will not only remediate older and new media but also improve upon it, Lisa improvises a saxophone solo that is far more complex and skillful than the musical notes on the page. Her teacher, the authority figure, old defender of old media, reprimands her for her performance. See Figure 5 for an image of the music sheet which *The Simpsons* remediates. Finally, the introduction builds up to the moment that the entire Simpson family rushes to the couch in order to sit down in front of a television. This demonstrates that *their* medium is the ultimate medium, which will not only entertain them but also unite the entire family as well. See Figure 6 for an image of the television.

Shakespeare and Remediation

The way *The Simpsons* remediates older media such as works of literature is similar to how Shakespeare remediates and modifies his source texts. According to Robert Adger Law, Shakespeare frequently remediates plot details from a prior story that parallels the one he follows. While incorporating older media (historical accounts, poetry, etc.) into his plays, he updates and modernizes his characters, enhances and emphasizes themes, critiques and satirizes old literary tropes, traditions and motifs, condemns certain values and incorporates high and low elements of culture. Shakespeare does not only remediate a single source text when constructing his plays; he often remediates various media in his source texts. For example, Law believes that, when writing *Macbeth,* Shakespeare borrowed from another story from *Holinshed* written in the *Scottish Chronicle* twenty pages earlier (38). Law states that there is an account of a disloyal Scot who is "incited by his wife to murder his sovereign, and he performs the deed assisted by his cruel lady in much more colourful fashion than did *Holinshed*'s Makbeth" (38). Given that

Shakespeare operates with the media logic of theatre and performance, he can add depth to the characters and their motivations using techniques from theatre such as soliloquies and asides, which allow characters to provide the audience with insight into their inner psyche.

The Simpsons and Shakespearean Remediation

The Simpsons' and Shakespeare's remediation processes have much more in common than might appear at first glance. *The Simpsons'* Shakespearean reworkings remediate Shakespeare's plays, Shakespearean films and other popular adaptations. Though some might dismiss *The Simpsons* as trite or foolish, *The Simpsons* successfully remediates and amalgamates Shakespearean media that is current in the zeitgeist. For instance, when *The Simpsons* remediates Shakespeare, they embrace both high and low-brow comedy and deploy literary references to emphasize Shakespearean themes in the parodic reworkings and comic books. Additionally, the Shakespearean content *The Simpsons* remediates in its episodes and printed publications may be some of the first ways many people outside of academia are exposed to Shakespeare's works. After all, the main motive for remediation is the validation of the emergent authority of the newer media form vis-a-vis that of prior media forms. *The Simpsons'* engagements with Shakespeare reflect this negotiation. *The Simpsons* chose to remediate Shakespeare because it endows the show with respectability and gives the show more credibility, similarly to the way early narrative film adapted Shakespeare to legitimize itself when it first emerged. Shakespeare also possesses considerable cultural authority, which makes him a prime target for the kind of parody that producer George Meyer indicates is a central function of the show. For *The Simpsons,* Shakespeare is essentially a cache of legitimacy, since he has held the status of literary authority for centuries. By remediating Shakespeare and other authors, films, and stories, *The*

Simpsons achieved enormous commercial success and popularity fairly quickly as Shakespeare did, ultimately hoping to achieve a similar artistic status, which animated cartoons have a difficult time finding.

Parody

In remediating Shakespeare and other works *The Simpsons* engages in parody, which is "a literary device that uses subversion for comic effect where the level of appreciation is determined by the amount of knowledge of the original" (Öğütcü 110). In addition, Dan Harries defines parody as the process of "recontextualizing a target or source text through the transformation of its textual (and contextual) elements, thus creating a new text" (6). According to Harries, the conversion between these two elements results in an oscillation between similarity to and difference from the parodic target, which creates a "level of ironic incongruity with an inevitable satiric impulse" (6). Tavia Shlonsky writes, "the method of parody is to disrealize the norms which the original tries to realize, that is to say, to reduce what is of normative status in the original to a convention or mere device" (Rose 83). Through their parodic reworkings, *The Simpsons* make Shakespearean conventions more transparent to the audience. Jonathan Gray notes that "to laugh at parody is to acknowledge comprehension of those conventions under attack, and hence [it] is also an acknowledgment of a genre's artificiality" (47). *The Simpsons'* reworkings of *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, as well as the reworkings in the comic book, subvert genre by transforming what are generally considered tragedies into tragicomedies.

Given that *The Simpsons* remediates multiple sources of older media such as popular culture, politics, literature, folktales, and myths, the audience would require at least some familiarity with Shakespeare and history to enhance their appreciation of these parodies. In some

instances, these parodies may also help audiences *acquire* this contextual familiarity through a process of trained inference ("they're making fun of something here"). Wherever these reworkings deviate from the source texts, *The Simpsons* distills Shakespeare's ideas into their basic, essential form, much like two-dimensional animation recreating real-life images using the most rudimentary lines. *The Simpsons* engages in the process that Bristol states "allows for new meanings to emerge," thus, "keeping Shakespeare relevant as cultural frameworks evolve" (Bristol 15). Therefore, the animated series and the comic book parodic reworkings ultimately address lingering questions and gaps that are present in the original Shakespearean works that have long been unanswered. They address themes and character motivations frequently unexplored in other adaptations, such as possible motives for Ophelia's suicide, Romeo's aggression, Gertrude's culpability, and Macbeth's reasons for obeying Lady Macbeth's murderous directives. *The Simpsons'* reworkings attempt to address these questions in a parodic tone, as well as combine other academic critiques, films, and popular adaptations of Shakespeare's work, to construct their subversion.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this thesis are as follows: to explore the process of remediation of Shakespeare's plays in *The Simpsons,* which also involves a thorough examination of how Shakespearean themes, film adaptations and scholarly critiques are conveyed through animation's visual, verbal and auditory imagery. In addition, I will examine how these remediated, parodic reworkings provoke a new appreciation for the genre. Throughout, I will engage with the questions of why *The Simpsons* turn to Shakespeare in the first place, as well as how the relationship between the show and Shakespeare is structured in the adaptations.

In Chapter One, I examine the animated parody of *Hamlet,* "Do the Bard, Man," which is the final segment in the episode "Tales from the Public Domain" (2002). Here, I argue that the manner in which the play is remediated in the segment engages with questions of authorship, ownership and the conflict between old and new media. I examine how *The Simpsons* engages with Shakespeare (old media of theatre), his source texts (old media of historical accounts), scholarly critique and later classic film adaptations to establish the validity of animation as a medium, all the while showing respect for the types of media which preceded it.

The focus of Chapter Two is a parodic remediation of *Macbeth,* which aired as part of the episode "Four Great Women and a Manicure" (2009). This segment is also a clever metaphor for the struggle of new media to differentiate itself from old media while simultaneously paying homage to it. As part of the approach in this chapter, I cite an interview I conducted with Raymond S. Persi, the episode's director. His insights into the creation of the episode further highlight the remediation process.

In Chapter Three I turn our attention to *The Simpsons Shake-up Shakespeare,* a comic book tie-in to the series written by Ian Boothby. This issue reworks the plays *Troilus and Cressida, Antony and Cleopatra, Julius Caesar, Henry V, Romeo and Juliet, The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Richard III, Titus Andronicus,* and *King Lear.* Boothby remediates Shakespeare and other Shakespearean media by condensing and abbreviating the plays. In doing so, he alters the endings for comedic effect to match the genre of the series the comic is based on. This chapter is also based on an interview conducted with Boothby, who shares about his influences and goals in writing the comic book.

CHAPTER ONE

The Simpsons' *Hamlet*: Remediations

The Simpsons' first parody of a Shakespearean play appears in 2002 during an episode titled "Tales from the Public Domain" (2002), written by Andrew Kreisberg, Josh Lieb and Matt Warburton. The parodic reworking of *Hamlet* within the episode, titled "Do the Bard, Man," was written specifically by Matt Warburton and directed by Mike B. Anderson. The titles of the episode and the parodic reworking are meaningful in their own right. "Tales from the Public Domain" implies that Shakespeare's works are within the public domain and therefore available for extended use and appropriation without compensation. The public domain reference raises issues about rights, ownership, and debt—themes also prevalent in Shakespeare's works, in *Hamlet* specifically, and in remediation studies fundamentally. *The Simpsons* engages with Shakespeare by remediating his work, his potential source texts, literary interpretations of the play and popular adaptations in film. In the opening of the episode, the inciting incident is Marge sorting through the family's mail, which she names as she does so: "Bill, bill, bill," the last of which results from overdue library books (2002). This is not only a reference to the idea of being in debt to an author, but Marge also acknowledges that the episode owes much to "Bill" Shakespeare. In response to the overdue notices from the library, Homer insists that he read the family stories from a book titled "Classics for Children" (2002) before he must return it.

Like most revenge tragedies, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* deals heavily with the theme of debt. Throughout the play Hamlet is tormented by the question of how much owes to his deceased father. When Hamlet first encounters Old Hamlet as a Ghost, the father demands that Hamlet "Swear by his sword" for his obedience to enact revenge on his brother on his behalf (1.5.182). The play engages with the theme of kingship and duty. For example, Polonius discusses "what

majesty should be, what duty is" when he confers with Claudius and Gertrude about Hamlet's "madness" (2.2.87). After all, what is rotten in Denmark is Claudius not fulfilling what he owes to his family's honour. When the *Hamlet* reworking is viewed through the lens of remediation theory, the segment can be understood as Bart/Hamlet having to choose between old media (his father) or new media (his personal moral sense). Thus, the *Hamlet* segment represents the struggle of adapting old media content to new media forms, where the old media is forced to establish its viability through new media. The theme of debt is analogous to the way *The Simpsons* remediates old and new media within their episodes. *The Simpsons* demonstrates their awareness of older media forms by parodying them and referring to them within their episodes. Though they often mock older media forms, the inclusion of older media preserves it within the collective consciousness. For new media to reign supreme, a connection to the past is important since it tries to appeal to familiar and established genres (Daubs, "Immediacy and Aesthetic" 163).

In the parody "Do the Bard, Man," the *Simpsons* characters represent the new media, and the media logic they are governed by is the genre they operate within, which is an animated sitcom. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is remediated into this new media logic and adapted to its structures. When *Hamlet* is subjected to an animated sitcom structure the play becomes significantly reduced and the genre becomes comedy. In the parody, Bart/Hamlet can also be seen as representing the struggle of choosing between old media or new media as he too must choose between his father, Homer, or his new stepfather, Moe. However, *The Simpsons'* end message differs greatly. The parody concludes with all the *Simpsons* characters dying, including Marge/Gertrude, who "refuses to clean up this mess" (2002) and bludgeons herself with a mace. This ending can be said to represent the difficulty that newer media has in remediating old

media. Though new media uses older media to establish and legitimize itself, new media must build on, and is therefore to a certain extent dependent upon, old media techniques. This is a technique Shakespeare uses in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Shakespeare remediates the tragic story of Pyramus and Thisbe within the media logic of theatre and comedy. Shakespeare's acting troupe, who are comedically inept, are unable to perform the tragedy authentically, and therefore perform it as a comedy.

Laura Carmen Díaz Moreno notes that "Do the Bard, Man" is made "up from a play of words between the name of the character who plays the role of Hamlet in the parodic adaptation, Bart, and the label commonly used to refer to the source text's author, the Bard" (24). From the title alone, *The Simpsons* demonstrates the writers' awareness of literary techniques that Shakespeare employs in his works— techniques such as wordplay, punning, witty literalism, clownish malapropism, word corruption and nonsensical rhetoric. As a particular nod to Shakespeare the opening couch gag that begins this episode opens with the motif of breaking the fourth wall. We see the Simpsons as drawings in a flipbook, which is then shown to be held by a real human hand (2002). This is also an example of remediation from text to moving image; a flipbook is the original moving picture which has progressed to the medium of flash animation used in the show. See Figure 7 for an example of the artist's hand holding the flipbook in the opening gag.

Hamlet **and Shakespeare's Use of Sources**

To craft the overall episode, *The Simpsons* remediates *The Odyssey*, the story of Joan of Arc, and finally *Hamlet.* Shakespeare was himself no stranger to Greek myths and biblical references, as he often remediated stories from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and passages from the Christian bible,

taking them from the page to the stage (Bullough 365). In the case of *Hamlet*, this history of remediation gets quite complex. As William Hansen notes in ***Saxo Grammaticus and the Life of Hamlet***, "*Hamlet* is a revision of a dramatic treatment...of a retelling...of a literary treatment...of a Scandinavian legend" (67). The exact age and origin of the *Hamlet* story are unknown. However, Kemp Malone in ***The Literary History of Hamlet*** identifies a series of parallels between the *Hamlet* story and the legendary histories of the British Isles (59-99). According to Malone, there exists a "Scandinavian warrior named Amhlaidhe... slayer of King Niall Glundubh" (54), who identifies as Amleth/Hamlet. Chopoidalo notes the story of Hamlet, a "protagonist who feigns insanity, seeks revenge, and brings down a corrupt king," would have been common in the folklore, mythology, and legendary history of various cultures (51). In *The Simpsons'* parodic reworking, Krusty appears as a jester on stage in what can only be described as a comedy club within the King's court. Krusty roasts a Viking, who then proceeds to kidnap a woman and light a table on a fire before fleeing the scene. This is an example of how *The Simpsons* demonstrates their awareness of Shakespeare's own creative practice, by remediating his source text within the parody.

Chopoidalo notes Shakespeare's further significant deviations from the Anglo-Saxon source text (59). In the Anglo-Saxon version, the Horatio figure warns Amleth of Feng's (the Claudius figure's) plot to seduce Hamlet with a woman. This woman is said to be the inspiration behind Shakespeare's Ophelia (Chopoidalo 59). In general, the figures of Horatio and Ophelia are far less developed in the original source tradition. Shakespeare inverts the seduction plot from the source text by making Ophelia concerned about Hamlet trying to seduce her, thus giving her character more depth. Here, Horatio and Ophelia's characters are also both foster siblings to Amleth. Once the Horatio and Ophelia figures accomplish their goals, they no longer

appear in the text (Chopoidalo 60). Shakespeare also departs from the source text with regard to his protagonist, Hamlet. In Shakespeare's version, Hamlet dies avenging his murdered father, whereas in the Anglo-Saxon narrative of Amleth he survives to tell the Danish people of the evil treachery that Feng and his wife Gerutha have committed (Chopoidalo 64). Shakespeare remediates his historical source text, bringing it to the theatre, where he updates and modernizes his characters and setting. Shakespeare demonstrates that his form of media, the theatre, is superior by merging older media contents and modernizing them.

Simpsonian Parodic Reworking of *Hamlet*

The Simpsons' rewriting of *Hamlet*, under the subtitle of "Do the Bard-Man," presents Homer reading the tale to his children in modern times while the family punctuates the parody with their remarks on the play itself. *The Simpsons'* parodic reworking adds modern, contemporary themes, critiques and references that challenge Shakespeare's text, while also demonstrating a cheeky awareness of the original source materials which Shakespeare himself may have used. Some scholars suggest Shakespeare may have only had access to *Ur Hamlet*, the lost play by Thomas Kyd (Cleeve 447). However, *The Simpsons* appears to be more in dialogue with a possible Anglo-Saxon source text. This technique is similar to that employed by Baz Luhrmann in his 1996 film *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet.* Luhrmann alludes to the narrative antecedents of Shakespeare's play in his film, which destabilizes any claim Shakespeare might have to primary or sole authorship of the work.[2] He creates a space for his own remediation. As Marino notes, Shakespeare's plays were owned by the Lord Chamberlain's Men rather than Shakespeare

[2] The 1990s saw an explosion of Shakespeare on film, starting with Kenneth Branagh's film of *Much Ado About Nothing* and Luhrmann's film of *Romeo and Juliet*, which showed that public-domain Shakespeare was an extremely viable commercial entity. This presumably plays into why *The Simpsons* turn to him early in the next decade.

himself, and the company was free to use and rework the play as needed (Marino 107). This means that plays such as *Hamlet* were meant to be adapted and reworked. Ultimately, Shakespeare's "version" is one of many in a long line of *Hamlets* which also includes "Do the Bard, Man." *The Simpsons* creates its own space for its remediation of *Hamlet,* similar to the manner in which Luhrmann does with *Romeo + Juliet.*

The Simpsons tells the story in the form of a parodic "show-within," wherein the series's main characters play the roles of the characters in the *Hamlet* story Homer reads to his children. Maria Elisa Montironi notes that *The Simpsons* embodies contemporary societal stereotypes: the main characters are "the members of a typical American family, living in the village of Springfield, site of a nuclear power plant" (9), which endows the parody with modern-day meaning. *The Simpsons* portrays Shakespearean themes in a world set in the past while also depicting a reaction to these themes in the present.[3] This process demonstrates how different meanings can be constructed through other cultural lenses. For example, when Bart asks Homer if Hamlet "gets to marry his mother," Homer replies, "I don't know, but that would be hot" (2002). Homer's comment recalls Laurence Olivier's 1948 film *Hamlet* in which Olivier, aged 41, cast Eileen Herlie to play Gertrude, who was 30 years of age at the time. Montironi observes that this is a parody of the critical attention that Olivier's (1948) and Franco Zeffirelli's (1990) films received about Hamlet and Gertrude's relationship being read through the lens of the Oedipus complex (10).[4]

[3] This form of questioning is similar to how Laura Bohannan's audience in her essay "Shakespeare in the Bush," composed of members of the Tiv tribe from West Africa, punctuates her retelling of *Hamlet* with their hypotheses and questions (15).

[4] Olivier's film was notoriously influenced by Ernst Jones's pioneering psychoanalytic reading of the play, which highlighted the presence of the Oedipus complex in the narrative (1964).

Critical Discourse in the Simpsonian Parodic Reworking

In the episode we watch Bart and Homer engage with critical discourse surrounding the play. Shortly after Bart's inquest, Bart opines to Homer about how "these old stories can't compare with our modern super writers. Steven Bochco could kick Shakespeare's ass" (2002), which Moreno notes as being the first attack on the author (26). Moreno observes that Bart's assertion mocks Shakespeare's authorial talent and popularity by "comparing him with a contemporary television producer and writer" (26). I would suggest, rather, that Bart's assertion mocks Bochco's authorial talent and transient popularity as compared with Shakespeare's enduring elite cultural status. *The Simpsons* therefore are commenting on how societal interests change over generations, and how classical works eventually get replaced by modern ones. Montironi notes that "Lisa tries to awaken her brother's interest in the classic book by telling him that the play opens with the murder of Hamlet's father, this way introducing the tragedy as some sort of thriller" (43). Montironi also writes that "this satiric statement attacks the Shakespearean myth, which contemplates the Bard as an icon of highbrow culture" (Montironi 42). In addition, the commentary could also suggest that *Hamlet* is not a work of art that can easily be classified. Harold Bloom famously refers to *Hamlet* as *"The Poem Unlimited"* because he argues that the play cannot be narrowed down to one specific genre (Bloom 2003).

Later in the episode, after he learns about the tragic fate of Hamlet's father, Bart asks Lisa "If the protagonist gets to marry his mother?" (2002). Karma Waltonen notes that this line represents "the psychoanalytic approach of the play. That is to say, the reading of the play in which Hamlet's rage at Claudius comes more from his own sense of incestuous cuckoldry than the crime of regicide" (199). Moreno notes that scholars have argued that "Hamlet's psychological conflict may be explained through Sigmund Freud's Oedipus complex, according

to which children feel some sort of attraction for their opposite-sex parent, and develop a feeling of hatred against the other parental figure" (26). In the DVD commentary to the episode, Al Jean, the series's showrunner, states that he was aware of an "Oedipal theory where [Hamlet] doesn't do anything until his mother dies and then he leaps into action and then doesn't stop" (2002), thus demonstrating that *The Simpsons* are in dialogue with some of the academic scholarship surrounding the play (e.g., Donaldson 1987).

Later in the episode, writer Matt Warburton further explores the Freudian Oedipal reading of the bedroom scene with the Gertrude/Marge figure. The bedroom scene in *Hamlet* is a scene which has been used in many popular cultural adaptations to allude to Hamlet's possible Oedipal motives for wanting to kill Claudius. A notable example is Olivier's 1948 film, in which the erotic tension between Olivier's Hamlet and Eileen Herlie's Gertrude is quite evident, making it the first film version to foreground the Oedipal angle (Donaldson 22). Peter Donaldson suggests Olivier's treatment of the Oedipal theme in *Hamlet* was informed by his early memories of sexual harassment at private school (23). Kenneth Branagh's 1996 *Hamlet* is another notable example of an Oedipal interpretation of the play, in which he and Julie Christie, who plays Gertrude, play up the sexual physicality of the scene. In Branagh's version, Hamlet climbs on top of the bed and throws his mother down on the bed, simulating a sexual position. Later in the scene, Hamlet and Gertrude lock heads with one another, holding each other in a warm embrace, almost as if they are about to kiss. Branagh's adaptation does not leave much to the imagination. In *The Simpsons* adaptation, there are no sexual undertones detected in this scene, but Warburton does portray Bart attempting to kill his mother with a large broad sword while Marge is sleeping in her bed. In order to stop Bart in his tracks, Marge reminds her son about the danger of "running with swords" in the house (2002). In the DVD commentary, Al Jean states that "the

whole thing can be interpreted that he's jealous of his uncle for killing his father and all of his actions that he takes and doesn't take can be interpreted as such."

Character Mapping

The Shakespearean roles *The Simpsons* writers assign to each of the characters, based on analogous character traits, reveal how the writers interpret Shakespeare's characters. This is a significant way in which the two fictional universes are shown to be, in the modern vernacular, "relatable." *The Simpsons* adds another interpretation to their reworking by having their characters deviate from their Shakespearean roles based on modern perspectives, such as feminism and psychoanalysis. For example, Lisa portrays the role of Ophelia. Despite the fact that Hamlet and Ophelia are not siblings in Shakespeare's play, this role is particularly well-chosen given Lisa's tendency to feel like an outsider who has difficulty in romantic relationships. The rest of the family often mistreats Lisa because her intelligence makes them insecure. *The Simpsons'* version deviates from *Hamlet* with regard to the depiction of Lisa/Ophelia's suicide. In the parody, Lisa commits suicide because she does not want to be "out-craz[ied]" (2002) by Hamlet. *The Simpsons* portrays Lisa as making the decision from a place of agency, similar to Shakespeare's Ophelia. According to Gabrielle Dane, Shakespeare's Ophelia represents a character who has "been shaped to conform to external demands, to reflect others' desires" (406). From this perspective, Ophelia chooses to commit suicide in order to regain control over her own life. The deviation from Shakespeare's version is the handling of Lisa's death. In the parody, no one seems to care or notice that Lisa has jumped out of the castle window. Her death is never mentioned, a usual trope in the franchise, in which other characters often dismiss Lisa's actions and storylines. On the other hand, Shakespeare's Hamlet feels guilty once he discovers

Ophelia has committed suicide. This is a modern critique of how Ophelia, in the grand scheme of the play, is largely disregarded. Every man in the play invalidates her concerns. She is only a concern to the other characters once she is dead. This close reading suggests that *The Simpsons* writers know Shakespeare, his source texts and the discourse surrounding them. *The Simpsons* adds to a tradition of parodically reinterpreting Shakespeare's female characters through a modern feminist lens, which includes Ann-Marie MacDonald's 1990 play Go*odnight Desdemona (Good morning, Juliet),* a parodic feminist revision of *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet.*

To prevent her from being "out-crazied" (2002), Lisa sings a song with the lyrics "hey-nanny-nanny with a hoo and a ha and a nanny-nanny-hey!" as she proceeds to jump out the window, landing in a moat that surrounds the castle (2002). *The Simpsons* having Lisa sing a song to depict Lisa's insanity is a parody of Ophelia singing to Gertrude and Claudius in Act 4 Scene 5 of the play. In the scene, Ophelia spontaneously starts singing when Gertrude asks how she is doing. *The Simpsons* demonstrate their knowledge of this scene by having Lisa sing a song to represent her insanity, but also by portraying Lisa, in her last aggressive act, kicking a vase filled with flowers, which scatter throughout the room. The parodic reworking is in dialogue with the scene which uses lyrics from within Ophelia's song, "Larded all with sweet flowers; / Which bewept to the ground did not go" (4.5.43-44). In Branagh's adaptation, he directs Kate Winslet to scatter flowers all over the film stage as she sings the song (1996). To enhance the theme of insanity, *The Simpsons* also shows Lisa/Ophelia's suicide, which is a deviation from the Shakespearean text. By making the suicide visible, *The Simpsons* also comments on Gertrude's culpability. In Shakespeare's play, Gertrude tells Laertes that she witnessed the suicide, and her retelling is striking for her inaction. In her story, she does not mention any attempt at rescuing Ophelia or even calling for help. Nor does anyone in this parodic reworking. This represents how

the nature of parody to interrogate the norm allows parody to make deep, poignant social commentary, while also remaining humorous.

Marge, a stay-at-home mother with blue hair and a strong devotion to her family, as the Gertrude figure in the parodic reworking offers many fascinating interpretations of the text for those familiar with *The Simpsons*. Marge, a character who would be deeply saddened by the loss of her husband, would likely not fall in love with Moe, a figure for whom she has much contempt since he owns the bar frequented by Homer on a regular basis. Nor would it be characteristic of Marge to have been pleased to hear him admit his intentions in the parodic Mouse Trap scene, where Moe blatantly admits to how he killed Homer/Old Hamlet. Although Marge does not have any lines in this scene, director Mike B. Anderson depicts her lovingly staring into Moe's eyes as he explains the murder of her old husband. This parodic reworking is a strong departure from her character in the franchise's universe, where Marge shows an almost bewilderingly steadfast commitment to Homer throughout the entire series. Since sitcom structure dictates that the characters are not allowed to change, this scene is engaging to watch because it is a complete departure from the Marge the viewer has come to know. Therefore, the audience experiences a feeling of betrayal similar to that which Hamlet experiences. To heighten her betrayal, Anderson directs Marge to only glance at Bart/Hamlet for a moment, as he comes to greet them, and then to quickly look back lovingly into Moe's eyes. This direction not only demonstrates how Hamlet would have felt rejected by the lack of validation he receives from his mother. Her lack of concern for him also provides an additional motive for why he would want to remove Claudius from his life.

In the series, Moe is a character motivated by selfish desires. He does not often consider the feelings of others. This character trait aligns him with Claudius. For example, when Gertrude

informs Claudius that Hamlet has murdered Polonius, Claudius remarks “O heavy deed! It had been so with us, had we been there. / His liberty is full of threats to all / To you yourself, to us, to everyone” (4.1. 13-16). Claudius is concerned he may have been in danger if he had been in the room, instead of being concerned for Gertrude, much less Polonius. Unlike Claudius, Moe, the sleazy bar owner, shamelessly admits his intentions for why he decided to marry Gertrude. In the series, the nature of Moe and Homer’s relationship is sometimes contentious since they have a rivalry over Marge. In addition, Moe is the gatekeeper to Homer’s addiction since he is the owner/bartender of Moe’s, the local bar in Springfield. Although Moe is often portrayed as rude and irritable, he is kinder to Homer, Lenny, Carl, and Barney, who are his frequent and regular customers. Although Homer is not actually Moe’s brother in the series, Moe/Claudius says he misses his brother so much that he wants to wear his rings and sleep with his wife, all while Bart/Hamlet is within earshot. Thus, The Simpsons comments on how transparent Claudius’s motives are to any keen observer. Meanwhile, Gertrude and other characters in Claudius’s court do not seem to register that he murdered their old king.

Given Moe/Claudius’s flat-out disinclination to hide his motives, the audience is encouraged to view the other members of the court as gullible and incompetent, since they are complicit in his plans without questioning them. For his part, Moe/Claudius is not convinced of Ralph/Laertes’s capabilities, either, and so he places poison everywhere. This further comments on how Claudius in Shakespeare’s play opts to have several backup plans because he believes he is dealing with incompetent people. This is further illustrated by the scene in which Lenny and Carl as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern kill themselves with their own poison. *The Simpsons* strongly insinuates that the characters in the play are responsible for their own deaths for trusting

Claudius. Their stupidity is a comment on how it is too obvious to Hamlet that they are working for Claudius. They do not have the intelligence to hide it better.

Bart is a natural choice to portray Hamlet, given the contentious relationship he has with his father. In a DVD commentary for the episode "Two Bad Neighbors," Groening states that Bart was conceived from the premise of Dennis the Menace, which he found disappointing, and that he was determined to create a character who was actually a menace (2005). Bart is an anagram of the word "brat" (Korte 1997). In *Hamlet*, the title character is perceived as a nuisance by Polonius, Claudius and Gertrude because of his opposition to the court. This is analogous to Bart's dismissal of authority throughout the series. They each have their own reason for labelling Hamlet in the play; Claudius is suspicious of Hamlet's intentions, Gertrude feels guilt about her marriage, and Polonius looks for any occasion to ingratiate himself with the new king. As previously mentioned, Bart's sibling relationship with Lisa aligns with the Anglo-Saxon source text. Bart also expresses contempt for Moe Szyslak, whose role as Claudius is fitting, given his reputation for criminal activities and questionable morals. In Bart's eyes, Moe is responsible for his father's neglect because he owns the bar where Homer spends most of his time. A recurring joke in the series is Bart prank-calling the bar, using false names which sound like lewd phrases. Therefore, having Moe portray Claudius, the figure who takes Hamlet's father away from him, is particularly well-suited. In addition, Moreno notes that "the series has more than once referred to Moe being in love with Marge, and even trying to steal her from Homer" (25). For example, in the episode "Secrets of a Successful Marriage" Moe believes that Homer has died, and he immediately goes to comfort Marge in an attempt to win her over.

Krusty the Clown makes several appearances throughout the episode. Krusty is known in the series as a "chain- smoking, hard drinking, gambling, pornography-addicted comic with

green hair, white makeup, and a red nose" (Feltmate 86) who hosts a popular television series within *The Simpsons* universe. In the parody of Joan of Arc, Krusty appears as a court jester who insults the King, who is portrayed by Milhouse. Krusty is then sentenced to death by hot oil. Krusty is not the only fool figure to be punished in these parodies. In the deleted scenes, within the *Hamlet* parodic reworking, there is another fool figure who gets punished. Otto, the school bus driver, is portrayed as a fool figure reminiscent of Feste from *Twelfth Night,* and is referred to as a "minstrel" by Homer/Old Hamlet (2002). Otto, an avid guitar player within the series, is playing the lute as he entertains his lord, Claudius/Moe. The scene comments on the many schemes and plans that Hamlet hatches to "catch the conscience of the king" (2.2. 581-582), schemes which do not meet with much success. Bart/Hamlet, hidden inside a decorative suit of medieval armour, waits for Claudius to pass, but he accidentally kills Otto instead. In turn, Otto becomes a ghost, after which Old Hamlet/Homer criticizes Hamlet/Bart for not completing the task properly (2002).

Other *Simpsons'* character selections are not arbitrarily made. The choice to depict Laertes as Ralph Wiggum is also a comment on his capabilities and naivete in the play. Ralph, Chief Wiggum's son, is a social outcast at Springfield Elementary, where he often does things other characters find strange or unintelligent, such as eating crayons or making absurd comments. In the parody, notably, Ralph/Laertes mistakes blood for tears. Ralph is told by Moe/Claudius that he has "one practice stab" (2002), and with that practice stab, Ralph/Laertes kills himself. Moe/Claudius says, "oh boy, did I bet on the wrong horse" (2002). The parodic reworking suggests how Laertes is responsible for his own death, just as Lenny/Rosencrantz and Carl/Guildenstern are. James W. Stone notes that *The Simpsons'* identification of Ralph with

Laertes "may be a way to recall the interpretations of Laertes as a weak soul, usually deduced from his crying words commenting on his sister's death" (Montironi 13).

Meanwhile, in the bedroom scene, Polonius/Wiggum is behind the curtains. Wiggum as Polonius is a comment on Polonius's capabilities and corrupt leadership style, as Wiggum is the extremely incompetent police chief in the *Simpsons* universe. He is reminiscent of Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing.* In addition, as Moreno notes, "Polonius convinces King Claudius to allow him to spy [on] Hamlet, thus becoming some sort of private detective, which connects with Chief Wiggum's profession" (37).

Deviations from Shakespeare

Although in many respects *The Simpsons'* parody follows the plot of *Hamlet* faithfully, the episode does deviate from Shakespeare's play in important ways which suggest the writers are also knowledgeable about his other source texts and the scholarly tradition pertaining to the play. In the Simpsonian version of the Mouse Trap scene, the reworking opens with Krusty dressed as a court jester. As mentioned earlier, Krusty's joke alludes to the *The Simpsons'* familiarity with Shakespeare's source text. Krusty tells his audience, "and if your idea of a first date…is burning down her village, then you might just be a Viking" (2002). This joke not only alludes to their knowledge of *Hamlet's* source tradition, but also "link[s] the courtly situation with the television entertainment today" (Montironi 11). Marge/Gertrude comments on Krusty's joke by saying that she "loves these court jesters. They're exactly what I need to forget about the death of my first husband" (2002). Montironi notes that "the metatheatrical scene par excellence in the Shakespearean canon becomes … a way to criticize contemporary television" (11). In the same way that Shakespeare explores "the nature and power of drama" (11) in Hamlet, *The Simpsons'*

parodic reworking of *Hamlet* invites its audience to examine "the nature and power of television" (11) by commenting on its ability to distract ourselves from our moral dilemmas, the very kind of distraction that the characters in *Hamlet* would have benefited from. Montironi argues that these criticisms:

> provide a sharp satire of television, where programs are rarely made to rouse people's consciences, or to reflect upon reality, but are more commonly planned to provide a fruitless escape from reality … Instead, *The Simpsons* promote and are an example of a television whose task is, in the words of Hamlet, 'to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature' (2.2.17-19) for an awakening of society." (12)

Further into the Simpsonian Mouse Trap scene, Bart/Hamlet says "Ah, ha! Me thinks the play's the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king" (2002). Bart's quote is from Hamlet's famous soliloquy, in which Hamlet says, "The play's the thing / Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King" (2.2.633-34). Unfortunately for Bart, his soliloquy can be overheard by Moe/Claudius, unlike that of Hamlet. Moe/Claudius turns to Bart, confused about Bart/Hamlet confessing his motivations aloud. Bart then retorts with "That's a soliloquy, you're not supposed to hear me" (2002). Warburton thereby comments on the modern absurdity of the theatrical tradition in which soliloquies are performed on stage. It also explains what a soliloquy is for audience members who may be unfamiliar with the technique. Moe/Claudius tries his own soliloquy, again shamelessly admitting his intention to kill Bart/Hamlet. According to Montironi, *The Simpsons'* attack on Shakespeare's use of soliloquies is "not meant as much to ridicule this popular Elizabethan dramatic technique, but rather to deride the traditional way of performing it" (43).

At this point, Bart/Hamlet has evidence which is far more damning than Hamlet does in the play, and yet Bart/Hamlet still finds himself unable to act. This lack of determination is a comment on Hamlet's notorious inertia in the play. In the DVD commentary, Al Jean remarks that the intention behind the parody was the "critique of an ancient [character]" because he finds that "Hamlet really wants a lot of proof but when he gets it he doesn't really do anything" (2002). To comment on the fact that Hamlet had enough evidence from his mouse trap scheme to make his mind up, Warburton writes about Moe/Claudius getting angry that the actors did not portray the death as accurately as the real murder he committed. Moe/Claudius uses another Shakespearean motif, the pun, to get himself out of the confession. This is finally enough evidence for Bart/Hamlet. He runs over to the painting of Homer/Old Hamlet and calls him "daddy," which is a term Bart himself does not use to refer to his father. This departure implies that perhaps Hamlet's reluctance or anger at his mother comes from a stunted childhood, as he is still infantilized by his mother.

Where *The Simpsons'* depiction of Moe/Claudius most deviates from *Hamlet* is with regard to the final scene. In Shakespeare's final scene, the stage direction has Hamlet "Hurt the King," followed by "Forcing him to drink the poison" (5.2.357), until "King dies" (5.2.358). Bart/Hamlet stabs Moe/Claudius with his sword, instead of forcing him to drink the poisonous cup. This reworking is similar to Branagh and Zeffirelli, who direct their Hamlets to stab Claudius with the envenomed sword before they force him to drink from the poisonous cup. In contrast, the parodic reworking is more closely aligned with Olivier's adaptation, which has Hamlet repeatedly stab Claudius with the poisonous sword until he dies, which is almost comically rendered in the film. In Olivier, the sword appears to bounce off of the batting that stuffs Claudius's clothing. Again, differently from Shakespeare's Claudius, Moe's final words

are, “remember me as a peacekeeper” (2002). The *Simpsons* comments on how Claudius’s murder of King Hamlet ultimately brings stability to the region when Fortinbras reclaims the land for Norway.

The parody exaggerates the play’s representations of violence by satirizing the excessive death scene at the end of the play. Al Jean observes that *Hamlet* is an “incredibly violent work of English literature” (2002). The exaggerations of violence begin with Moe slathering poison on nearly every object Bart could possibly touch, including courtly figures Rosen-Carl and Gilden-Lenny. This presumably refers to the amount of poison deployed in *Hamlet* to murder King Hamlet, Claudius, Gertrude, and Laertes. After this scene, Rosen-Carl and Gilden-Lenny give each other a high-five and die immediately. Ralph, portraying Laertes, stabs himself in his own side and dies. This references to how Laertes is responsible for his own death, given that he puts the poison on the end of his own sword. Bart murders Moe with a sword to his chest. As Bart walks away, he slips in a puddle of blood and falls on his back, killing himself. Marge, after witnessing all this violence and unwilling to clean it up, bludgeons her own head with a morning star. The excessive violence in this scene renders it meaningless.

The Simpsons generally critiques the ubiquity of comic violence on television through its parodic callbacks to popular cartoon series such as *Mickey Mouse*, *Looney Tunes* and *Tom and Jerry* in the form of an animated television series beloved by Bart, Lisa and other children. “Itchy and Scratchy” depicts the gruesome adventures of Itchy, a murderous mouse, and Scratchy, an overly trusting cat. The pair are not present in this episode, though they are used to comment on aggression and violence in *Titus Andronicus* in the comic book version of that play by Ian Boothby, which is described further in Chapter Three.

Syuzhet

Gregory Semenza distinguishes between the term "fabula," meaning the form and content of the story, and the term "syuzhet," the way in which these stories are created and transformed on screen (39). *The Simpsons'* version of *Hamlet* is an interesting opportunity for scholars to answer Semenza's call to examine the "syuzhet" in the background, which conveys Shakespearean themes, references, and critiques that the "fabula" is not telling. When the parody begins, we are shown Bart portraying the role of Hamlet, sleeping in his bed. On the wall behind Bart is a sign that reads "Danes Do It Melancholy," which Montironi states is a "comic sentence that also refers to the sexual and psychological connotations of the story" (10). Montironi corroborates her point by noting that in the next scene there is a painting hung on the wall "representing the wedding of Gertrude with Claudius and a mortified and mope[*y*] Bart/Hamlet in the background" (10). In addition to the sign, there is a pennant that reads "Feudalism" (2002), reminding the audience that "Hamlet is not a scholar from Wittenberg, but a feudal prince" (13).

Later in the parody, when Homer, as the ghost of King Hamlet, exits Bart's room, he leaves behind a smear of green slime. Montironi notes that this slime "unequivocally reminds us of the famous green ghost Slimer" featured in the movie and eventually television animated series *Ghostbusters* (11). Montironi adds that this is a clever comparison on behalf of the animators because Homer "shares with Slimer the inclination to gluttony" (11). *The Simpsons'* use of the imagery of gluttony is in stark contrast to the lines the ghost says in the play, "And for the day confined to fast in fires, / Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature / Are burnt and purged away" (1.5. 11-13). Bart comments on how it seems that Homer has "returned from the Buffet" instead of returning from the dead. The mingling of appetite and death is reminiscent of the carnivalesque, which scholars such as Michael D. Bristol suggest is a main theme of the play

(350). *The Simpsons* demonstrates that the humour they engage in is not purely for laughs; it is full of social commentary, critiquing the source work. Shortly after Bart's buffet joke, the ghost of Homer tells Bart/Hamlet the reason Moe killed him. Homer states that it was so that Moe/Claudius could get "married to Marge and become the King" (2002) where Bart replies with "Yeah, that was quite a weekend" (2002). The *Simpsons* are engaging with Hamlet's line in the play when he speaks to Horatio about the pace of the marriage when he retorts "Thrift, thrift, Horatio. / The funeral baked meats Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables" (1.2.87-88). John McDonald argues that Bart's line comments on "the absurdity of the plot" and even suggests that there are "those who might find Shakespeare's narratives unbelievable and convoluted at times" (2014).

Costumes

A closer examination of director Mike B. Anderson's costume selections reveals he successfully merges two popular culture Shakespeare adaptations to complete his visual and auditory parody. Anderson relies on Olivier's *Hamlet* for most of the costume selections for the characters, whereas he only remediates two costume choices from Zeffirelli's *Hamlet.* Anderson directly remediates Hamlet's outfit from Olivier's adaptation. Although Olivier's Hamlet changes into many different outfits throughout the film, Anderson selects the outfit that Olivier wears in the "To be or not to be" soliloquy scene. The entire outfit, from the boots, belt, billowing sleeves and vest bears a striking resemblance to Olivier's. See Figure 8 for a visual comparison. Later, Bart undergoes a costume change, which is not traditional for *The Simpsons,* which usually has its characters dressed in the same outfit for the entire episode. However, in true Simpsonian fashion, Anderson subverts structure to make his point. In the final scene of the reworking, Bart/Hamlet

is wearing an exact copy of the outfit Mel Gibson wears in the final scene of Zeffirelli's adaptation. See Figure 9 for an example of the comparison between the two outfits. This transition from Olivier's to Zeffirelli's adaptation can be explained by Bart/Hamlet transitioning from inaction to action. When Zeffirelli's adaptation was released, Roger Ebert, a film critic, praised Mel Gibson's performance for not:

> Giving us another Hamlet as Mope, a melancholy Dane lurking in shadows and bewailing his fate. We get the notion, indeed, that there was nothing fundamentally awry with Hamlet until everything went wrong in his life, until his father died and his mother married his uncle with unseemly haste. This is a prince who was healthy and happy and could have lived a long and active life, if things had turned out differently. (1991)

Anderson also remediates a character portrayal from Zeffirelli's version for the murderer of Gonzango, played by Melvin Van Horne, a dramatic performer on Krusty's show who speaks with a crisp British accent. Melvin is wearing a similar brown cloak with a hood as the murderer in Zeffirelli's. See Figure 10 for the comparison. The decision to select Melvin as the murderer of Gonzango is an interesting choice when one considers who is portraying Gonzango. Gonzango is portrayed by Krusty, who throughout the series belittles, insults and berates Melvin, who is Krusty's sidekick on Krusty's television series. Anderson depicts Melvin in a costume similar to Zeffirelli's murderer and also frames the scene with an exact shot that Zeffirelli uses to showcase the vessel of poison that the murderer uses. However, in typical *Simpsons* fashion, they use it as an opportunity to exaggerate and distort the ridiculousness of the plot by drawing an excessively large bottle to contain the amount of poison he eventually ends up using to kill Gonzango. If this sarcasm is not enough, Anderson adds an explicit label that reads poison clearly for the audience to read. See Figure 11 for the comparison of the poison bottles.

While those costumes are borrowed from Zeffirelli, Krusty and Moe's are remediated from Olivier's version. Krusty, who portrays Gonzango, is dressed in similar clothing to the Gonzango in Olivier's. Since the scene is about actors performing a play, both directors portray Gonzango as wearing similar clothes to Claudius/Moe. However, they are of lower quality, since the actors would not have access to similar clothes as a king. To achieve the lower quality robe and crown, Anderson dresses Krusty in courtly fashion and adds patches and dirt to make it appear lower quality. See Figure 12 for the comparison of the Player King's outfits in *The Simpsons* and Olivier's *Hamlet*. In addition, Moe/Claudius is adorned in a crown, which bears a similar shape and adornments that Basil Sydney wears in Olivier's. In addition, he wears a fur vest, and jacket with similar flares at the end of the cuffs. Anderson also portrays Moe/Claudius in jewellery, to flaunt his wealth. See Figure 13 for the king's costumes in both versions.

Performance/Set

Not only is the outfit similar to Zeffirelli's, but Anderson depicts Bart/Hamlet as falling to his death in a similar manner as Gibson's Hamlet. Both Gibson and Bart/Hamlet lay on the floor, with their arms stretched like a Christ figure. See Figure 14 for the visual comparison of Bart laying on a wooden stage as compared with Mel Gibson laying on a wooden stage.

The costume selections are not the only "syuzhet" in dialogue with the Zeffirelli and Olivier adaptations. The framing and staging of "shots" are almost identical to their respective film versions. Anderson's staging and the *mise-en-scène* are strikingly similar to the Zeffirelli film. The two thrones in which Moe/Claudius and Marge/Gertrude sit are styled the same as in the Zeffirelli film. Even the stone wall behind the thrones is taken directly from the wall in Zeffirelli's version. In addition, the wood stage, where the final fencing takes place, is an exact

rendering of Zeffirelli's stage, from the colour of the wood to the shape and size of the wood planks, to containing similar seating as the 1990 adaptation. See Figures 14 and 15 for images of the two stages. Anderson remediates the staging from Zeffirelli for the final scene, but he uses the staging and *mise-en-scène* from Olivier for the Queen's closet and Mouse Trap scenes. In the Queen's closet scene, Anderson decorates the scene in the same manner as Olivier's Queen's closet scene. The bedroom is in a similar position, and Anderson portrays Marge/Gertrude lying in a lavish bed, with high-quality silk sheets, which are draped in a similar manner as Olivier's version. See Figure 15 for the visual comparison of the bedrooms. Anderson employs similar techniques as he did in the Queen's closet scene that he does for the Mouse Trap scene. However, instead of only using similar staging and *mise-en-scène*, Anderson also uses similar framing shots that Olivier uses. The stage on which the players perform is designed similarly to Oliver's stage. The arch doorways behind the stage are similar, along with the curtains and drapes surrounding them. Anderson also rests the camera in between the thrones of Marge/Gertrude and Moe/Claudius to recreate the exact framing that Oliver uses in the moments of catching the conscience of the king. The framing technique that both directors employ allows the audience to see a similar perspective that Claudius sees. Therefore, it recreates the feeling of the audience witnessing the same thing. See Figure 16 for an example.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the parody, Bart implies that Steven Bochco, a notable producer, is a modern superwriter and that Shakespeare has nowhere near the level of fame or recognition that Bochco has amassed. The joke at first glance appears to be a scornful attack towards Shakespeare's legacy. However, upon further analysis, it demonstrates that *The Simpsons* writers are addressing

the lack of appreciation for Shakespeare's legacy, an understanding which they have demonstrated they are quite aware of. Therefore, in their true subversive fashion, *The Simpsons* has managed to demonstrate Shakespeare's legacy, dismantle it and piece it back together again. By doing so, they are now responsible for continuing his legacy and for introducing and inspiring others to examine and interrogate works, which are held at such high regard, and to see if they merit that regard. In this case, it appears they have shown an appreciation for Shakespeare.

CHAPTER TWO

The Simpsons' Parodic Reworking of *Macbeth*

In 2009, seven years after "Tales from the Public Domain," *The Simpsons* released an episode entitled "Four Great Women and a Manicure." The episode was written by Valentina L. Garza and directed by Raymond S. Persi. Most *Simpsons* episodes use a standard three-act structure. However, "Four Great Women and a Manicure" is one of only two episodes with a four-act structure.[5] The episode begins with Marge and Lisa getting manicures as a mother-daughter bonding activity. Marge recounts four stories about empowered women to Lisa to encourage her sense of female independence. In this episode, *The Simpsons* remediate *Macbeth* and Orson Welles's popular film adaptation within their media logic and produce a parodic work that critiques the predecessor works through a modern lens. To this end, Marge adapts her stories to convey values she wishes to instill in her daughter. Marge's stories weave together famous folktales, history, stories and plays as she retells the tales of Queen Elizabeth I, Snow White, Lady Macbeth, and Howard Roark from Ayn Rand's novel *The Fountainhead*. Marge takes liberties with the stories by adapting, modernizing, and altering dialogue, characters, settings, plot and genre to fit her narrative. When examining the *Simpsons' Macbeth* reworking through a remediation lens, *The Simpsons* parodies the struggle that new media experiences when adapting old media. Within the parody, it could be argued that Marge/Lady Macbeth is encouraging Homer/Macbeth to fight to be recognized as the best Shakespearean actor in Springfield. The only way Homer/Macbeth is able to achieve this is by killing all his competition, a process which occurs in remediation as new technologies render older technologies obsolete. Once

[5] Garza is aware that she veers away from convention. After the third story or segment in the episode, Marge states that this marks the end of the episode before Lisa prompts her to tell one more story for Maggie's sake (2009).

Homer/Macbeth has demonstrated his media supremacy, Marge/Lady Macbeth informs him how many more works that he has to adapt. Homer/Macbeth, understanding how difficult it was for him to adapt and fully comprehend *Macbeth*, is confronted with the difficulty of remediating older media. Staying true to his characteristic penchant for laziness, Homer/Macbeth chooses to die rather than remediate any more Shakespearean works.

Macbeth and Shakespeare's Departures from Sources

Marge uses a remediation technique similar to that which Shakespeare himself employs when writing his plays, although the play *Macbeth* is not a series of vignettes as the *Simpsons* episode is. It is acknowledged that Shakespeare's main source text for *Macbeth* was Holinshed's *Chronicles*. Examining Holinshed's account with specific attention to the *Makbeth* narrative, it becomes clear that Holinshed "not only furnished Shakespeare with far more than 'the merest skeleton of a plot,' but also offered numerous hints for specific lines in the drama" (Law 37). Therefore, it can be said that Shakespeare used *Holinshed* as an outline for most of the significant action in *Macbeth*. However, Shakespeare did take liberties with the source text in relation to the characters' motivations. For Shakespeare, Holinshed did not provide enough psychological development, specifically with reference to the killing of King Duncan (Law 38). Robert Adger Law observes that Shakespeare's habit of remediating plot details from a different story which parallels the primary source he is using is a trademark Shakespearean technique. He uses this approach in many plays, for example when adding a subplot found in Sidney's *Arcadia* to parallel the main plot of *King Lear* (Law 38). Law notes that Shakespeare remediates another story from Holinshed that was compiled in the *Scottish Chronicle* twenty pages earlier. Law states that there is an account of a disloyal Scot who is "incited by his wife to murder his

sovereign, and he performs the deed assisted by his cruel lady in much more colorful fashion than did *Holinshed*'s Makbeth" (38). His major deviation from his source text may also be his most significant addition to the portrayal of his protagonist Macbeth. Macbeth being "motivated by ambition to commit direst crimes, yet having to fight his conscience" (Law 41) is what adds a level of depth to the character that *Holinshed* does not include. Shakespeare's tendency to borrow from other source texts to enhance the conflict within his plays also serves as an opportunity for him to dive psychologically deeper into the motivations behind these historical accounts. Shakespeare's desire to explore the explanations for the irrationality of human behaviour allows the audience to sympathize with Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's atrocious crimes. As Law elegantly concludes, "few of Shakespeare's villains are by nature altogether villainous" (41).

Shakespeare's desire to explore deeper psychological explanations for his character's motivations is similar to the way the *Simpsons'* parodic reworking allows the audience to see other possible motivations for Marge/Lady Macbeth's actions. In keeping with the feminist emphasis of the episode, it is notable that "Four Great Women and a Manicure" is one of the only episodes in the entire series in which Bart does not appear. According to director Persi, this was a deliberate choice on Garza's part as she wrote the script. Although Persi was free to add Bart as a background character or extra in the episode, he chose to follow Garza's lead and not include Bart, so as to focus on the female characters including Lisa and Marge (Persi 2023).

Macbeth **Through Marge's Feminist Lens**

Marge begins by framing the play *Macbeth* as a story about a "great woman who has been held back by her not-so-great husband" (2009). It is significant that her description of the play

describes her sense of her own life. Writer Garza carefully selects which *Simpsons* characters portray the characters in *Macbeth,* revealing a deep understanding of the source text. This is where prior knowledge of the show, in addition to the play, allows for a deeper appreciation of the parodic reworking. In this episode, we get a play-within-a-play-within-a-play. Marge is not only the storyteller; she also portrays a Lady Macbeth-esque figure in the segment, a woman disappointed in her actor-husband's lack of ambition. But no one is assigned to play Lady Macbeth in the play within the episode. Marge is merely a costume cleaner in the segment. However, she inhabits the characterization of Lady Macbeth. In the wider *Simpsons* universe, Marge is a character who constantly picks up the slack of her incompetent husband. She is largely responsible for fulfilling the needs and wants of the entire family, and accomplishes all of this without explicit appreciation from them. This complexity added to the Lady Macbeth figure provides motivation for the character's possible grievances and hidden resentment towards her husband, which Shakespeare leaves open in his version. It is possible that Marge's perspective on Lady Macbeth may have been shared by other "housewives" in Shakespeare's own audience. In turn, the characterization of Marge as Lady Macbeth also allows for further development of Marge's character in *The Simpsons.* In a much earlier episode of the series, "Moaning Lisa," in which Lisa shares her sadness with Marge, Marge reveals her own emotional defense process. She encourages Lisa to "take all your bad feelings and push them down, all the way down, past your knees, until you're almost walking on them, and then you'll fit in" (1990). Lady Macbeth therefore becomes a conduit for Marge to express her long-repressed anger toward her husband and other Springfieldians who have taken advantage of her kind and pliant nature.

As mentioned, the episode conveys the story of *Macbeth* within metanarrativistic framing, a technique Shakespeare employs in many of his plays, including, as we have seen in

the previous chapter, *Hamlet*. In this segment, Homer is an actor and Marge works as a costume cleaner for a Springfieldian production of *Macbeth. The Simpsons'* focus on the production allows Garza to draw parallels between Marge's desire for social mobility and reputation (which leads her to plot a way for Homer to take Melvin van Horne's place as the lead in the play), and Lady Macbeth's plot to become queen through her husband. At the beginning of the segment, Marge reflects on her circumstances as she scrubs dirty costumes. She reveals that she is unhappy and blames Homer, who has been assigned a marginalized role in the play, as a tree.[6] For his part, Homer is satisfied with his circumstances because he believes this role will allow him to "get his face out there" (2009). Immediately after saying that, the director of the play-within-the-play covers his face with bark and Homer groans, dismayed by the lack of exposure he will have as a tree. On the other hand, his dialogue with Marge reveals that he believes himself unable to play the lead role as well as Melvin. At this point, the scene cuts to Melvin in an elaborate, emotional performance of *Macbeth.* This cut from Homer to Melvin foreshadows Homer's eventual transformation into a "real" actor by the end of the segment.

Macbeth, upon hearing the witches' prophecy, appears to enter a state of uncertainty not unlike Homer's. In an aside, after Macbeth has spoken to the witches, he thinks to himself, "My thought, whose murder is yet but fantastical, / Shakes so my single state of man / That function is smothered in surmise, / And nothing is but what is not" (1.3.153-156). Macbeth finds himself in such a state of shock that he is unable to choose a course of action. He does not immediately act upon the witches' prophecies. Neither does he outright dismiss them. This passivity is reminiscent of Homer in the series, who often finds himself in situations where he is unable to

[6] It is significant that Homer is dressed as a tree in the initial scenes; Garza foreshadows Macbeth and Homer's eventual demise, referencing the army who cuts down branches from the trees in Birnam Wood to use as camouflage to storm Macbeth's castle.

make a decision. Banquo comments on Macbeth's behaviour, stating, "Look how our partner's rapt" (1.3.157). Macbeth only decides to pursue a course of action in the following scene when Lady Macbeth urges the reluctant Macbeth to act. This scene is echoed in *The Simpsons'* parodic reworking.

Marge, angry with her husband's lack of ambition, exclaims, "wouldst thou live a coward in thine own esteem. Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would?" (2009). Marge alters Lady Macbeth's original lines, which are "Wouldst thou have that / Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life, / And live a coward in thine own esteem, / Letting "I dare not" wait upon "I would," / Like the poor cat I'th' adage?" (1.7.44-48). Marge condenses lines from this passage in particular because this is the exchange between Lady Macbeth and Macbeth which pushes him to begin his murder spree. In Shakespeare's play, Lady Macbeth is only responsible for urging Macbeth to commit the first murder. However, in this reworking, Marge is responsible for encouraging Homer to commit every murder. Writer Garza implicitly engages with the scholarship on the question of whether Macbeth or Lady Macbeth is more culpable for the murders (e.g., Goode 1963; Carr & Knapp 1981). Homer, unable to understand the Shakespearean lines, agrees that he will do whatever Marge tells him. Garza exaggerates Homer's complacency to comment on Macbeth's culpability in the play. Marge then hands Homer a knife. Carr and Knapp argue that the knife in the play can double as a phallic representation, implying that this phallic object can be imbued with masculine energy to complete the murderous task (845).

After Marge encourages Homer to kill what appears to be nearly the entire cast, she is ironically left with even more costumes to clean. Garza deviates from the source text by having every dead cast member appear as a ghost, whereas Shakespeare writes that only the spirit of

Banquo appears. This scene is another instance of *The Simpsons* filling in the gaps that Shakespeare does not develop with regard to Lady Macbeth. Lady Macbeth is found to have killed herself off-stage, tormented by the guilt of everything she has done. Shakespeare does not divulge much more than that, though she does have a "mad" scene in which a doctor is called to ascertain the status of her health. *The Simpsons* depicts the shame Marge feels after having manipulated her husband to do her evil deeds as the main contributor to her suicide. To provide further explanation for Macbeth's willingness to commit these acts, the ghost of Lenny implies that Marge withheld sex from Homer. Depriving Homer of a biological drive is a powerful motivator which Shakespeare does not explicitly provide in his version, though Carr and Knapp argue that she "manipulated Macbeth through her sexual power over him" (845). In addition, Marge uses a similar strategy as Lady Macbeth, who frequently makes references to her estimation of Macbeth's manhood. Eugene M. Waith argues Lady Macbeth ascribes to the "Roman's ideal-of what it is to be a man" (265). Both Lady Macbeth and Marge weaponize this ideal against their husbands in order to achieve their ends. Lady Macbeth taunts Macbeth by saying that she fears he has too much of the "milk of human kindness" (1.7. 72-74), implying that her husband is too effeminate. Later, in the parodic reworking, Marge is angered that every other cast member, even the "two soldiers who don't have lines" (2009), receives more attention than Homer. She urges him to kill them all. When Homer is reluctant to do so, Marge insults his manhood by passive-aggressively taunting him, saying "unless you're not man enough" (2009).

Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow

Finally, for the play-within-the-play story to complete, Homer's ascendance to the throne is achieved when he truly acquires the ability to play the role of Macbeth. The comedic irony is that

he has killed so many to obtain the role that no one is alive to see his performance. Homer delivers Macbeth's "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow" monologue from Act 5, Scene 5. Persi notes that the voice actor Dan Castellaneta, who portrays Homer, performs the speech "without any humour" (2023). Persi recalls that Castellaneta performed the monologue with a certain gravitas which then encouraged him to elevate the way he directed that scene (2023). Persi wanted to present Homer's transformation as "authentically as possible," stating that he and the actor "must do the same acting, camera angles, and lighting [as Welles's version] to make it appear that Homer finally understands the play" (2023). In this monologue, Homer finally grasps the significance of *Macbeth* and the consequences of his actions and those of Macbeth up until this point. Persi notes that the directorial choices he used were attempts to further "push the isolation of the character" (2023). Persi wanted to avoid Homer's typical clumsy movements and foolish antics in order to make the performance more authentic. According to Persi, "If it weren't for [Homer] being a character with yellow skin and bulgy eyes, his performance could have been taken seriously" (2023). Persi notes that none of the jokes that follow would have resonated with the audience if Homer had not performed the monologue as dramatic. Persi intended to have a moment of seriousness in order to break the tension with comedy (2023).

Persi was allowed to deviate from Homer's standard depiction within the *Simpsons* universe because none of the events of the episode truly occurred within that universe. Scholars who criticize animated reworkings of Shakespeare's works as low and reductive may fail to notice what is being omitted from such parodic remediations. A follower of the fidelity model may have noticed that Homer ends the speech two lines early. Garza eliminates the lines, "It is a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing" (5.5.30-31). These lines indicate a change in Macbeth. Throughout the play, he relentlessly pursues Lady Macbeth's

ambitions for him. However, at this moment, he understands that his wife is dead, and the army is marching toward him. Therefore, he succumbs to pessimism and disappointment and alludes to the fact that there is no meaning or purpose in life. What makes this deviation significant is that it reveals Garza and Persi's deep understanding of the source text. In the parodic reworking, Homer has the exact opposite realization. He finally understands the play and can perform it perfectly and eloquently.

Syuzhet

The Simpsons' version of *Macbeth* not only remediates Shakespeare's play, it also remediates previous film remediations of the play. Persi opted to deploy visual references from a prior cinematic production of *Macbeth* in order to capture Macbeth's "isolation" and "descent into madness" (2023). This major visual influence on Persi's work was Orson Welles's 1948 version of *Macbeth*. Persi remediates techniques from Welles's film. Homer's monologue specifically uses similar "stagings, cross-dissolves, techniques, atmospheric fog, [and] simple-looking backgrounds" in order to capture the mood of Welles's version (2023). See Figure 17 for a comparison of the "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow" scenes in *The Simpsons* and Welles's adaptations. To capture Homer's isolation and descent into madness, Persi uses similar abstract settings and expressionistic techniques to reference Welles's film. For example, Homer's large square crown and clothing are remediated directly from Welles's costume choices. See Figure 18 for a comparison of the two costumes.

Persi also remediates imagery from Welles's Three Witches scene, in which an astute observer would notice similar jagged rock formations in the background. Persi chose to have Selma and Patty portray two out of the three witches. Persi's Patty and Selma wear similar

clothes to Welles's witches. It is fitting that Patty and Selma portray the role of the witches because when Banquo first encounters the witches he notes that they "should be women, / And yet your beards forbid me to interpret / That you are so" (1.3.47-49). In the series, Patty and Selma are often mistaken for men, and are known to have exaggeratedly hairy legs which other characters often comment on. As Homer stumbles and terribly misreads his lines, Patty and Selma, like the witches, mock Homer for his unworthiness. The decision on Persi's part to "cast" Homer's sisters-in-law, with whom Homer notoriously does not get along, and who constantly advise Marge to divorce him, provides a motive for the witches that Shakespeare did not explicitly include. In Shakespeare's version, they do not appear to have a motive; they are simply there to prophesize Macbeth's and other's futures. In this reworking, the witches have a motive to want to lead Homer to his death. See Figure 19 for a visual comparison of the witches and the sets they perform on.

In addition to Welles's *Macbeth,* Persi notes that the 1920 horror mystery *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* was also a major influence on the look of the episode (2023). Persi wanted to remediate the technique of sharp angles of dark and light to create isolation. *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* is known for its visual style, described as dark, twisted and bizarre. The director, Robert Wiene, deliberately distorts perspective in the film to make the dimension and scale appear chaotic and unhinged to the viewer (Barlow 99). In addition, Persi employs "framing elements that would not typically make sense [spatially]," but which enhance the feeling he was trying to capture (2023). Persi uses techniques from the Expressionist tradition in this episode because Welles was also himself highly influenced by Expressionism in his *Macbeth.* Welles utilizes a similar technique when framing Macbeth, since he wanted to frame "his main character as a monster, and in doing so, employs a visual storytelling style that is at once melodramatic and

expressionistic" (Smith 151). Persi notes that *The Simpsons* typically uses bright-lit shots and standard framing techniques that he purposely discarded for this story. To enhance the theme of isolation, Persi ensures that the episode contains "a lot more darkness" (2023). For example, during Doctor Hibbert's death scene, Persi notes that "his office has never been lit that way" (2023). Persi wanted the audience to feel as if Doctor Hibbert is the only one in the hospital at the time that Homer comes to murder him. Persi states that not only did this effect achieve the isolation he was looking for, but it also foreshadowed that something ominous would happen to Doctor Hibbert (2023).

The parody also enhances the theme of violence which is already strongly present in Shakespeare's version. Garza chooses to depict certain deaths which Shakespeare omits. Shakespeare does not represent the death of Duncan, as Macbeth murders Duncan with a knife off-stage. The violence is enhanced purely by the fact that the audience is viewing the murder of Melvin/Duncan. When Homer attempts to stab Melvin with the knife, he notices that it is a dull prop knife made from rubber. The phallic object being limp is representative of Homer's lack of commitment. Garza and Persi amplify the murder beyond the source text by having Homer discard the prop knife and instead grab the bone that is lodged inside Melvin's hair. For Homer to complete the task he is required to grab a stronger phallic object. To add to the gruesomeness, up until this moment, fans of *The Simpsons* are unsure if the bone is a part of Melvin's skull, or if the bone is simply an adornment for his hair. Having Homer resolve that conflict by using Melvin's own adornment to murder him amplifies the cruelty of the act.

To enhance the theme of violence Persi also depicts the scene in darker tones than *The Simpsons'* typical colour palette. In addition to the colour palette, Persi also cuts to the wall at the very moment that Homer is bludgeoning Melvin with his own bone to highlight the blood

splatter on the wall. This is not typical of *The Simpsons*, which typically chooses to employ less blood.[7] After the murder is discovered, the character portraying the stage director presents his conclusion of the murder and states, "the bone fell out of Mel's horn and beat him to death" (2009). The director then proceeds to name Homer as Mel's replacement for Macbeth. Garza remarks on the naivety of the members of Duncan's court, who are so willing to take at face value the explanation that is offered by Lennox and Macbeth.

Later in the story, as Homer is getting more desperate to gain the attention of the critics, he is forced to increase the stakes of his violence. To exaggerate Shakespeare's theme of violence and murder in the play, Homer appears on set while the other cast members are leisurely participating in a conga line dance. Homer comes up from behind them and stabs them all in the back with a sword. If the metaphor is not obvious, the parody comments on the severe act of betrayal that Macbeth commits. If this were not already enough to emphasize the theme of violence alone, Garza chooses to far exceed the violence that Shakespeare includes in his version by having Homer take a nap within the dead bodies and use one of the bloody corpses as a blanket, thus taking what is usually a wholesome act and turning it into an absurdly violent act. Persi states that he wanted the first death scene to be the most realistic. Therefore, he used low lighting and shadows to design the scene to be more eerie (2023). Persi was inspired by the 1986 movie *Little Shop of Horrors*, in which the murdering antagonist's "first death is played more realistically" in contrast to the later murders, which were filmed more lightly and comedically (2023). Persi notes that the murders "are sillier as [the murderer] gets more used to it" (2023). The entire time, Homer seems to take pleasure in the killings. This lack of discomfort is a strong departure from Macbeth, who appears tormented by his conscience throughout the

[7] For example, in the episode "Who Shot Mr. Burns? (Part 1)", Mr. Burns is found to be discovered with a bullet wound to his chest, depicted with only a small bloody stain on his shirt (1995).

play. Joan M. Byles notes that, immediately after the murder of the King, “Macbeth feels the enormity of his crime, as if a heavy curse has fallen on him, and he is full of regret and remorse” (153). Macbeth reveals his consciousness of guilt when he hears the off-stage knocking and says to himself “Wake Duncan with thy knocking, I wouldst thou could.” (22.72-73) According to Byles, it is “characteristic of Macbeth that although he is a destroyer of the life-giving and life-preserving natural order, he is desperately aware of his need of it” (153). For example, when Macbeth states “Methought I heard a voice cry, ‘Sleep no more, / Macbeth does murther Sleep,’” (2.2.34-35). Byles states that this voice could be Macbeth’s own and “certainly one that seems to be outside himself that emphasizes poetically, imagistically, the sense of unnatural outrage of which he is painfully aware; but still he is driven by the compulsive nature of his hidden, inner fears” (153). In addition, Byles notes that Macbeth is so overcome by his guilty fears for having killed the King “in so unmanly a way that he dare not look upon the act again, much less think about it” (153). When Lady Macbeth asks Macbeth to return to the scene of the crime, he states “I'll go no more; / I am afraid to think what I have done; / Look on't again I dare not.” (2.2.50-51). The guilt Macbeth experiences is what makes the play a tragedy. Therefore, when Garza removes Homer’s guilt, she comments on how the removal of Macbeth’s interiority shifts the genre of the play into comedy.

The final instances of violence where the parody deviates from the source text is with regard to Macbeth’s and Lady Macbeth’s deaths. Marge/Lady Macbeth’s suicide is depicted as swirling ghosts swarming and overwhelming her to the point she collapses on the stage. Persi recalls that this scene alludes to the famous moment in Disney’s animated feature *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves,* rather than to any adaptation of *Macbeth,* in which the audience sees “the smoke choke [the wicked witch] as she falls” (2023). Persi chose this magical moment from

the Disney film knowingly: released in 1937, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* made the case for animation as high art and was the first full-length theatrically released animated film. It was awarded a special Academy Award in that year's competition. Though Shakespeare has Lady Macbeth's suicide take place off-stage, Persi visually depicts her guilt through the death of Marge. The ghosts of Marge/Lady Macbeth's victims, as indirect as her role in their murders was, swarm around her as she chokes on their incorporeal bodies. In Shakespeare's play, Macbeth can hear the women "cry within" (5.5.8), which implores Seyton to inform him that his wife is dead. In Garza's reworking, she has the cries come from Homer himself as he cradles Marge/Lady Macbeth's body. This scene operates as a wish-fulfilment for those who wish to see some closure between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Persi notes that a character's death "means more if it is off-screen" (2023). This direction is the opposite of Roman Polanski's 1971 version of *Macbeth,* in which Polanski deviates from the source text by depicting several of the off-screen deaths on screen. Polanski's murder of King Duncan is approximately three minutes in length. It begins with Macbeth sneaking into Duncan's chamber and stabbing him while he is asleep. During the attack, Duncan awakens and becomes aware of his attacker. Duncan appears terrified while Macbeth stabs Duncan seven more times in the chest and a significant amount of blood is released. Macbeth finishes Duncan off with a final stab to the neck. Also, Polanski portrays the murder of MacDuff's son on-screen and depicts the slaughtering of MacDuff's household. Polanski's final deviation from the source text is his depiction of Lady Macbeth's suicide, in which he portrays her dead and mangled body with a broken neck (Polanski 1971). On the other hand, Persi intended to stay closer to Shakespeare's off-stage death of Lady Macbeth. He quickly cuts to Homer cradling Marge/Lady Macbeth's body because of this. Persi asserts that how a "character dies" is not as crucial as the "aftermath of the death" itself (Persi

2023). Persi explains that it allows the audience "to feel shocked because they never had time to process the death." This method of direction technique allows the audience and Homer to both feel helpless in the matter.

Garza also takes liberties with Homer's death. Instead of having Homer slain by MacDuff[8] at the end of the play, the parody portrays Homer brutally taking his own life with a gun to the head after Marge's ghost insists that Homer learn and star in other Shakespearean plays. The screen pans away as the audience hears the gunshot go off. Homer becomes a ghost alongside Marge. The ghost of Homer explains that "me having to read all those plays would be the real tragedy." Homer would rather murder himself than master all the plays. Thus, Garza uses irony to comment on the difficulty of intellectually grasping Shakespeare's plays. In true sitcom fashion, all of the lessons and understanding from that episode must be unlearned. Marge returns to her state of dissatisfaction and Homer loses touch with his newfound understanding of Shakespeare.

Conclusion

A parody is "a literary device that uses subversion for comic effect where the level of appreciation is determined by the amount of knowledge of the original" (Öğütcü 110). Therefore, for Shakespeare's audience to gain more appreciation for the play, they would have benefited from having a prior understanding of the source material as well, similar to how a parody operates. *The Simpsons* operates on the same principle. In order to appreciate their parodic reworkings, one must have an extensive amount of knowledge of Shakespeare's source text,

[8] Interestingly, "Duff" is the brand of beer that Homer overconsumes within the Simpsons universe, which may or may not contribute to his death.

plays, modern adaptations and the academic discussions surrounding them. *The Simpsons* makes Shakespearean conventions more transparent to the audience.

CHAPTER THREE

Bard Boiled: Remediating Shakespeare in Comic Book Form

Matt Groening, creator of *The Simpsons*, launched Bongo Comics in 1993. The vision for the company was to release comic books related to the animated television series. When Groening reflected on the origins of Bongo Comics he explained, “I go into comic book stores and look at all the stuff, and, for the most part, it looks like fairly grim science-fiction and superhero stuff ... I guess I just thought there was room out there for funny comic books” (Richmond 20). *The Simpsons* comic issue #76, *Bard Boiled: The Simpsons Shake-Up Shakespeare!*, was released in November 2002. Ian Boothby wrote the comic. John Costanza completed the pencilwork. The inking work for the comic book was finished by Phyllis Novin and Howard Shum. The cover was conceived and drawn by Jason Ho and Nathan Kane. The colours were rendered by Art Villanueva and Joey Mason. And finally, Matt Groening is credited as “Shrew Tamer.” The synopsis from the original release reads:

> The Simpsons serve up Shakespeare "bard-boiled" when the PTA and students of Springfield Elementary perform, measure by measure, virtually every one of the Immortal Bard's plays in one midsummer night. From “Romeo and Juliet” to “Julius Caesar” and “Richard III” to “Troilus and Cressida,” there will be much ado about nothing as all of Springfield participates in a comedy of errors that proves that all’s well that ends...quickly. So get on board as Bart does the Bard. (2014)

By titling the comic “bard-boiled,” Boothby puns on the hard-boiled detective fiction genre, known for its gritty American crime writing that aims at realism and naturalism in the field of

detective fiction (Britannica 2023). By titling the comic that way, Boothby establishes that the reader will be exposed to alternate versions of Shakespeare's works through *The Simpsons'* media logic which produces animated "graphic sex and violence, vivid but often sordid urban backgrounds, and fast-paced, slangy dialogue" which is present in hard-boiled detective fiction (Britannica 2023). Boothby therefore implies that he is bringing a new tone to Shakespeare.

Remediation and the Comic Strip Form

Comic books have become intellectually respectable in a similar manner to what occurred with film. The French historian Francis Lacassin argues that the language or syntax of the comic strip is able to produce many techniques that are similar to the language of film (11). According to Lacassin, "The comic-strip page demonstrably corresponds to the film sequence, or to the act of a play, except that the background tends to change more often. The daily comic strip of three or four images is comparable to the cinematic scene" (11). After all, Lacassin notes that Alfred Hitchcock and Henri-Georges Clouzot composed their entire films on paper (detailed "storyboarding") prior to shooting them (11). Lacassin asserts that the comic strip expresses more clearly and efficiently a comedic gag better than other mediums (18). He explains that the comic strip "abbreviates movement, or rather relieves it of certain phases and contracts the time necessary for its execution. The strip can also…expand time for comic purpose" (18). Therefore, when Boothby remediates Shakespeare and other Shakespearean media, he does so by condensing and abbreviating the plays and alternating their endings for comedic effect, since *The Simpsons* is, after all, a comedy.

Inspiration for the Parody

When writing the story for *Bard Boiled*, Boothby states his goal was "as always to be as close as I could to the smart comedy of the series. There was nothing funnier than the Simpsons and so I always aimed as high as possible" (2023). What led Boothby to directly parody Shakespeare's work is a different story:

> It's fun to drop the characters into different worlds. I've done manga stories, a sequel to the *Bible Stories* episode, Stephen King, *Aesop's fables*, Hans Christian Anderson and I have a lovely note from Ray Bradbury on my wall from the time we did a *Something Wicked This Way Comes* parody. I know my way around most Shakespeare plays, I've even co-written a live show called *Free Willie Shakespeare* and the ones I didn't know were fun to research. (2023)

Boothby's works demonstrate an awareness of academic criticism of Shakespeare's plays, due to his training at Trinity and Douglas Colleges. According to Boothby, the literary criticism that informs the parody comes from the training he acquired at those institutions. He states that it was there that he "understood the plays and…covered critiques and the historical context of the plays" (2023). Boothby is quite familiar with "The Complete Works of William Shakespeare Abridged" (2023), which he used as his main source for the parodies. The plays Boothby decided to parody were inspired by "*The Simpsons* TV series*"* since it is "known for broad strokes and deep cuts" (2023). Deep cuts are references to an author's more obscure work. They are part of the *Simpsons'* projection of, and award to the audience for, "knowingness" as part of the parody. The pleasure of getting the joke is experienced because it relies on specific and obscure background knowledge. *The Simpsons* is not "afraid to talk over the heads of the audience and let the audience catch up" (Persi 2023). Therefore, Boothby selects more obscure Shakespearean plays to parody in order to align himself with the series. Boothby wishes the main takeaway from

his readers would be “First and foremost laughs. Second maybe curiosity about the source material” (2023). He notes that “[t]he greatest compliment you can give is to think something is strong enough to withstand examination and parody does just that. Look at the amount of *Star Wars* parodies out there, almost all coming from a place of love for the source material” (2023).

Cover Art: Parody of *Hamlet* Revisited

When designing the cover, Ho and Kane are in direct dialogue with the *The Simpsons* episode “Tales from the Public Domain,” specifically the *Hamlet* parody titled “Do the Bard-Man.” The cover scene is a parody of the graveyard scene in *Hamlet*. On the cover, Homer returns to his recent series role as the ghost of Old Hamlet and Bart to his role as Hamlet. Two of the gravestones in the background belong to Lenny and Carl, who “posthumously” return to their roles as Guilden-Lenny and Rosen-Carl. To the right of the frame is another, more clearly legible tombstone of “Theatre for the Masses,” which makes the case for the present comic’s remediation of Shakespeare’s works. Theatre can no longer reach the masses (if it ever did). Ho and Kane are not only in continuity with the series, but they also subvert Shakespeare’s work as well. In the center of the cover image, Bart/Hamlet defaces the skull of Old Hamlet/Homer, writing graffiti on it with a quill pen in a remediating act of *détournement*. In Shakespeare’s play, this scene would have Hamlet at the grave, holding the skull of his dear avuncular fool Yorick, conversing with the comic figure of the Gravedigger. Although the cover refers to “Do the Bard-Man,” the timeline does not add up. Since the gravestones of Guilden-Lenny and Rosen-Carl are present, it implies that this scene takes place after they killed themselves with the poison that Moe/Claudius provided them. However, that cannot be, since in that episode, Bart/Hamlet dies immediately after. Although the cover does not have perfect continuity with the series episode, it

opens an interesting alternate adaptation to *Hamlet*. By choosing to have Guilden-Lenny and Rosen-Carl die in this alternate reality, where Hamlet/Bart does not go through with his plan, Ho and Kane further the critique that Warburton began in "Do the Bard-Man," which is that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are two incompetent traitors who would somehow still find a way to end up dead.

The cover recreates the famous graveyard scene where Hamlet discovers the skull of his former jester, Yorick. However, in this reworking, the skull is not that of Yorick; rather, it is that of Old Hamlet/Homer. In *Hamlet,* Hamlet takes the skull from the Gravedigger and affectionately reminisces about Yorick to Horatio. Hamlet recalls that Yorick was a "fellow of infinite jest, most excellent fancy" (5.1.184-85). Hamlet further reminisces about how Yorick had romped with him as a young child, carrying him on his back around the court, like a father figure. Hamlet gazes at the mouth of the skull of his beloved old playmate and recalls the tender affection and frequent kisses that he gave him as a child. Hamlet ponders, "where be your gibes now? Your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar?" Alas, poor Yorick, now jawless, is 'quite chapfallen'" (5.1.188-92). According to Sandra Pyle, the graveyard scene is a major turning point for Hamlet. Pyle states that Hamlet contemplating the skull of Yorick is significant for Hamlet since he himself is a "self-appointed court jester, who now is gazing at the skull of another jester, just as he might gaze at his own reflection in a mirror" (182). Pyle observes that in Christian teachings, self-scrutiny in a mirror helps one to identify and eliminate vice as well as to identify and reinforce virtue (182). The mirror is a motif that appears in *Hamlet* as well. For example, Hamlet tells Gertrude that he will use a mirror so that she can "see the inmost part of [herself]" (3.4.21). Therefore, Hamlet must now confront the truth about himself. Although there are other key moments which help shift

Hamlet's outlook, Pyle notes that "Yorick's skull takes on the "role of the physician in purging Hamlet's heart of sloth" (183). Pyle further notes that by "cleansing his heart of sloth, Hamlet regains the fortitude to accept Laertes' invitation to a duel and the possibility of death" (184) and Hamlet is spurred into action. The cover of Bart/Hamlet defacing the skull of Old Hamlet/Homer, missing his opportunity to have his epiphany, aligns with traditional sitcom structure in which how a character is never allowed to change. Instead, it appears Bart/Hamlet has turned his anger toward Old Hamlet/Homer, the very person who is responsible for causing the inciting incident within the story. Therefore, Ho and Kane mocking Hamlet's epiphany ensures that Bart/Hamlet will never change and complete his arc. He will always remain the same because of the character dictates of the sitcom genre.

There is a fair amount of violence referenced in the cover scene, given that comic violence is a key part of the media logic of animation. Ho and Kane thereby comment on the amount of blood and death in *Hamlet.* Even the ink that Bart/Hamlet uses to deface the skull of Old Hamlet/Homer is a deep red, similar to the usual shade of colour they use when they depict blood. The quill of his feather pen appears to resemble the sharp end of a knife. The quill is also splattering red ink, similar to blood splatter. Bart/Hamlet's defacing of the skull also engages with gender politics, something Shakespeare was keenly fascinated with as evidenced within his plays. Bart draws red ink above the teeth of the skull, to simulate red lipstick, and draws extended eyelashes, to finish off his feminist mocking of Old Hamlet/Homer. Not only does Bart/Hamlet deface the skull, which in many cultures and religions is sacrilegious, Ho and Kane depict a recently-dug grave, implying that Bart/Hamlet has morbidly dug up his father's grave in order to deface it. However, more importantly, this scene visually represents *The Simpsons'* remediation process as they themselves metaphorically dig up Shakespeare, the precursor-father

figure, in order to deface him as well. Ho and Kane demonstrate that they will not pay their respect to Shakespeare; rather, the debt will ostensibly be mocked. The last instance of violence Ho and Kane depict is Old Hamlet/Homer's reaction to Bart's digging and defacing of his skull. Old Hamlet/Homer engages in his trademark wringing of Bart's neck in response to his transgression. See Figure 21 for an image of the cover.

Ho and Kane depict Bart/Hamlet with a mischievous grin as he defaces the skull. He also engages in tagging, as he has written a self-given nickname "El Barto" on the skull, an act associated with mischief. Hamlet, the character Bart plays here, can also be viewed as a trickster figure. After all, Hamlet in Old Norse means "a fool, ninny, or idiot" and the name more especially refers to a Jutish trickster who feigns stupidity (Hassel 109). In Shakespeare's play, Hamlet engages in trickster behaviours such as using evasion and trickery when hatching the mouse trap scheme. Hamlet uses his fool tactics and trickery to uncover the truth and corruption within Claudius's court or to merely mock his authority. For example, when engaging with Polonius, a fool's trick that Hamlet employs is to speak "ambiguously, thus suggesting an insult, on the one hand, or an innocuous comment, on the other" (Pyle 161).

In examining the background images of the cover, one of the gravestones reads "Theatre for the masses." Ho and Kane comment on the fact that *The Simpsons* and Shakespeare are both known for appealing to popular culture, therefore highlighting their similarities, while simultaneously alluding to the decline in popularity of theatre as a medium. The castle Ho and Kane draw resembles the Kronborg, a castle and stronghold in the town of Helsingør, Denmark, which may have inspired Elsinore Castle in Shakespeare's play. The castle contains many features of Danish architecture, such as the columns and small windows along the tower. See Figure 22 to view an image of Kronborg castle in Shakespeare's time. Bart/Hamlet's clothing

does not seem to be carefully selected from a prior adaptation in the same way that Persi and Anderson do in their parodic reworkings. However, he is wearing 18th-century-inspired clothing, when it became more common to wear tights under one's jacket (Fleming 441). Villanueva and Mason colour the scene at night, with clouds and a large ominous moon. These ominous colour choices create a darker tone than *The Simpsons* typically depicts. The tones align more with the tones that Persi will later use in his parodic reworking of *Macbeth* which he used to recreate Macbeth's isolation and descent into madness (Persi 2023). The colours also comment on the tragic and dark tone of *Hamlet.*

The cemetery that Ho and Kane depict on the cover is outside the castle walls. This intentional design recalls how Ophelia should have been buried outside the castle walls, as opposed to the noble churchyard that Claudius has requested she be buried in. It could also comment on how Fortinbras may have treated Old Hamlet's burial after he took over. Although Ho and Kane do not have perfect continuity with the Simpsons' prior version of the story, let alone Shakespeare's, their cover demonstrates that like the series, they too are in touch with historical context, scholarly critique and other alternative close readings of the play. The only thing that Ho and Kane and the other artists involved with the cover did not engage with is other popular culture adaptations of *Hamlet,* the same way that Persi and Anderson do in the background and *mise-en-scène* of their parody.

Troilus and Cressida

Troilus and Cressida is often classified as a problem play, and has not been as widely seen by the general public as have other plays in Shakespeare's canon (Young 46). C.B. Young discusses the stage history of *Troilus and Cressida* and notes that the "play has hardly been staged at all till

the present century, revivals up to date have been largely either in universities or by special groups and companies" (46). Therefore, Boothby indeed follows in the footsteps of *The Simpsons* by making the more obscure choice of *Troilus and Cressida* to begin the issue, since it has rarely been seen by the general public. In the opening panel, Bart makes a pun that shows that he has not read the play and that instead, his goal is to entertain the audience. He is essentially arguing for radical freedom in the act of adaptation. On the other hand, Lisa represents the view of those who subscribe to the fidelity model, a rule that adaptations must follow the original text as closely as possible. Lisa tells Bart "Do the right lines, you're ruining *Troilus and Cressida"* and then further argues that "Shakespeare is just fine on his own. Do it right,or we'll start the whole play over again" (2002). Bart plays King Priam, but he also steps out of character into his usual Bart persona to critique Shakespeare. He invites Lisa to improv with him to "improve" Shakespeare. Bart comments on how non-academic, non-theatre people might see Shakespeare, while Lisa represents the views of those who ascribe to the fidelity model. According to Boothby, his purpose for the *Troilus and Cressida* parody "hopefully [shows] that [the audience] read the actual text (like Lisa) but are about to have fun and go in some crazy directions with it (like Bart). It sets the tone for what's to come" (2023). Just as *Troilus and Cressida* is a problem for scholars and theatrical producers, it also becomes a problem for Lisa, as she becomes frustrated that her production is not going well. This conflict between her and Bart will continue further into the issue. Their disagreement illustrates the difficulties in remediating older works into newer media. There are tensions between what can be included and how it can be translated into the new media logic.

While Springfield's children perform Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, Homer falls asleep, dreaming of different Shakespearean works portrayed by the people of Springfield. This

is reminiscent of Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, who falls asleep and believes he has dreamt the change that has recently occurred to him. Boothby was well aware that the play within a play and the dream sequence are Shakespearean conventions. He remarks that "[Homer falling asleep] was definitely a *Midsummer Night's Dream* reference since Homer is a Bottom-style character" (2023). Boothby also states that his intention with the dream sequence was to "get into the stories in a real-world way and a dream gets you there" (2023).

Since the play takes place at Springfield Elementary School, John Constanza's staging, framing, and *mise-en-scène* do not engage with other adaptations of *Troilus and Cressida.* Bart/King Priam is dressed in a typical Greek king outfit, whereas Ralph, who plays Agamemnon, dons a Greek soldier uniform. The outfit Ralph/Agamemnon is wearing is an accurate rendering of the 1717 fresco mythological painting by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, titled *Rage of Achilles.* See Figure 23 for a comparison of Ralph's outfit and Tiepolo's painting.

The brief *Troilus and Cressida* rendition mostly makes fun of how boring Shakespeare is. Bart's ad-lib joke at the beginning is intended to "liven things up," at least according to Bart. When Bart suggests they need a new location, one of the audience members quips, "At a less boring play!" Bart responds with "I heard video arcade!" The brief seven-panel version ends with a contented Homer having figured out how to sleep with his eyes open. All you need to know about *Troilus and Cressida* is that it is boring. The comic book starts by remediating Shakespeare into a comic book representation of the theatre, and suggesting that, to audience members who are not Lisa and Marge (and perhaps Maggie, who looks on intently with her binky in her mouth), Shakespeare simply cannot compete with more modern media entertainment forms like arcade games and comic books.

Antony and Cleopatra

Shakespeare's plot for *Antony and Cleopatra* was inspired by Plutarch's "Life of Mark Antony," written approximately in the 2nd century AD, about two hundred years after the death of the legendary couple. Plutarch's Cleopatra was the "consummate manipulator who loved not Antony but power and pulled his puppet strings to make him dance to her tune" (Williamson 2017). According to Jacquelyn Williamson, Plutarch's account is accepted as fact, more than any other Roman account of Cleopatra. In addition, his account also forms the plot for most popular culture Hollywood adaptations (2017). Williamson states that Egyptian sources on this "famous queen were mostly lost when the library of Alexandria was destroyed" (2017). Archaeologists suspect Cleopatra's primary residence was located near the delta area of Egypt, which is known for its poorly-preserved remains. The Egyptian record of Cleopatra is abysmal; therefore the "accounts of those who hated and feared her speak that much louder" (2017).

In Boothby's parody of *Antony and Cleopatra*, Principal Seymour Skinner portrays Antony and Miss Krabappel, Bart's schoolteacher, portrays Cleopatra. Boothby's selection of Seymour as Antony fittingly imbues him with Seymour's characteristics of making mistakes and overlooking things. He accidentally gets Cleopatra killed by gifting her a non-poison-free asp as an anniversary gift (doh!). This interpretation opens up the possibility of Antony being naïve and less culpable in the suicide of Cleopatra. Seymour being attracted to Cleopatra is not an invention that Boothby came up with; it was a popular storyline in the episode "Grade School Confidential," in which Seymour and Krabappel secretly begin dating. At the end of the episode, in order to get themselves out of trouble for being together, Seymour has to admit that he is still a virgin, which Superintendant Chalmers agreed Seymour would only admit if it were true. Just as Krabappel was Seymour's masculine downfall, Timothy Grams argues that "Antony's obsession

with Cleopatra leads to his masculine undoing, and consequently his fall from Roman grace" (2). Furthermore, "his suicide implies Antony's attempt to reclaim his masculine prowess as a Roman" (2).

Krabappel as Cleopatra implies that she is the more dominant figure in her relationship with Seymour, thus fitting the narrative that Cleopatra manipulated Antony so that she could use him for his political power. Boothby states his intention for selecting Krabappel as Cleopatra was because she "was a strong, tragic character in a passionate but doomed relationship, and that merged nicely with Cleopatra" (2023). Krabappel's final words reveal how she perhaps was the one being taken advantage of, flipping the dominant narrative of Cleopatra as a seductress and manipulator of Antony. This view of Cleopatra taking advantage of Antony aligns with Grams's view of Cleopatra. Grams states that Antony's "relationship with the matriarch pharaoh not only invites abuse from Rome, but also entails mistreatment within their relationship" (34). Grams further notes that "Cleopatra mocks Antony in a variety of ways; many times those insults are directed toward the Roman hero's virility to the point of what one may perceive as verbal abuse" (34). According to Grams, Antony disavows his classic dominant masculine role for a submissive role within the relationship (34). Grams perceives Cleopatra's actions as manipulative due to her "active pursuit of conflict throughout her relationship with Antony, centering on his achievements as a hero and his representation as a man" (34). When discussing Antony's deceased wife, Fulvia, Cleopatra encourages Antony to fake his emotions. She tells him, "I prithee turn aside and weep for her, then bid adieu to me, and say the tears belong to Egypt. Good now, play one scene of excellent dissembling, and let it look like perfect honour" (1.3.76-80). Cleopatra implies that Antony lacks integrity (Grams 34). This similar dynamic plays out within the comic. In the first square, Krabappel/Cleopatra tells her therapist that "I

can't believe he's late. This counselling was his idea!" (2002). She later tells the therapist, "You see, this is what I mean! He has no respect for my needs" (2002), thereby implying that Seymour/Antony too lacks integrity.

Although Krabappel can be dominant and manipulative in their relationship within the series, in Boothby's parody he does try to show an alternate interpretation of Cleopatra's undoing by portraying her as vulnerable and ultimately doomed by staying with Antony. Krabappel/Cleopatra is frustrated by Seymour/Antony's antics. She tells him "You're the one with issues, not me!" and then further mentions all of the complaints he has against her; for example, her "sacred cats make him sneeze, [her] pyramids are too pointy, and now he's even complaining about [her] milk baths!" (2002). Seymour/Antony explains the reason he objects to her milk baths is because he is "lactose intolerant" (2002). Seymour/Antony then accuses Krabappel/Cleopatra of taking "Caesar up on his request for her to kill me!" (2002). All of this bickering and arguing mounts until it is revealed the true reason that Krabappel/Cleopatra is hurt is because Antony forgot their anniversary. This scene demonstrates a softer and more vulnerable side of Krabappel that is not portrayed in the television series that often. As soon as it finally seems like Krabappel/Cleopatra and Seymour/Antony are about to get along, she opens the box of inadvertently non-"poison-free" snakes and gets bit on the neck and dies, after which Seymour/Antony says, "So, um…aside from the fatal venom, how do you like the gift?" (2002). Krabappel/Cleopatra's final words are "It's like everything else in this relationship, Antony…it bites!" (2002). Krabappel/Cleopatra's last words reveal how she perhaps was the one being taken advantage of, flipping the dominant narrative of Cleopatra as a seductress and manipulator to Antony.

Constanza's staging, framing, and *mise-en-scène* do not appear to engage with other popular adaptations of *Antony and Cleopatra.* However, Constanza has adorned Krabappel/Cleopatra with a Royal Vulture or Falcon Crown consisting of a falcon feather headdress with its wings spread around her head to symbolize protection. Many works of classical Egyptian art portray Cleopatra as adorned with a similar royal Vulture or Falcon Crown.

Julius Caesar

The issue then shifts to a third example of Shakespeare's "Roman" plays, *Julius Caesar*. In writing this play, Shakespeare again borrows from Plutarch's "The Life of Julius Caesar," "The Life of Antonius," and "The Life of Brutus." Shakespeare might have read "In Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans," written by Plutarch and translated by Thomas North. Sir Thomas North's 1579 translation was Shakespeare's main source for Julius Caesar, for which he drew on the three main characters mentioned above (93). According to Gail Kern Paster, "Plutarch chronologically traces the characters and careers of individual men, filling his accounts with anecdotes illustrating their traits" ("In the Spirit" 95). For example, in "The Life of Julius Caesar," Shakespeare borrows "the names of the tribunes Flavius and Marullus and their confrontation with the plebeians over the adorning of Caesar's statues" (Paster, "In the Spirit" 96). According to Paster, Shakespeare used "The Life of Caesar" and "The Life of Brutus" to borrow detailed accounts of Caesar's assassination and the events immediately surrounding it ("In the Spirit" 97). However, Shakespeare also deviates from these historical facts to make them his own. Shakespeare adds many scenes and dialogue which were not present in his source texts. For example, Shakespeare inserts the famous line Caesar says–"Et tu, Brute?"–before he dies,

whereas Plutarch and Suetonius each report that Caesar did nothing before he died (3.1.77). Plutarch adds that Caesar pulled his toga over his head when he saw Brutus among the conspirators (605). However, Suetonius records that Caesar said "ista quidem vis est" (112), which translates to “this is violence" (Townend 286).

In the parody of *Julius Caesar,* Charles Montgomery Plantagenet Schicklgruber Burns, usually referred to as Mr. Burns, portrays Julius Caesar, which emphasizes the ambivalence Caesar’s men may have had toward him as a leader, since Mr. Burns is known in the sitcom as the greedy, ruthless owner of the Springfield power plant. When Mr. Burns/Caesar is first introduced, he asks his loyal sidekick Smithers as Brutus, who secretly resents the way his boss mistreats him, “The people love me. Do they not, Brutus?” (2002). Smithers/Brutus begrudgingly retorts “We all do, sir” (2002). In the next column, we see Mr. Burns/Caesar bend down to pick up a coin just as someone in the crowd has swung an axe at him and missed. Luckily for Mr. Burns/Caesar, he is fascinated by coins “with [his] face on [them]” (2002). Boothby establishes Caesar as a tyrant and illuminates Brutus’s motives for his betrayal. Boothby states that “Smithers on the show has flashes of resentment over his treatment and I thought that would pair well with Brutus’s motivations” (2023).

Mr. Burns/Caesar is on his way to the senate. A reader familiar with history would recognize that this day is the Ides of March, when Mr. Burns/Caesar will be assassinated. In the Senate, we see his “loyal” senators waiting to petition Caesar. A familiar face can be seen in the crowd. It is Seymour/Antony returning from the previous *Antony and Cleopatra* comic. At the podium, Mr. Burns/Caesar engages in some Shakespearean wordplay with puns and malapropisms which Shakespeare often used to humorous effect (Waltonen 168). Mr. Burns/Caesar would like to know the weather before they get to business. Hans Moleman, the

seer with the think glasses, who is next to him as one of the senators, tells Mr. Burns/Caesar "Hail Caesar" (2002). A frustrated Mr. Burns/Caesar asks the senator again, "Yes, hail yourself but what's the weather going to be like?" (2002). This back and forth goes on for one more square, until Mr. Burns/Caesar, with his arms raised to the sky, aggressively yells to "forget the weather!" Later, Mr. Burns/Caesar wants to inquire what type of lettuce was used in his salad the other day, to which the senator replies "Caesar" (2002). This confusion goes back and forth for another square until it leads to Mr. Burns/Caesar sentencing the senator to death. This situation causes Homer as Caligula, the great-grandson of Caesar, to start planning the assassination, instead of Smithers/Brutus. This is an anachronism, as Caligula and Caesar were not alive at the same time, although the role of Caligula is especially suited for Homer, as both have reputations as hedonists (Wardle 109). Boothby depicts Smithers/Brutus as the only conspirator who is skeptical, which is a deviation from Shakespeare's text. Another deviation from the source text is that the conspirators attempt to kill Mr. Burns/Caesar while he is in his home. Vain and oblivious, Mr. Burns/Caesar asks, "The senate! What, is this some sort of party in my honor" (2002), alluding to Caesar's lack of awareness that the senators were going to turn on him. Smithers/Brutus responds with some more wordplay, when he says, "Um…kind of a…surprise party" (2002), to which they all pull out their knives and attempt to stab Mr. Burns/Caesar to death as they all yell "Surprise!" (2002). They notice in the next square that they all missed their target because Mr. Burns/Caesar was "too thin," a running gag throughout the series. In missing their target, each would-be assassin accidentally stabs himself, while Mr. Burns/Caesar survives. Thus, Boothby deviates from the source text with regard to Mr. Burns/Caesar's death, which acts as a wish fulfillment for those readers who wish the assassination were unsuccessful.

The final wordplay in the parody comes from Homer/Caligula. Homer/Caligula remediates Caesar's famous last words by Shakespeare, "Et tu, Brutus" (3.1.77), and instead says "Ate two, Brutus" when responding to Mr. Burns/Caesar inquiring why two pieces of cake are missing from his birthday cake. This pun could be taken at face value, but it could also be seen as Homer/Caligula demonstrating to Caesar that he was not a part of the assassination, even though he admits that he "ate one piece" when planning the assassination (2002). In Shakespeare's text, Caesar tells Antony that he wants "Let me have men about me that are fat, / Sleek-headed men and such as sleep a-nights. / Yond Cassius has a lean and hungry look, / He thinks too much; such men are dangerous" (1.2.202-4). If Homer/Caligula proves that he is fat and well-fed, then Mr. Burns/Caesar is less likely to believe that he is one of the traitors to displace blame from him. Regardless of the intention, Boothby joins Shakespeare in the tradition of using wordplay for comical effect, conceiving alternate scenarios and creating dialogue for figures based on historical facts.

Henry V

Professor John I.Q. Nerdelbaum Frink Jr., also known as Professor Frink, portrays the noble Henry. At first glance, the poorly coordinated and socially challenged professor appears to be a poor choice to portray Henry. On the other hand, in *Henry IV Part One*, the young Hal is seemingly ill-equipped for the role of king and commander of the army, as he is irresponsible and reckless. Although Frink and Henry are opposites, they are both in trying situations, in over their heads. Boothby parodies Shakespeare's "This day is called the feast of Crispians" speech, "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers; / For he to-day that sheds his blood with me / Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile" (5.3.62-64). Boothby states that this is a comment on

Falstaff's group of "pitiful rascals" (1.4.66) which Henry did not think would be capable of fighting the war (2023). In the series, Professor Frink is known for creating scientific inventions that go terribly awry. Professor Frink/Henry alters the DNA of his soldiers to make them stronger. While holding a syringe, Professor Frink/Henry tells his soldiers "You are my band of brothers, for anyone who fights here today shall be my brother. This is thanks to some simple adjustments I made to your DNA while you were sleeping" (2002). Boothby states that "It just seems to be a Frink thing to do. Had to add a science element to the mix" (2023) when it comes to his intentions behind the altered DNA. Boothby selected Professor Frink as Henry because "This day is called the feast of Crispians" speech is "one of Shakespeare's greatest speeches and most confident so the contrast of giving it to a character who has trouble with a coherent sentence and who gets less motivating over time worked for me" (2023).

In Shakespeare's version, Henry's forces win a great victory at Agincourt. However, Boothby subverts those expectations since Professor Frink/Henry is so unconvincing that his cowardly army runs away before the fight even begins. Historically, as noted in Shakespeare's epilogue to *Henry V,* although Henry was victorious at Agincourt, most of the French territory he conquered was lost after his death. Boothby comments on the futility of the war efforts. The result of Frink's battle and of Henry's battle are the same.

Romeo and Juliet

Most critics agree that Shakespeare based his tragedy *Romeo and Juliet* on a poem titled, "The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet, written first in Italian by Bandell, and nowe in English by Ar. Br." (Duthie 11). According to George Ian Duthie, the Ar. Br. stands for "Arthur Brooke, a young poet who was shortly after drowned while crossing the Channel" (12). Duthie further

notes that scholars learnt that from “George Turbervile, who printed an epitaph on him in 1570 which makes special reference to the promise shown in a poem on ‘luliet and her mate’” (12). Duthie states that Shakespeare “follows the poem not only in incident, but often in word and phrase” (12). According to Duthie, Shakespeare must have known the poem almost by heart since “frequently does he recall some expression or train of thought that occurs in one part of Brooke's story and adapt it to another” (12).

Scholars are still fascinated by how the origin of the feud between the Capulets and the Montagues in Shakespeare’s drama is never revealed. Paster notes, “We are never told what the families are fighting about or fighting for; in this sense, the feud is both causeless and goalless” (Paster, “A Modern Perspective” 27). However, this has opened up the possibility for further adaptations to fill in the blanks.

While Romeo is often depicted as a gentle and romantic figure in popular culture adaptations, Boothby fittingly chooses Nelson to portray him, as Romeo is hot-headed and engages in numerous instances of violence in the play, culminating in murder. Boothby describes his rationale for selecting Nelson, stating that “Romeo is a passionate character who wears his heart on his sleeve and Nelson has been known to cry at an Andy Williams song” (2023). In addition to Nelson being a good choice based on his violent tendencies in the comic book and the television series, he is also a good selection because “Nelson and Lisa have a romantic and star-crossed history on the show” (2023).

Lisa as Juliet was a good fit since Lisa like Juliet “became the paradigm of the feminine ideal—lovely, gentle, loyal her beloved, and utterly lacking in vice” (Zarevich 2023). In addition, Lisa and Juliet both share a disinterest in men who are interested in them. For Juliet, it is Paris. For Lisa, it is Milhouse. Pairing Lisa with Nelson as star-crossed lovers is something

Boothby borrows from the episode, “Lisa’s Date with Destiny,” where she learns that she cannot reform Nelson and is forced to end the relationship (1996). Unfortunately, Lisa does not have a Nurse figure in her life who is there to support her romantic relationships. Therefore, Lisa’s romantic life remains abysmal. Boothby even makes sure to add the Nurse, played by Lunchlady Doris, as unavailable to tend to Lisa/Juliet’s needs because she needs to “change [Mr. Capulet’s] bedpan” (2002). Mr. Capulet is portrayed by Homer. The Simpson family’s dysfunction is likened to the dysfunction of Shakespeare’s Capulets, illuminating a possible reason that Lisa/Juliet would have wanted to escape with Nelson/Romeo. Constanza portrays Homer/Mr. Capulet engaging in his trademark wringing of Bart’s neck, which further illustrates their family dysfunction.

Boothby notes that *Romeo and Juliet* is “a world where the two families will fight at the drop of a hat or a bite of a thumb so the violent Nelson fits in there” (2023). Thus, unlike other directors of well-recognized *Romeo and Juliet* adaptations, Boothby recognizes that he cannot avoid the violent nature of the play. Boothby does not shy away from depicting the play’s violence in the comic book. In fact, it plays into his hands. Nor was he willing to deviate from depicting the titular character as violent and aggressive. Already on the first page, Nelson/Romeo is swearing because he stubbed his toe on a large bust that resembles the Bard himself. Nelson/Romeo witnesses Jimbo/Tybalt kill Dolph/Mercutio, who are typically his fellow bullies in the series. Constanza creates a realistic expression of devastation on Nelson/Romeo’s face as he witnesses the murder. Then in the next square, Nelson/Romeo is furiously stabbing Jimbo/Tybalt in the heart as he yells, “you killed him, you jerk. Take that!” (2002).

In contrast, in his film, Luhrmann removes certain violent scenes to portray Romeo as more innocent and romantic. In addition, Zeffirelli deliberately omits most of the references to

Rosaline, which speeds up the pace of the film. However, it also has the effect of making Romeo appear more invested in his romance with Juliet. According to Zeffirelli, he had to cut several scenes in the final production because the film was too long. Zeffirelli notes he cut the scene because it made Romeo less sympathetic:

> We had to cut the killing of Paris, which I shot. You don't want that. I mean young people wanted us to have the romantic meeting between the dead girl—who was not dead—and Romeo who had threatened to kill himself. If he was a murderer- ugly boy, ugly boy! It wouldn't have worked. And besides, the thing was already long enough. (Lonely 245)

Cutting scenes that portray Romeo in a more negative light and hiding his flaws makes the character on screen less nuanced. Boothby does not shy away from Shakespeare's depiction of Romeo.

The ending leaves Lisa frustrated with Nelson because he does not want to kill himself to prove his undying love. This ending reinforces Shakespeare's point that Petrarchan love is not sustainable and that Romeo and Juliet's love could not have lasted. Boothby states the reason he altered his ending is because "Romeo had a similar love for his previous object of affection Rosaline and eventually he'd move on from Juliet. They're both teenagers and if I can stop them from killing themselves, I'm going to do it" (2023). Boothby's ending gives Lisa/Juliet a significant amount of agency as compared to Shakespeare's text. Rather than going along with Friar Lawrence's plan, as he does not exist in this comic book version, she reads *Faking Your Death the E-Z Way* to help her hatch her own scheme and brew her own poison. Boothby notes that it is "almost impossible to do a Lisa story that doesn't have a strong feminist angle that comes through" (2023). Boothby was inspired by another feminist reworking of the play titled,

Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet), which he found "takes Juliet in a very different direction" (2023).

The Two Gentlemen of Verona

Critics have found three possible sources for Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Shakespeare drew upon the Spanish work titled, "Los Siete Libros de la Diana" by Jorge de Montemayor (Carroll 142). In the romance, Don Felix falls in love with Felismena. Shakespeare remediates elements of the plot, such as Felismena rejecting the letter and resenting her maid for presenting it (Carroll 143). In the end, a fight in the woods breaks out and eventually, Don Felix and Felismena are reunited. Celia falls in love with Felismena, who is dressed as a man (Wardropper 139). However, after Felismena reveals herself, Celia does not have a counterpart and therefore dies of grief (Carroll 145).

Critics believe another major source for *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* was the story of the friendship of Titus and Gisippus in the book *The Boke Named the Governour* by Thomas Elyot in 1531 (Schlueter 10). Gisippus introduces his lover to Titus and Titus immediately plans to seduce her. Gisippus discovers Titus's scheme and allows him to switch places with him on his wedding night, ultimately privileging his friendship over his wife (Schlueter 12).

In both of Shakespeare's sources, a pattern emerges where the female characters are mistreated at the hands of the supposed gentlemen. Even in Shakespeare's version, Proteus and Valentine engage in behaviour that is not socially sanctioned. For example, in the woods, Proteus rescues Silvia and demands to have nonconsensual intercourse. Unbeknownst to Proteus, Valentine is watching from a distance and rescues her. In the end, both of them end up married to their respective lovers. However, that does not dismiss Proteus's actions. Valentine's reaction to

rescue Silvia from Proteus demonstrates that Shakespeare does not condone that behaviour within the play.

In the parody of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona,* Lenny and Carl portray the main characters Valentine and Proteus. However, it is unclear who is who since Boothby does not assign names to the characters. At first, the pair attempt to court women the "proper way," bowing politely when a member of the opposite sex passes them. Lenny and Carl greet multiple women in this manner only to discover that "being a gentleman" does not work to attract women. Boothby therefore comments on how the two "gentlemen" in Shakespeare are not "gentlemen" at all; they engage in scheming to attract the women they are interested in, and when they are honourable, they do so for their own means. Boothby states his intent for selecting the duo, "I needed men who are always in a pair and that to me is Lenny and Carl" (2023). Boothby further iterates that he also "hadn't used them yet and this seemed to be a great fit" (2023). He does not comment on whether he intentionally chooses the same characters to play Valentine and Proteus as were selected to portray Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

Ultimately, after having no success in courting women, Carl suggests "Y'know, this 'being a gentleman stuff'…is whatyacall it? Not working" (2002). Lenny replies, "Wanna go to Moe's? It's ladies' night" (2002). In the final square, Lenny and Carl as Proteus and Valentine end up at a bar with the merry wives of Windsor, portrayed by Patty and Selma. Lenny, looking unimpressed, mentions to Patty and Selma that "you merry wives of Windsor really ain't that merry" (2002). Boothby subverts the typical marriage union at the end of the comedy by having the two gentlemen end up with a reflection of themselves, two women who are not considered desirable within the *Simpsons* universe.

Richard III

Shakespeare's *Richard III* is widely known for its exploration of classic villainy (Leas 1214). The titular character has for centuries mortified audiences "at the machinations of the hunchbacked villain" commits throughout the play, and caused them to "rejoice when that inhuman tyrant is at last overcome, as he offers his kingdom for a horse" (Leas 1214). Due to the popularity of Shakespeare's play, "the real Richard III has the reputation of a murderer hideously deformed both body and in soul" (Leas 1214). However, when writing *Richard III,* Shakespeare would have written Richard III poorly in an attempt to belittle him in favour of Queen Elizabeth's grandfather, Henry Tudor:

> Shakespeare, of course, wrote for a Tudor monarch and used Tudor historians such as Holinshed as sources for his chronicle plays. Holinshed's version is derived from the biography of Richard III written by Sir Thomas More, left unfinished, and from others who wrote under the first Tudor king, Henry VII. This dynasty succeeded Richard's Plan-dynasty, and therefore one of the chief motives for writing "history" in this age would be to blacken the name of the king whose throne they had usurped. Shakespeare has preserved this biased version of the facts. (Lease 1214)

In Boothby's *Richard III,* Krusty portrays King Richard III – he is the self-declared "king of comedy" who wants to rule by having the highest ratings on television. In Krusty's view, his television show is equivalent to a kingdom and battling against other shows to get good ratings is equivalent to war. Constanza draws Krusty/Richard imagining all the faces of the people he has murdered to get "to the top" (2002) as he openly wonders about whether his actions are worthwhile to the audience. Then he takes it all back, in keeping with sitcom structure. This fits the Richard of Shakespeare's play because he is "for the most part, a gleeful, inhuman caricature

who delights in explaining his villainies to the audience, like Iago or like Vice in the medieval morality play" (Leas 1214). Krusty also has health difficulties, as does Richard in the play. Krusty hires the mob to kill his competitors, including Rudolph, who is actually a "puppet," just as Richard III hires men to murder his brother the Duke of Clarence. The mobster is as reluctant as Clarence's murderers. In spite of this, Krusty is beloved by his audiences. Thus, Boothby comments on how willing audiences are to follow heinous anti-heroes. Boothby states:

> *Richard III* is a play where the audience at times is on the side of the villain because they are the protagonist and we want to see how things play out. This is the case in movies like *The Godfather* as well so adding mobsters to the story made sense. Krusty is a morally corruptible character who we as an audience still root for so that seemed to work. (2023)

Boothby states that he was inspired by *Rick Mercer's Made in Canada (AKA The Industry)*, a Canadian television series, when it came to crafting Krusty to play Richard III. Boothby notes, "[Mercer] plays a very Richard III-style character" (2023). Similar to the reputations of the real Richard III, the *Simpsons* comic book and the series most often portray Krusty as "a chain-smoking, hard drinking, gambling, pornography-addicted comic with green hair, white makeup, and a red nose. He consistently produces shoddy merchandise with his likeness, mistreats people, and tells terrible jokes" (Feltmate 86). Meanwhile, there is another side of Krusty that the audience is not privy to. The episode "Like Father, Like Clown," a parody of the 1923 film titled *The Jazz Singer*, in which the son of a Jewish cantor defies his father to become a jazz singer (Feltmate 86), reveals the reasons behind Krusty's anger and addictions. In the episode, the audience learns of Krusty's Jewish heritage and that his father disowned him for disgracing the family for pursuing comedy, instead of becoming a rabbi. Due to this disagreement, they became

estranged for twenty years (Feltmate 86). It is one of the few moments when the audience witnesses their favourite funny-man so disheartened. Bart and Lisa vow to reunite Krusty with his estranged father. When contemplating his misdeeds in the comic, Constanza draws Krusty's facial expressions as if he is truly lamenting his heinous actions, akin to the vulnerability Krusty expresses in "Like Father, Like Clown." Krusty shares this similar sentiment with Shakespeare's Richard, who also felt unloved and believed he was unable to live a normal life. Therefore, Boothby's parody creates a more nuanced Richard because Krusty/Richard reflects on his motives and appears emotionally affected by his actions.

In the beginning of the parody, Krusty's/Richard's adoring audience loves him. They chant his name. Then when the page is turned, he has lost them. The crowd begins to "Boo!" him (2002). This scene is parodying the scene before the battle at Bosworth Field, in which Richard is visited by the victims of his murders who wish him to "despair and die" (5.3.135). For Krusty, the audience rejecting his comedic material is the same as wishing him to die. When Krusty/Richard looks to the audience, Constanza has drawn them to appear ghost-like. The audience is all mono-colour and in a shade of blue and purple. They all stare at Krusty/Richard, unamused.

Now the parody jumps to the end battle at Bosworth Field, where Richard is unhorsed. Constanza draws a horse costume, clearly worn by two men underneath it. Krusty/Richard thinks of jumping on top of them, despite the horses' pleas not to do it. Krusty/Richard collapses on the floor and exposes the two elderly Springfieldians wearing the costume. Boothby parodies Richard's famous line, "A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!" (5.4.13). For his part, Krusty/Richard cries out, "A horse! A Horse! My kingdom for two non-union actors to play a horse!" (2002), furthering the modern showbusiness equivalent critique. Sideshow Bob as

Richmond appears and declares “Richard, I’m here to kill you” (2002), to which he further clarifies, “And by you, I mean your show. I’m the new head of programming and your show is being put on hiatus indefinitely for retooling” (2002). For Krusty, this is the modern equivalent of Richmond killing Richard and claiming the throne for himself.

Titus Andronicus

Richard T. Brucher notes that Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* is far more outrageous and far more violent than its source material (Brucher 87). Thomas Heywood defended the genre of tragedy by remarking that “the fatal and abortive ends of such as commit notorious murders, […] aggravated and acted with all the art that may be, to terrify men from the like abhorred practice” (Heywood 62). Brucher takes a slightly different tack, arguing that Titus’s catastrophic acts in the play cause laughter rather than pity, fear, or moral gratification (71). Titus is referred to as the “Patron of virtue, Rome’s best champion” (1.1.65). Bucher notes that when Titus, in a chef’s costume, “feeds Tamora her two sons, whom he has baked in a pie, kills his daughter Lavinia, and murders Tamora, before being killed by Saturninus,” would have delighted Elizabethan audiences, since they had a love for violence (Brucher 72).

“The Itchy & Scratchy Show” is a show within *The Simpsons.* The show details the exploits of a cat-and-mouse comedy team based on the animated show *Tom and Jerry*. However, as Matthew Henry notes, “this cartoon goes its model one better: we are shown every gruesome detail of the ways in which this cat and mouse team seek to destroy each other” (96). In the show, they are constantly being “sliced, diced, disembowelled, de-skinned, beheaded, impaled, and exploded, all with gratuitous amounts of blood” (86). Groening, the series creator, has stated that “My problem ... is that there’s an anticipation of cruelty which I find really repugnant”

(Elder 30). According to Henry, "The Itchy & Scratchy Show" exaggerates the violence associated with contemporary cartoons to the extreme, thus demonstrating that there is a mass appeal for violent content that is still ubiquitous today, just as in Shakespeare's time.

In this brief, two-page parody with little dialogue, Boothby establishes Itchy as Tamora and Scratchy as Titus. However, there is some inconsistency, since Scratchy also plays Lavinia, who gets his tongue and hands cut off in the same manner Lavinia does in Shakespeare's text. In Boothby's adaptation, not even Itchy/Tamora and Scratchy/Titus can escape their inevitable fates; they both die, their corpses lying in the desert sun, while ravens pick on their dead bodies (which alludes to Tamora's ultimate off-stage destiny in the play). This is a departure from the usual ending of an "Itchy and Scratchy" episode, in which Itchy is the only one left alive. Having Itchy die at the end of this comic comments how violent *Titus Andronicus* is if Itchy cannot escape death, either.

Itchy and Scratchy comment on the excessive violence in the play. These characters typically never show a moment of sympathy on the "Itchy and Scratchy Show." However, they both agree that Shakespeare's characters are more violent than they typically are. Exaggeration is meant to enlarge, increase, or represent something beyond normal bounds so that it becomes ridiculous, and its faults can be seen. The excessive violence depicted in the *Titus Andronicus* parody showcases how violent and absurd the play can be. Boothby notes that he wanted to point out how "violent people say pop culture is now, something parodied with Itchy and Scratchy on the TV show" to show how "[*Titus Andronicus*] is shockingly violent" (2002). Boothby further elaborates that since *Titus Andronicus* contains a significant amount of "violence that Itchy and Scratchy" were a perfect fit to parody the violence. Boothby notes that "The tragedies end in death, so violence is unavoidable. Even the comedies have the threat of death and pounds of

flesh being extracted. Like now, violence is part of entertainment and Shakespeare was a crowd pleaser" (2023).

King Lear

Critics have discovered many possible sources that Shakespeare used to construct *King Lear*. However, most would agree that the death of Cordelia appears to be unique to Shakespeare's version (Bloom, "Shakespeare Through the Ages" 52). According to Harold Bloom, during the 17th century, "Shakespeare's tragic ending was much criticized and alternative versions were written by Nahum Tate, in which the leading characters survived and Edgar and Cordelia were married" ("Shakespeare Through the Ages" 52). Bloom reminds his reader that "Tate's version held the stage for almost 150 years until Edmund Kean reinstated the play's tragic ending in 1823" ("Shakespeare Through the Ages" 53).

Homer plays King Lear, with Bart as Regan, Maggie as Goneril and Lisa as Cordelia. Boothby uses the dynamic between them in *The Simpsons* to explain Lear's treatment of his children in Shakespeare. Boothby's selection of Homer as King Lear is well-suited because he is a selfish parent. Homer often places his needs above the well-being of his children. Like King Lear, Homer is entirely unaware of how selfish and self-absorbed he is. This dynamic causes a reaction that makes Bart and Lisa often need to take care of him, similar to the way that Lear's children have to tend to his needs. Boothby writes Homer/Lear's selfishness by having Homer/Lear sitting on his couch, thinking "Man, being a king is so boring" (2002). Homer then has the idea to "play a game" that he calls "who loves Daddy best?" (2002). The game, which causes the eventual banishment of his daughter, was conceived just so that he could entertain himself. Boothby added this motive, as Lear's motive for why he asks his daughters how much

they love them is unclear. Bart as Regan is also well-chosen, because Bart has been known to ingratiate himself to Homer in order to get what he wants—for example, to get Itchy and Scratchy tickets. Bart/Regan tells Homer/Lear "How much do I love thee? More than all the stars in heaven. More than all the grains of sand on the beach. More than all the beads of sweat on a substitute teacher's forehead. Words cannot express my love, and so I shall end this sentence now" (2002). Although Boothby writes that Bart is portraying Regan, his line is more similar to Goneril's response to Lear's question. Goneril replies:

> Sir, I love you more than word can wield the matter,
> Dearer than eyesight, space, and liberty,
> Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare,
> No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honor;
> As much as child e'er loved, or father found;
> A love that makes breath poor, and speech unable.
> Beyond all manner of so much I love you. (1.1.60-76)

Lisa as Cordelia is also well-suited, since within the series, Homer often favours her above Bart. There are many episodes where the main plot involves Homer and Lisa bonding. For example, in the episode "Lost our Lisa," Homer and Lisa bond over an after-hours trip to the history museum to see an exhibit she wanted to see (1998). It is also fitting because she often speaks her mind to Homer and is not afraid to be honest with him. Homer and Lisa bring out each other's vulnerabilities as a parent and child and help each other grow.

Krusty the Clown makes a quick appearance as Kent, who is confused as to why he is in this scene, only to find that whose scenes his scenes were cut because they did not "do well with the demographic" (2002), drawing attention to the process of adaptation and the choices that

must be made. Another quick appearance is that of Kent Brockman, a reporter, reporting the story of King Lear, punctuating the story with his remarks, representing the audience. For example, he states that Lear's banishment of Lisa/Cordelia is foolish as "she was his only truly loving child" (2002). By having other characters from his parodies cross over, Boothby comments on how Shakespeare uses similar themes and motifs in his plays.

As Homer/Lear holds Lisa/Cordelia's mangled body, Nelson as Romeo from the previous comic informs Homer/Lear that Lisa/Cordelia/Juliet is faking her death because that is what she did to him earlier. Nelson tells Homer/Lear that she is "faking to get attention!" (2002). This could also be interpreted as a meta-comment on theatre and the artifice of performance. Lisa/Cordelia awakens and Homer/Lear drops her on the floor, leaving her there as he walks away. In accordance with the sitcom tradition, Boothby denies Homer/Lear the epiphany he might have had about his harmful behaviour. Therefore, Boothby's ending is more aligned with Shakespeare's possible source texts, which do not include the death of Cordelia.

Conclusion

Boothby's comic book *Simpsons* renditions demonstrate a knowledge of academic criticism of Shakespeare's plays. These comic book versions suggest that *The Simpsons* knows Shakespeare, his source texts and the discourse surrounding them. *The Simpsons* adds to a long tradition of parodically remediating Shakespeare's characters through a modern and feminist lens. Although the artwork does not engage with many sources, the facial expressions and body language of the characters express many non-verbal Shakespearean themes.

Conclusion

Remediation is the process of representing old media and its contents in different, often new or emergent, media forms. In remediating Shakespeare, *The Simpsons* takes formidable classic works and make them more relatable and accessible, which thereby allows them to reach a greater audience. *The Simpsons* takes these great works and distills them in a language that their audience can understand. The animated situation comedy narrative container that *The Simpsons* operates within is different than the classical theatre narrative container in which Shakespeare operates, and each allows for the transmission of different meanings. Remediation is predicated on the necessary interrelationship between form and content. *The Simpsons* represent Shakespeare's works within a narrative container and media logic suited for an animated sitcom. *The Simpsons* do not remediating entire works of Shakespeare, since the works are being told in their language. Therefore, their reworkings are still a process of translation, because the media container is not the same as Shakespeare's. *The Simpsons* is aware of the extent to which Shakespeare can be remediated to their media format and intentionally does not engage with the full complexity of the works. Rather, they indicate that they are just scratching the surface of the world that Shakespeare wrote.

Firstly, this thesis examined *The Simpsons'* remediation process in the parodic reworkings of Shakespeare, and how the episodes engage with questions of authorship, ownership and the conflict between old and new media. For example, the episode "Tales from the Public Domain" implies that Shakespeare's works are available for appropriation without compensation. Works within the public domain raise issues about rights, ownership, and debt, themes which are present within *Hamlet* itself and which are also strongly related to the process of remediation. Hamlet is tormented by the question of how much he owes to his deceased

father, much like new media may be concerned with the question of how much its reputation is owed to the media which came before it. I examine how *The Simpsons* engages with Shakespeare (old media of theatre), his source texts (old media of historical accounts), scholarly critique and later classic film adaptations to establish the validity of animation as a medium, all the while showing respect for the types of media which preceded it. *The Simpsons* achieve this by remediating popular film adaptations of Shakespeare's plays through staging, *mise-en-scène*, framing techniques, lighting, special effects, costumes, performance, and character mapping.

Secondly, my findings confirm that the parodic reworkings are a clever metaphor for the struggle of new media to differentiate itself from old media, while also paying homage to it. In examining the *Macbeth* reworking in "Four Great Women and a Manicure" (2009), it becomes clear that *The Simpsons* represents the conflict between old and new media in the process of remediation. In the segment, Marge as a Lady Macbeth-like figure encourages Homer, as a Macbeth figure, to become the best actor in his acting troupe in order to play the lead in *Macbeth.* The only way that Homer/Macbeth is able to achieve this is by murdering all of the other competing actors. This is a metaphor for the way new media can lead to the decline of older media forms as it gains its own viability and legitimacy. Specifically, this reworking in particular engages with these themes by remediating not only Shakespeare's version of *Macbeth*, but also previous film adaptations such as Orson Welles' *Macbeth* (1948) among others.

Lastly, my findings confirm how *The Simpsons* remediates Shakespeare and other Shakespearean media in comic book form. Through the comic book form's media logic, Shakespeare's works become condensed and abbreviated versions of the plays with subverted endings for comedic effect. In comparing the remediation process between *The Simpsons* television series and the comic book, my findings suggest that the comic book is engaging in less

remediation. Constanza, Ho and Kane, the artists for the comic book, do not integrate and reference older Shakespearean media. The comic book does not appear to engage in the similar visual remedial process that the series engages with by incorporating popular film adaptations. On the other hand, Boothby, the writer, borrows and remediates other popular adaptations of *Shakespeare* and incorporates literary analysis to create a thought-provoking comic. He remediates Shakespearean plays into the media logic of *The Simpsons.* For example, his characters do not experience the same character arcs that Shakespeare's characters do. Instead, because he conforms to the media logic of *The Simpsons,* his characters are not allowed to experience a change by the end of their stories. For example, in the parodic reworking of *Romeo and Juliet*, Lisa/Juliet does not commit suicide, nor does she win the affection of Romeo. She goes back to the way she was at the beginning of the comic, alone and miserable within the family which confines her.

As noted in the Introduction, Harries defines parody as the process of "recontextualizing a target or source text through the transformation of its textual (and contextual) elements, thus creating a new text" (6). According to Harries, it is this conversion between these two elements that results in an oscillation between similarity to and difference from the original media form being parodied. This oscillation is similar to the interrelationship between form and content on which remediation is predicated. In addition, Semenza discusses how critics view cutting Shakespeare's text as equivalent to reducing the complexity of, or "dumbing down," the plays for their target audience (64). My findings, as do Semenza's, demonstrate that animated Shakespeare adaptations such as *Shakespeare: The Animated Tales* and *The Simpsons* employ an expressive visual language that compensates for the removal of dialogue, in addition to remediating popular film adaptations through visual references within the animation.

Shakespeare: The Animated Tales and *The Simpsons* train their audience to focus their attention on the material processes of remediation.

While adaptations of Shakespeare's works in film and, to some extent, television, have been critically examined in English and media studies, scholars have largely ignored animation and focused their attention on live action works. This medium is dismissed because it is considered low culture and reductive (Öğütcü 109). Scholars must remember that, when a classic work of literature is remediated into a newer medium, the adaptation is not necessarily a low and reductive version of the older form. Rather, it has been translated into another form and therefore is now an exemplar of a new medium. This process of drawing from older media is part of the way new media achieve legitimacy. While animation has been discredited in the field because it is associated with low culture (and child audiences), we must remember that Shakespeare included both "high" and "low" status, culture, and registers in his plays. Shakespeare himself remediated older media including historical accounts, prose and poetry into theatre which was meant to be performed.

One of the strengths of this thesis is the use of personal interviews which provided valuable insight into *The Simpsons'* remediation process. These interviews, conducted with Raymond S. Persi, director of "Four Great Women and a Manicure" (2009), and Ian Boothby, author of *Bard-Boiled: The Simpsons Shake-Up Shakespeare* (2002), both guided and corroborated my literary analysis of the episodes. These were also sources of in-depth knowledge of the inner workings behind the series.

To conclude, *The Simpsons* turn to Shakespeare as a source of credibility and demonstrate to their audience that his works can be translated into a language that can be entertaining and educational. *The Simpsons* is fully aware that they simply introduce their

audience to a sample of what is the vast complexity of Shakespeare, as well as the rich history of Shakespearean adaptations and literary theory. In addition, *The Simpsons* also represents the conflict between new and old media forces within the stories in their parodic reworkings in a metaphorical way. *The Simpsons'* parody of Shakespeare is part of a greater theme of the series, which is to dismantle authority. In examining Shakespeare's authority, the series pays homage to him and other artists who also pay tribute to Shakespeare's canon, while transmitting new meanings of his work. Though these authorities are dismantled, they are also used to legitimize the series, which indicates that their authority is simultaneously respected. Therefore, animated parodies that remediate Shakespeare's work should be further explored in literary studies. Though they deviate from the traditional texts, they have a modern significance in their ability to give Shakespeare a new life in new media forms. The process of remediation may be endless due to technological advances that give rise to novel forms of media. Given that Shakespeare has been depicted in almost all types of media, it does not appear that he will be slowing down anytime soon. For its part, *The Simpsons* in its inception provided "mildly subversive examinations of family life and social issues" (Daubs, "Subversive or Submissive?" 55). On the other hand, it could now be argued that it is an authority in animation itself and that newer forms of media will emerge to remediate it, just as it remediates Shakespeare.

Appendix

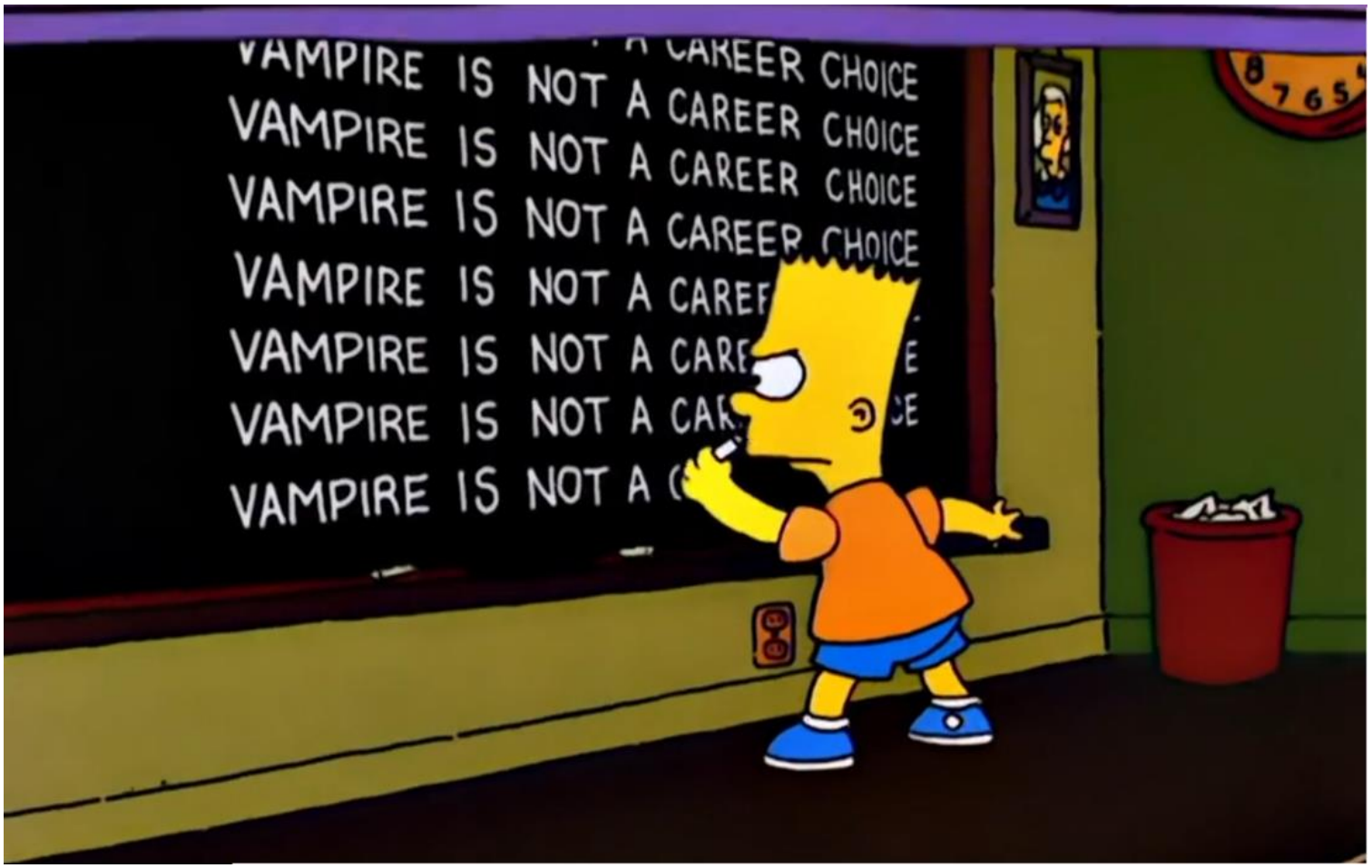

Figure 1: Bart writing on the chalkboard (1989).

Figure 2: Bart skating by a bookstore (1989).

Figure 3: Bart interested in television (1989).

Figure 4: *The Simpsons* remediating a magazine that Marge is reading (1989).

Figure 5: Couch gag: *The Simpsons* remediating sheet music.

Figure 6: *The Simpsons* representing their media viability (1989).

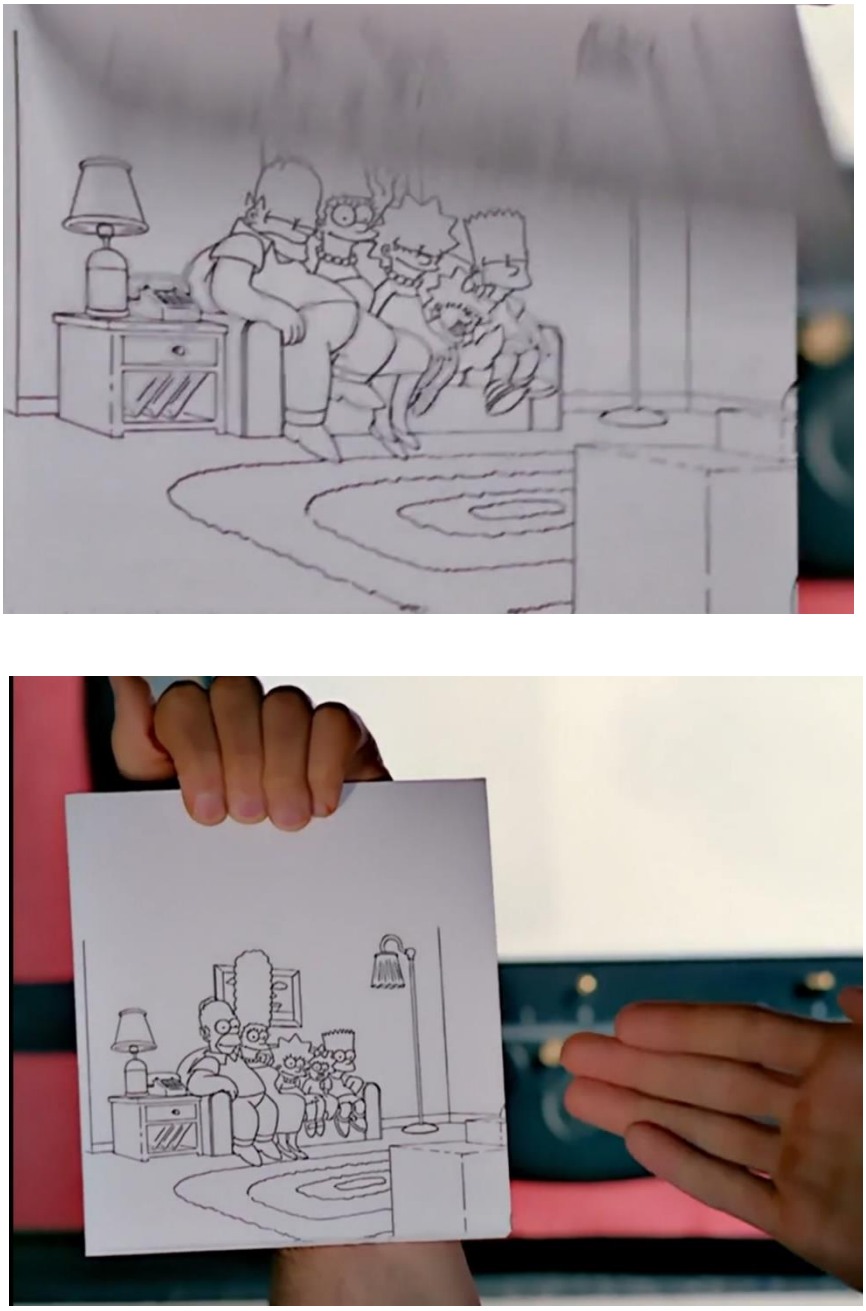

Figure 7: Couch gag: Flipbook in motion (top) and Flipbook static (2002).

Figure 8: Bart as Hamlet in *The Simpsons* (top) and Laurence Olivier as Hamlet (bottom; 1948).

Figure 9: Bart as Hamlet in *The Simpsons* (top) and Mel Gipson as Hamlet in the final scene of Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* (bottom; 1990).

Figure 10: Melvin Van Horne as the Murderer in *The Simpsons* (top) and Justin Case as the Players (murderer of Gonzango) (bottom; 1990).

Figure 11: Bottle of poison in *The Simpsons* (top) and bottle of poison in Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* (bottom; 1990).

Figure 12: Krusty as Gonzango in *The Simpsons* (top) and Patrick Troughton as Player King in Olivier's *Hamlet* (bottom; 1948).

Figure 13: Moe as Claudius in *The Simpsons* (top) and Basil Sydney as Claudius in Olivier's *Hamlet* (bottom; 1948).

Figure 14: Set of the final scene in *The Simpsons* (top) and set of the final scene of Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* (bottom; 1990).

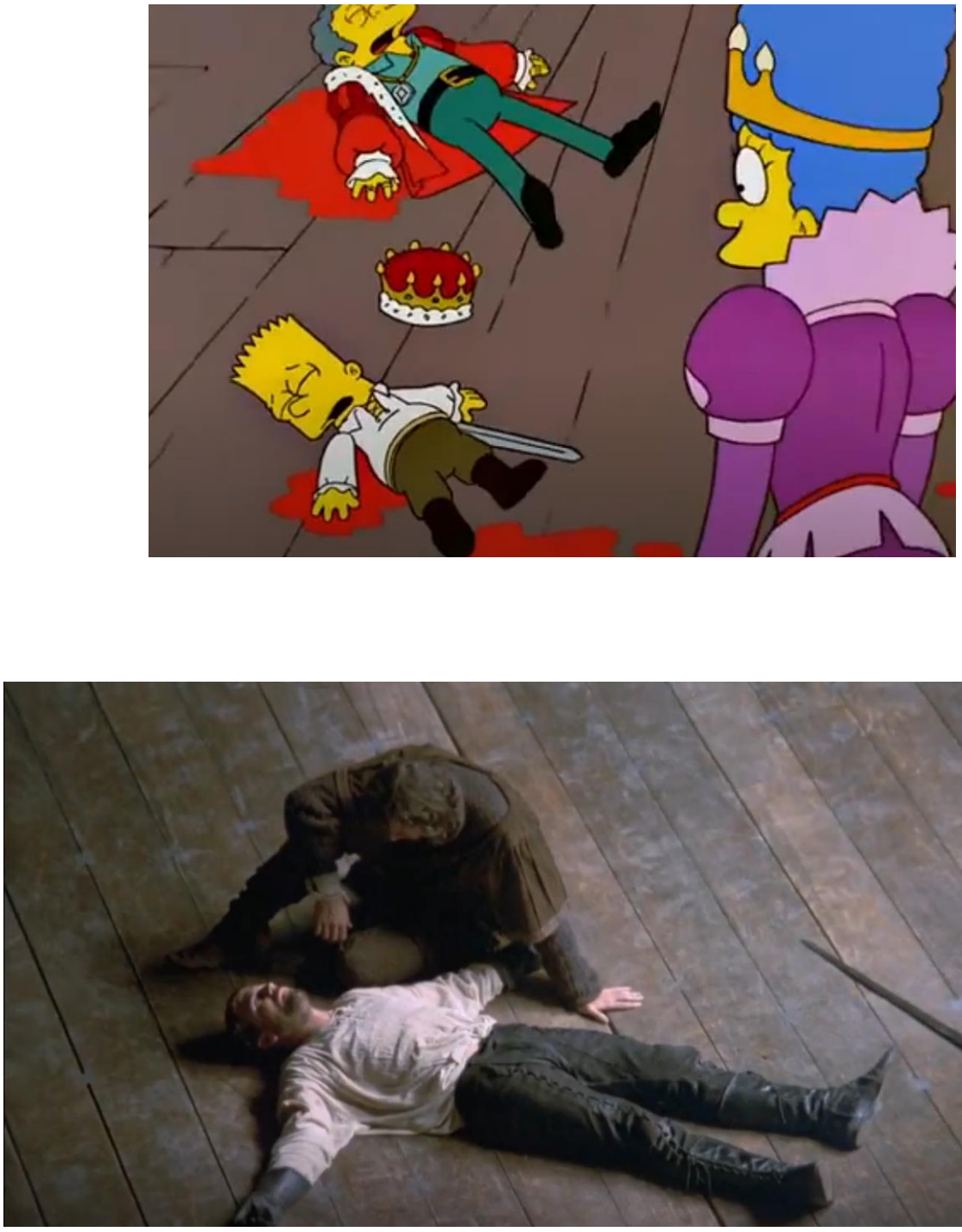

Figure 15: Close-up of the set of the final scene in *The Simpsons* (top) and set of the final scene of Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* (bottom; 1990).

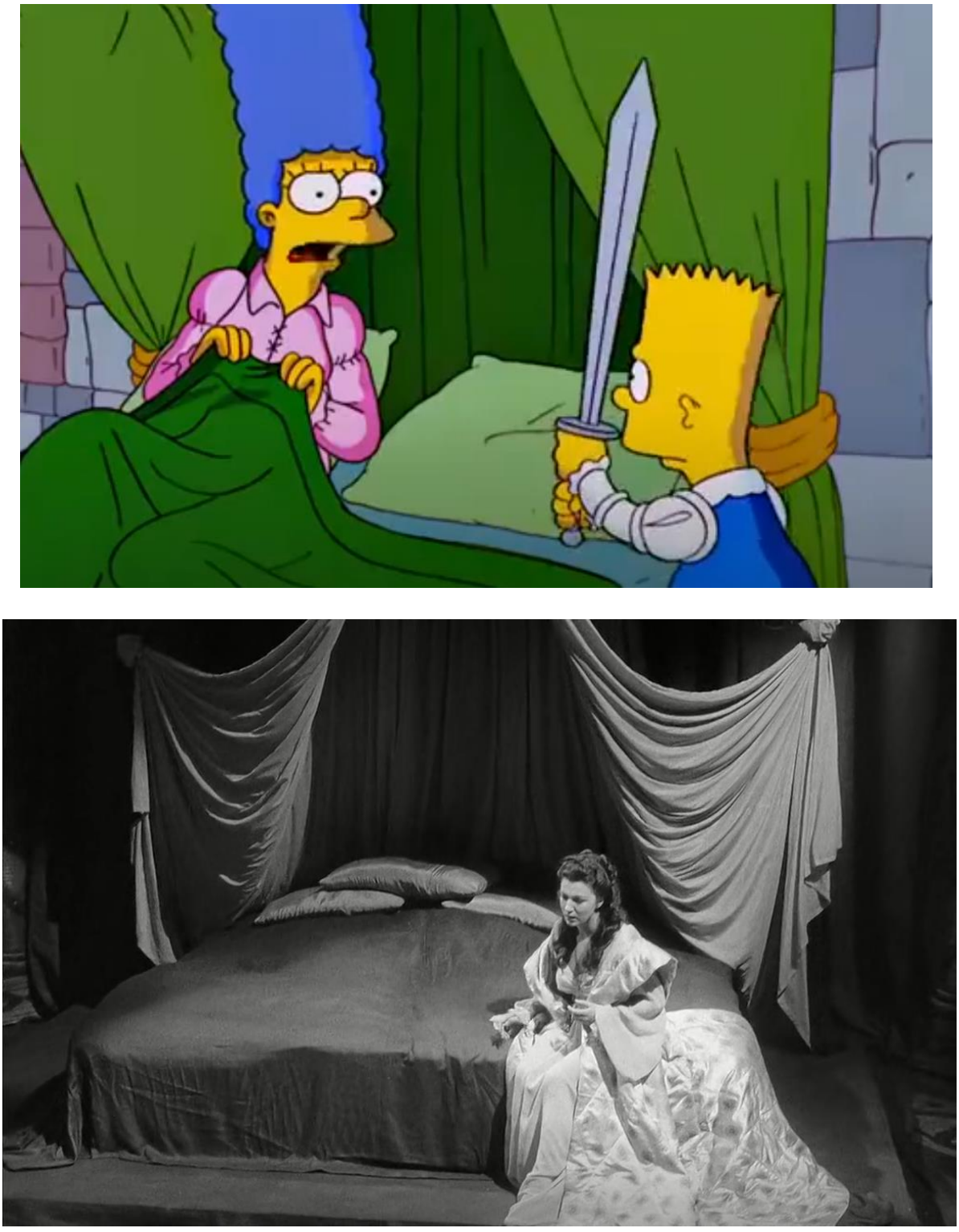

Figure 16: Set of the Queen's closet in *The Simpsons* (top) and set of the Queen's closet in Olivier's *Hamlet* (bottom; 1948).

Figure 17: Set of the Mouse Trap scene in *The Simpsons* (top) and set of the Mouse Trap scene in Olivier's *Hamlet* (bottom; 1948).

Figure 18: “Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow” monologues in *The Simpsons* (top) and Orson Welles’s *Macbeth* (bottom; 1948).

Figure 19: Macbeth's costume in *The Simpsons* (top) and *Macbeth* (bottom; 1948).

Figure 20: The Witches in *The Simpsons* (top) and *Macbeth* (bottom; 1948).

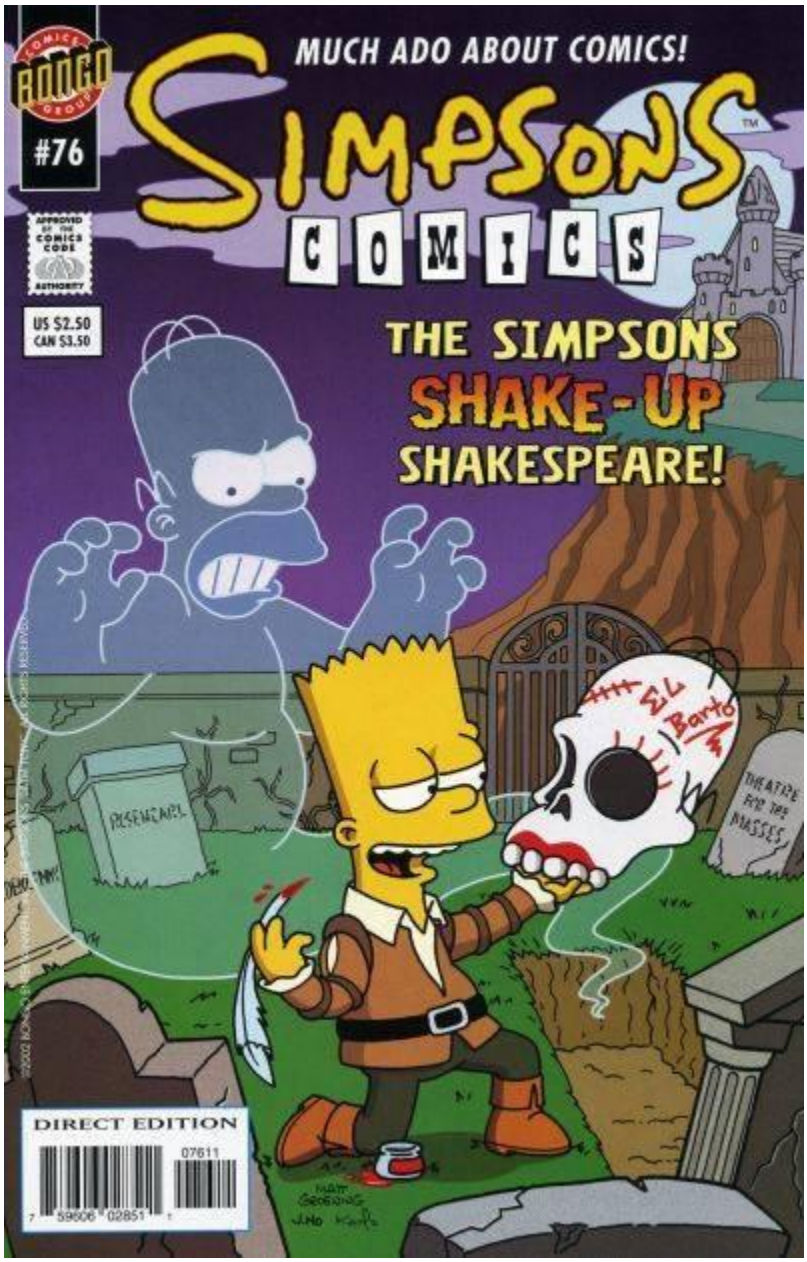

Figure 21: Cover of *The Simpsons Shake-up Shakespeare* (2002).

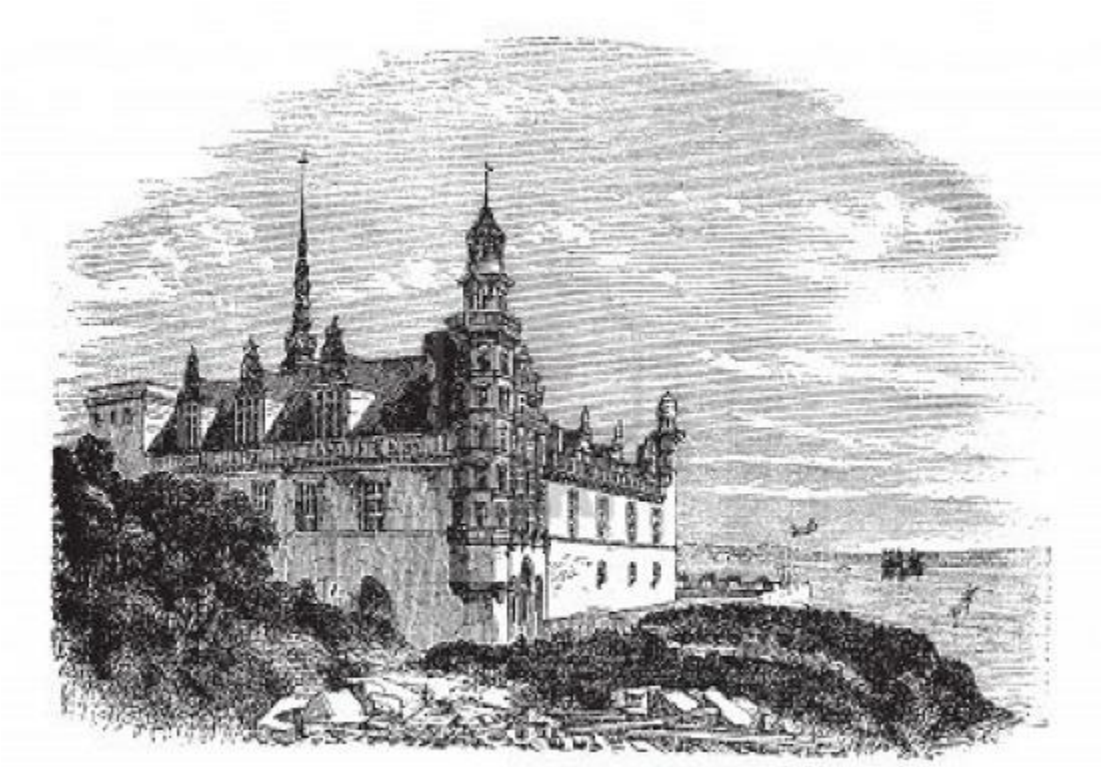

Figure 22: Castle Kronborg at Elsinore — the setting for *Hamlet* from Whittemore, Hank; "Lord Willoughby, Oxford's Brother-in-Law, at the Court of Denmark in Elsinore, the Setting for "Hamlet"." *Hank Whittemore's Shakespeare Blog*, 18 Aug. 2013, hankwhittemore.com/tag/kronborg-castle.

Figure 23: *Rage of Achilles* by
Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (left; 1757) and Ralph in *Bard-Boiled* (right; 2002).

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