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“Wherein I am false I am honest; not true, to be true” (IV.4.50): Updating Deleuze’s Crystal-image with Almereyda’s *Cymbeline*

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Résumé

Cet article propose une nouvelle manière d’aborder l’adaptation shakespearienne. Celle-ci est ici considérée comme une pratique esthétique dont le but est de tirer de nouvelles conclusions à partir de l’utilisation des machines épistémiques que sont les pièces de Shakespeare. Cette nouvelle manière de voir l’adaptation est le résultat d’une étude de cas, le *Cymbeline* de Michael Almereyda, lu comme point nodal entre la pièce, le film, mais encore un troisième terme crucial pour comprendre la stratégie d’adaptation mise en place : le concept d’image-cristal tel que théorisé par Gilles Deleuze. Au terme d’une analyse qui gagnerait à être complétée par l’étude de cas similaires, l’article affirme que l’adaptation shakespearienne remplit une fonction didactique. Grâce à des films tels que *Cymbeline*, l’adaptation rappelle au grand public que l’évolution des productions audiovisuelles a des conséquences sur la réception, tout en enseignant aux lecteurs de Deleuze que le moment est venu de mettre à jour leur vision du concept fondamental de l’image-cristal. Là où Deleuze nous incitait à voir le temps dans l’image-cristal, des adaptations comme celle d’Almereyda placent le passage du temps à l’origine d’une nécessaire *mise au point* sur cette même image-cristal.

Mots-Clés

image-cristal, faux, preuve visuelle, théorie de la réception, culture scopique.

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Texte intégral

In the conclusion to his 2011 book on *Gilles Deleuze's Philosophy of Time*, James Williams explains why he did not see fit to address Deleuze's works on film, *The Movement Image* (1983) and *The Time Image* (1985):

> First, the focus on the image is problematic. This is not due to the concept itself, since it has a careful elaboration notably in chapter III of *Difference and Repetition* and in Deleuze's works on Bergson. It is caused by the conflation of the philosophical use of image, where it stands for a necessary yet risk-laden restriction of intensity and ideas, and the cinematic image, where, however much we seek to expand it outside the screen, to the brain, to senses, to perception, to thought, we still retain screen images as the prompt, support and central reference for these wider processes. This means that representation retains some of its force over the formal metaphysics developed in the earlier works on the philosophy of time. [1]

In this article, I will use Shakespearean adaptation to contradict Williams' reading of the irrelevance of Deleuze's works on film in the context of his philosophy of time. My case study, Michael Almereyda's version of *Cymbeline* (2014), will serve to demonstrate the force of representations over, or at least as a complement to, more formal metaphysics, especially where the complex relationship between time and the image is concerned. I will consider Almereyda's adaptation as a reflection on, and even a furthering of, Deleuze's

philosophy of images and time. In particular, I will show how Almereyda's adaptation of *Cymbeline* mobilizes *and updates* Deleuze's famous concept of the crystal-image, "the indivisible unity of the virtual image and the actual image". [2]

Admittedly, this approach goes against the grain of adaptation studies. Indeed, while there is nothing pioneering about the use of Deleuze in the context of studying film (which makes it technically possible to apply his concepts to all types of films, including those based on literature or drama), claiming that adaptation casts a new light on Deleuze may sound counterintuitive. On first thought, given Almereyda's focus on the power of images obtained by new media, which was duly noted in the film's reviews, [3] it might seem more consistent to study what results from the director's Deleuzian angle on the play — or perhaps to see the film as an illustration of Deleuze's image-related concepts. Yet this preconception regarding the link between adaptation and theory comes with a methodological problem. Deleuze coined the concept "crystal-image" with film in mind, so that applying it to adaptation may seem to be a way of avoiding to tackle the play, for chronological reasons. With this approach, in other words, the notion of the crystal-image may seem misplaced at best, and at worst irrelevant. Far from ignoring this issue, my aim in this paper is to take a fresh perspective, by offering a new framework for the study of adaptation that proves the relevance of implementing concepts from (in our case, French) theory, although they are ulterior to Shakespeare, and even though they originally belong in film theory *as* philosophy. To that effect, I will focus less on the adaptation's inclusion of new media and older media, [4] even though I agree with Douglas Lanier that the film focuses on "the effects of media on youth culture (in this case, social media)", [5] than on what the updates included in the film teach us about the evolution of media and their impact on the notion of "truth." To make this point, I will operate a distinction between applying theory to Shakespearean adaptation and showing that Shakespearean adaptation, as a practice, brings up a number of concepts, recontextualizes them, questions their consistency, and suggests some possible revisions for the matching theories.

Fabricating Evidence in *Cymbeline*: An Overview of Almereyda's Adaptation Strategy

I chose Almereyda's *Cymbeline* due to the film's emphasis on the notion of visual evidence, which it treats from the perspective of contemporary screen culture. The adaptation focuses mainly on the play's scenes that present the origins of Posthumus's jealousy. In the play, the character is sent away from Cymbeline's kingdom, and consequently from

Cymbeline's daughter Imogen, whom he married in secret. While away, he meets an Italian villain, Iachimo, who undertakes to prove that Imogen is unfaithful, after hearing praise of her beauty and moral standards, both of which are supposedly superior to those of all other women. They engage in a bet, and Iachimo goes to Imogen, intent on seducing her and thus winning the wager. Even more so than the play, at least where quantity of diegetic time is concerned, the film insists on Iachimo's forging of misleading evidence, with the assistance of all manners of new media (a mobile phone and iPad, mainly). In its first half, the adaptation focuses on how easy it is for Iachimo to use digitally produced visual evidence so as to make Posthumus believe that Imogen is cheating on him (and, to a lesser extent, vice versa). Iachimo first seeks to convince Imogen that Posthumus is in a relationship with another woman by showing her, on his iPad, pictures of her lover looking very close to a lady. Iachimo then implies that Posthumus is living a loose life in the company of other women. Of course, Imogen seems horrified when confronted with the photos. Not until Iachimo suggests she get her revenge by sleeping with him does she threaten to call the King her father for help, causing Iachimo to clap hands and pretend he had tried to hit on her in order to test her fidelity on behalf of Posthumus. Still, the part of the text from the play that is kept does not include the lines in which Imogen reaffirms her faith in her husband's love (I.6), which shrouds her motivations in doubt. The scene from the film, indeed, shows her angry at Iachimo because he tried to sleep with her, but does not clearly express that she does not believe the evidence he produces to be in the least truthful.

Imogen's uncertainty about the photos has to do with the inclusion of visual evidence in the form of digital pictures, where Iachimo, in the play, has nothing to use as proof but his smooth speaking of downright lies. [6] The pictures, although Iachimo later reveals that they were photoshopped to include Posthumus instead of his friend Philario, indicate no wrongdoing at all: Posthumus is just sharing a glass of wine with a young woman, so that it seems that the pictures might have made Imogen equally jealous had she seen them on her lover's Facebook page — that is, if he had indeed owned one, which is not the case in the film. The convincing power of the pictures, then, seems relegated in the fact of photoshopping, rather than in the pictures themselves. Since Imogen refuses his assaults, Iachimo sets out to win the bet differently. He introduces himself in Imogen's apartments, hiding in a box he has asked her to look after overnight. Going out of the box after bedtime, he lies close to Imogen, robs her of her bracelet while she sleeps, takes close-up pictures of the mole on one of her breasts, and even a selfie of the two of them lying next to each other, he awake, she asleep. Later on, going back to Posthumus, he manages to convince him that Imogen is indeed unfaithful, based on the evidence of the bracelet and the pictures.

The selfie trick may sound clever. Nevertheless, Michael Almereyda's adaptation of *Cymbeline* received many negative reviews, most of which criticized his insistence on new technology as far-fetched, notably in its implications. In her article for the *Los Angeles Times*, for instance, Betsy Sharkey describes the film as "a mash-up of social media shortcomings and Shakespearean tragedy that becomes as much a tale of cinematic ambition gone awry as anything the Bard intended". [7] In his two-star review for the site RogerEbert.com, Peter Sobczynski is even harsher with the director on his choice of emphasis: "the focus on the test of Imogen's fidelity just does not make any sense in this revised context and makes Posthumus seem silly rather than tragic." [8]

The questions and criticisms the film raised revolve around the director's use of new media, and in particular photographic evidence. Such critical consensus points to the necessity of studying adaptation from the perspective of evolving reception patterns. For almost all the reviewers of the film, indeed, this is primarily where and how it fails to be a decent adaptation. Yet while it is difficult not to agree with the fact that Posthumus seems "silly rather than tragic", another thing is for certain — that critics of the film empathize with viewers by claiming they belong to a media-savvy community that knows better about the connection between selfies, iPads, and evidence. The implicit conclusion is that no one but Posthumus would be fooled by such evidence, which seems to mean that growing awareness of the fake, while making the adaptation of *Cymbeline* immediately obsolete, has become a natural defense against the deceiving power of images (including that of a Shakespeare adaptation).

Methodological Framework: Shakespearean Adaptation *as* Theory

The film thus triggered a stable response in viewers and critics (negative appraisal), yet this response was grounded in a consideration of what makes fabricated visual evidence convincing or not (in our case, rather not — a conclusion that still indicates, by contrast, what might make the fake powerful again). This suggests that while the film awkwardly (over)focuses on the construction of fake visual evidence (by Posthumus), it mainly probes the reception of the evidence (a naïve type of reception by Posthumus and Imogen, triggering an educated reception in its viewers). By introducing the crystal-image as a concept designed to better understand the changes suffered by our conception of visual evidence, the next sections seek to reassess not only this verdict of irrelevance, but also the preconception of superior media literacy that motivates it.

The rest of the present article thus introduces an alternative methodology for studying Shakespearean adaptation (and probably literary adaptation as a whole). To clarify what the methodology is and what it has to offer, I use comparisons with studies of the film conducted in more traditional fashion and enhance the differences, particularly where the conclusions brought by various analytical methods are concerned. Given my case study, it is all the more convenient as scholarly articles devoted to Michael Almereyda's adaptation of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* are not numerous (which may be related to the film's poor reviews, combined with the still widespread fallacy according to which all good adaptations are also critically acclaimed, whether as adaptations or just as films). I have found just two articles on the topic written by academics, both of which will be used as points of comparison. As the second one mobilizes the study of new media to make better sense of Almereyda's film, in ways that evoke the notion of the crystal-image without the concept being credited, I will refer to it in a specific section where I explain that my own understanding of media diverges, which allows me to mobilize media differently, and with an alternative outcome in mind.

In his article published in the edited volume *Shakespeare on Screen: The Tempest and Late Romances*, Douglas Lanier describes the film as "the end of teen Shakespeare". [9] For Lanier, who does not pay specific attention to the problem of deception or of the fake in the context of the adaptation — except by referring adequately to the emphasis on "selfies (…) a strategy that changes significantly the dynamic of Shakespeare's text" [10] — Almereyda's work on the playwright expresses the end of the Shakespeare teen movie trend. His reading, therefore, is mostly generic, and focuses on the evolution of a Shakespearean film subcategory.

I wish to offer a radically different approach to the notion of Shakespeare on film, and even to the practice of film adaptation *per se*. Indeed, rather than analyzing the evolution of Shakespearean adaptations generically, I seek to produce a different method, where adaptation defies filmic categories, because it focuses, as an apparatus, on other types of categories — in our case, truth and falsehood. My argument is that Shakespeare adaptations can be read out of all contexts — whether the source work or the target is concerned. This way, Lanier's issue with the "realism" of the cinematic medium, accounting for its inadequacy to adapt *Cymbeline*, and especially the alienation effects that overcrowd its ending, become a non-issue. The same way as "realism" and "Brechtian" are obviously contextually inadequate attributes to characterize the play, they can be considered of little use to understand the modes of its presence on film. Indeed, while it is undoubtedly crucial to describe an adaptation with the adequate generic label in order to understand the evolution of the adaptation, it may be inadequate for whoever

seeks to gauge the persistence of Shakespeare's play, on but also, one might say, despite the screen.

This does not mean that adaptation is taken out of context here. Nevertheless, I introduce context differently, to convey that a cultural environment accounts for a specific level of belief or disbelief in beings or things that are materialized visually. Or, to put it simply, I handle context neither as the production context of the source, nor as the production context of the adaptation, but as a diachronically evolving element that informs the changing reception of "the play," as it is placed on a transmedia continuum — the play moves from one mediation to another in time, but its migrations may be uncorrelated with alterations in patterns of perception and reception. In other words: despite any film director's best efforts at trying to "keep", "preserve", or "transpose" the meaning of the source work, their attempts might be ruined for lack of taking into account that reception patterns are different from one medium to the next and keep changing over time. Conversely, acknowledging the fact of unstable reception patterns when studying film adaptation makes it possible to study adaptations of "the source", where the source is considered as an evolving work whose meaning series of adapters have sought to keep stable, rather than as one specific type of source set in a very specific context, leading to a very precise type of adaptation, itself set in a very precise context. It dispenses with many issues connected to adaptation studies, commencing with fidelity and preservation, to focus on how it might be possible for an adaptation to cope with what cannot be preserved.

The asset of this new methodology is twofold. First, it might make it easier for scholars to understand some reconstructions of plays by Shakespeare on film by ascribing them to the necessity of coping with cultural changes, which sometimes materializes in the form of new alternative reception patterns. Second, and at the other end of the spectrum, it may enable scholars to use adaptations of Shakespeare in order to reconsider some overarching aesthetic issues relating to the construction and perception of the visible, by selecting moments in the transmedia continuum to make sense of an ontological evolution. In this case, the nature of the restructuring of the play is not informed by an aesthetic context, but the other way round — a Shakespeare play, toying as they all do with belief and disbelief, truth and falsehood, reflexivity and realism, as those problems are at the very core of drama, is a landmark that becomes stable enough (because it preserves some aspects that make Shakespeare's play identifiable despite perceptible changes) to inform evolutions in our aesthetic context. This is what I will seek to demonstrate here, using Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* as an epistemic machine whose evolving modes of existence (including but not limited to the cinema) help clarify the nature of the current issues of the fake, and of post-truth, considered by some to be the main problems of the

21st century, but also question the notion that the resulting popularity of fact-checking is its solution.

Almereyda's *Cymbeline* and the "Dangers of New Media" Label

This is not to say that the traditional method for studying adaptation, based on how it works to update a play, has become fruitless. Such a conclusion would be biased, even in the case of a film that seems so concerned with new media as to seem very remote from Shakespeare. The idea is to introduce a methodology for studying adaptation that will produce a new kind of conclusion, which may complement studies following a more traditional methodological framework.

In this category, one finds Maurizio Calbi's 2018 study of the film *Cymbeline* as an adaptation to the current media context, entitled "'Fear No More': Gender Politics and the 'Hell' of New Media Technologies in Michael Almereyda's *Cymbeline*". On the question of media-provided ocular proof, in the film, Calbi writes:

> As the scene [in which Iachimo takes pictures of Imogen's body as she sleeps] progresses, we are made to understand that the photographic image generated through new media technologies *is* the thing itself; that the image *supplements* (in a Derridean sense) whatever rhetorical and narrative skills Iachimo displays throughout the movie. For instance, as he takes a photograph of Imogen's "left breast" with its "mole cinque-spotted" (37-38), we realize that it is the *image itself* that functions as "a voucher, / Stronger than ever law could make" (39-40); that what is "riveted, / Screw'd to [Iachimo's] memory" (43-44) is nothing but what is stored in his cellphone's memory. [11]

This occurs in the context of an opposition between new media and older media, which Calbi analyzes in terms of how they correspond to character types in the film. According to him, Imogen lives in a world of archaic media, as exemplified in shots when she is seen near a TV set and "against the background of an Old Master painting with hounds hunting a stag". [12] This stands in contrast with the villain Iachimo's media practices, since the character is shown to be well-equipped with "prosthetic devices", but also presented as a media-savvy type of manipulator. In other words, as exemplified in the scene referred to above, and even more so in the scene where Iachimo exploits the pictures he has collected to convince Posthumus that Imogen has been cheating on him, his jealousy-inducing power results from his knowledge of the power images acquire when they are

disconnected from their source. Indeed, as Calbi rightly notices, “what is striking about the scene in which Iachimo is supposed to ‘make’t apparent / That [he has] tasted [Imogen] in her bed’ (II.4.56-57) is that we never see the photographs he has taken”. [13] The alleged evidence value of surveillance images, the result of seeing unseen combined with the capturing power of small-sized camera, is enough to plant jealousy in the mind of Posthumus. In other words, deceit, present here as the induction of jealousy out of nothing, is only credible in our media-saturated world when someone who uses new media technologies without thinking twice is manipulated by a character who understands new media technologies very well. In a way not dissimilar from Shakespeare’s plot, the idea is to induce a misperception of a scene/picture as evidence of the real, or at least as indexically connected to the real, when the scene/image is not what it might seem to be. The difference posited by Almereyda, one might say, is that deceit is credible when a media-savvy character uses to the full the deceiving power of images, on the one hand, but also, on the other hand, and even more importantly, is able to tap into the other characters’ belief in the power of images to supervise reality, and provide godlike knowledge as a result. When the second element, which has to do with reception patterns scattered by new media technology, is dispensed with, a benevolent character is not duped, but a character is seen as stupid enough to believe in an illusion. It is, of course, far more clever and insightful to present Posthumus not as naïve or easily convinced, but as subjected to the widespread belief that, with cell phones, tablets and web cams everywhere, cheating on one’s partner never goes unnoticed, and that therefore, in a very widespread logical fallacy, people’s cell phones, tablets and computers are chock-full of evidence of adultery (wrongdoing, lying, and so forth).

Calbi’s conclusion is equally interesting and convincing. To him, the film’s finale “suggests that ‘Shakespeare’ is a complex textual ensemble that can be inherited and become an ally against mainstream cinema, and perhaps against new media technologies, only if it is forced to go through a process of multiple transformations and migrations”. [14] New media technologies, because they are included in the film, question the place of Shakespeare’s play in current culture, determine the evolution of its meaning, and bear the marks of the necessity for the play to evolve, in keeping with changing social and cultural contexts. [15] It is obviously a very good and adequate conclusion, crowning a very convincing analysis of the film as an adaptation of *Cymbeline*. Consequently, rather than seeking to contradict these conclusions, I propose here, as a complement, to use the play in order to draw conclusions about the fake, how its relation to truth is impacted by new media technology, and the import of the evolution of our scopic culture in the process.

“What is it to be false?” Reconsidering the Fake through Shakespearean Adaptation

In his book chapter on the film, Lanier evokes an anecdote concerning actor Ethan Hawke (Iachimo). For the purposes of shooting the film, Hawke took a picture of actress Dakota Johnson (Imogen) with his own mobile phone. He kept it on the device, and Hawke’s wife mistook the picture for what it was not (evidence of adultery), until the film revealed the photo’s true story. As in real life, Hawke’s wife browsed through his phone to spy on him, so that the anecdote, for Lanier, “underlines the selfie’s power”. [16] To me, this is a slight misreading of the connection between the film and social media. Hawke did not hide the selfie (he had nothing to hide, and the film was still to be released, eventually proving him innocent of the supposedly adulterous selfie, if need be). And in the film, Imogen did not scan through Posthumus’s phone, nor look in Iachimo’s: it was Iachimo who showed Posthumus the selfie, embedding it in a narrative that gave its fake meaning for Imogen to hear. What the film illustrates, therefore, is less the power of the selfie itself than the power of fake images, and the fact that their power comes from their ability to serve as evidence of almost anything, provided the so-called proof is given in the right context, and accompanied by the right words.

Mainly, therefore, it is the connection between fake evidence and new media on which the film focuses, in ways that have consequences in real life. In the adaptation of *Cymbeline* by Michael Almereyda, then, the notion of truth, connected as it is, in the play, with the notion of visual evidence, appears to be shattered by the appearance of new media. Indeed, as Maurizio Calbi rightly explains in his article, basing his argument on a related one by Lanier, the film processes an anxiety generated by new media, and expresses concern with their ability to “open up a bi-directional, potentially reversible process of visual inscription that relativizes any form of ‘truth,’ a process whereby each and every form of visual rendition of the ‘truth,’ including Iachimo’s true ‘report’ about Posthumus on his iPad, remains haunted by opacity, by its own dark, uncanny shadow”. [17] I would like to take this reading further, by describing in greater detail the kind of dichotomy between media types that Almereyda introduces, first of all, and then by showing that rather than just exploiting new media in order to deceive other, more naïve, characters, Iachimo exploits the dichotomy. As I will show, he does so in order to generate a dysfunctional reception pattern that is essential to his deceiving power, by placing the characters he seeks to manipulate in the position of perceiving the productions of new media through the reception pattern of older media. In so doing, I seek to place higher emphasis on the reception angle of adaptation, and also to further focus on the consequences of adaptation on our understanding of the impact of

new media on truth. As indicated in the title to this section, I will consider the film as a tentative answer to the question Imogen rhetorically asks when confronted with supposed evidence that she cheated on Posthumus. “What is it to be false?” she asks the audience, members of which are well aware that the evidence she is presented with is fake, so that the question has more to do with falsehood as a product of faking than with adultery. In other words, it might read as an invitation to consider the current blurring of the threshold between truth and falsehood, the eternal question of fiction that the director seeks to reconsider and ask again through his film.

It is all relative, she seems to indicate with her question, reminding the audience/viewers that truth and falsehood have always been subjective notions. And indeed, in the play, Imogen is only false to Posthumus because the latter gets convinced she is, while the audience perceives her as absolutely faithful. Provocatively, but also for the purpose of studying the stakes of the adaptation, I would suggest here that the dichotomy is a matter of “mediation”. In fact, Posthumus’s conviction that Imogen is untrue to him is the result of Iachimo’s mediation — he acted as a go-between and interfered with the truth. By comparison, the audience’s perception of Imogen as faithful is unmediated by any other character in the play. It is only mediated by the specific regime of drama. I thus wish to pose at the outset that this type of mediation, which could be equated within certain limits with a form of subjectivity, is transposed in the adaptation under the form of what Calbi calls “media”, and that it informs not only the nature of Iachimo’s deceit, but also what constitutes the deceiving power of new media. The film thus teaches how to handle media beyond the naïve, although popular, principle according to which all information needs to be fact checked.

The type of mediation Posthumus uses and seems to trust is described by Calbi as old-fashioned. I would say that it is pragmatic, and even pedestrian — which is, of course, deeply ironic for a character whose very name suggests that one is not necessarily dead who seems to be so. The type of media Posthumus consumes and exploits do not have to be “old”, let alone “archaic”, merely because Iachimo uses so-called “new media”. Taking a closer look at the character in the adaptation, it is worth noticing that Posthumus seems to consider that what is truthful is necessarily characterized by a tangible degree of connection with the real. Reliable evidence is characterized by the imprint of the real, as demonstrated in his woodcut of death and the maiden, which he uses as a kind of stamp, covering it in ink to, literally, print the picture on paper and send it to Imogen. The picture, an addition to the play featured at the beginning of the film, may not be faithful to what he and Imogen look like, but it does not make it unrealistic as a result. The characters have indeed likened themselves before to the image of death and the maiden, so that the printout reads as a representation of their love. The displacement here introduced by

representation does not alter the realism of the picture, at least according to Posthumus — what was carved out of wood then printed literally bears the stamp of its author, and Posthumus has no doubt that the picture will be received as his by Imogen, and that the message will get through. “Fear no more”, it says, because the characters have found a way of exchanging truths in the form of representations they both trust and understand (one characterized by older forms of mediation). With this picture, their love is unique and eternal, and they have nothing to fear from the outside world, as nothing can disrupt their trust in each other.

Nevertheless, resorting to the manipulation power of new media is not enough to make the plot development convincing. After all, one might wonder, who would believe that their partner is having an affair without considering the possibility for pictures to have been stolen (along with the bracelet) or altered? In our media-savvy age, viewers are also likely to consider that the picture of a nude body part may have been taken by Imogen herself, to be sent as a kind of teaser to her lover while they were away from each other, and that it was stolen from her phone by Iachimo. Yet what saves the plot from appearing to be flimsy in the end is the fact that neither Imogen nor Posthumus are frantic mobile phone users. As seen before, they rely on older forms of mediation, and, one might add, on more direct forms of communication. This is what makes them susceptible to easily fall prey to the kind of fabricated evidence Iachimo has to offer. In other words, their gullibility is only explained by their deliberate ignorance of new media practices (which given their age and environment in the film, may seem far-fetched anyway). What results from this is a pattern of deceit based on the discrepancy between the expectation of a certain type of media by Posthumus which, even if it is not very well-conducted, works brilliantly because the other two characters receive evidence through the lens of older media.

The dichotomy is between indexical media and digital media. Posthumus communicates through productions that bear the stamp of the real. Consequently, he just needs Iachimo’s ocular proof to seemingly be physically connected with the real to believe it is evidence of wrongdoing, because this is the only pattern for receiving evidence he seems to be familiar with. Even the communication of the photographs is old-fashioned. Posthumus uses his skateboard, rolling it across a low table so Iachimo can lay his iPad on it, in a mixture of direct transmission and digital communication (with anybody else, Iachimo could just have sent the pictures through a cell phone). The trick, therefore, is less in the photograph itself than in the mode of transmission, and in the mode of its reception by Posthumus.

Once the trick has worked, the same reading applies to the dichotomy between being really dead and being falsely dead. In the log cabin, after being rescued by Belarius and his ‘sons’, Arviragus and Guiderius, (they are, in fact, Cymbeline’s sons, kidnapped in infancy

and raised by Belarius), Imogen feels unwell and decides to drink the medicine she got from Cymbeline's henchman Pissanio. She does not know that the medicine is in fact poison. The same type of beverage as the one Juliet drinks in *Romeo and Juliet*, it makes her seem to be dead for a limited amount of time. Believing her to have passed away, Belarius, Arviragus and Guiderius bury her with the headless corpse of Cloten, the Queen's son, without checking for signs of life. Again, the illusion works literally like a charm. In the film, this might be explained by the fact that Belarius and his sons live in a log cabin, with an old-fashioned television as their only media device: their regime of belief is that of televised reality, and they seem conditioned to believe that TV gives the news, and that whatever appears on TV is true. As pedestrian media users, they only need to see someone looking dead to believe he or she is dead. Later, when Imogen wakes up next to Cloten's headless corpse, she believes it to be Posthumus's body just because Cloten had stolen Posthumus's T-shirt. The physical trace of the real is 'evidence' that it is Posthumus who is really dead, as the bracelet and the physical characteristic (the mole on her breast) were evidence enough, for Posthumus, that Imogen had become physically involved with Iachimo. And so, in the end, Posthumus is posthumous more than by name: in the eyes of Imogen, he is indeed resurrected. This adaptation then reads as the perfect complement to Almereyda's older *Hamlet*, where media created omnipresent ghosts, thus leading viewers to reconsider the meaning of the "to be or not to be" soliloquy in the light of the power of new media to erase the threshold between life and death (with pictures, films, holograms, and whatnot). Here, the creation of artificial death is just as easy, because some characters consume even the basest products of new media through the reception pattern of indexical media, thus neglecting the possibility of faking images, be it only by quoting them out of context. The reason I am referring to the other Shakespearean adaptation by Almereyda is to present his second adaptation as a way to further construct an analysis of the power of new media and how to counter it, as spectators, for instance by learning the lessons from such films as *Hamlet* (2000) *Cymbeline* (2014), or *Marjorie Prime* (2017). [18] As a result, the adaptation is less a modernization of Shakespeare's play than an update of the play's questioning of the basic difference between truth and falsehood, the terms of which have dramatically evolved because of the spread of new media. To try to characterize this evolution thanks to Shakespeare, I will now try to use the best known philosophy of the deceiving power of images, Deleuze's conception of the crystal-image, and see how reasoning with the adaptation of *Cymbeline* can lead to revise some of the French theorist's major tenets.

Seeing through the Crystal-Image

Iachimo's version of the crystal-image — the digital picture taken and shown on an iPad — is only believable for viewers who take into account the fact that Posthumus and Imogen perceive the digital image with the standards and criteria of analogical audiovisual media. This means that the verisimilitude of the ploy is directly correlated to the evolution of media, and more specifically, to small discrepancies between the state of the productions of some media and the slightly outdated reception of those productions by some characters. The film thus shows, through its new plot development, that the crystal-image is not the ultimate form of the fake as such. It takes a specific type of reception of the image for it to be powerfully and durably deceitful. This conclusion brings nothing new to Deleuze's conception of the crystal-image, at least in appearance. Indeed, as Barry Nevin explains,

> Whereas virtual images-souvenir and images-rêve enter into broad, dilated circuits with actual images, this actual — virtual circuit is contracted within the image-cristal (crystal-image), which presents us with 'the bifaced image, actual and virtual at the same time.' According to Deleuze, a perfect crystal of time eternally juxtaposes the actual image (the present image) with the virtual (a potentially coexisting image located in the past). [19]

In the film, the uncertainty is crucial to the concept of the crystal-image, especially since the misperception of images is correlated to an (implicit) time gap. Indeed, Deleuze surmises, 'the present is the actual image, and its contemporaneous past is the virtual image.' [20] One level of reading of the phrase, with regard to the adaptation, is that Iachimo's digital pictures contain the possibility of adultery as a virtuality. This reading, however, is simplistic. Indeed, while it is true that in the film, Iachimo's new-media evidence cannot be told from what is supposed to have virtually happened in the past (in one case, Posthumus having an affair with a dark-haired woman, in the other, Iachimo sleeping with Imogen), this type of evidence is only deemed reliable by Posthumus. It follows from this singling out of the character that Posthumus must be seen as unable to tell the virtual past presented in the picture from evidence of actual wrongdoing bound to have repercussions on the present. This character trait may be a way for the director of the film to adapt Posthumus's lack of discernment in the play. Indeed, when Iachimo tries to convince Imogen that her husband is having affairs while he is away, he accuses him, although implicitly, of not being able to see the difference between the excellence and beauty Imogen personifies and the sluttery of the prostitutes he allegedly sleeps with (I.6.39-46). Later in the play, when presented with Imogen's bracelet and the detailed description of the mole on her breast, Posthumus jumps to the conclusion that she slept with Iachimo, and evidences the lack of discernment which the villain had noticed about him.

For the viewers of the film, however, and despite the fact that he is presented with actual evidence rather than with the description of the ocular proof Iachimo supposedly obtained, the character's reaction seems to deliberately lack verisimilitude. Once again, this may just be a way of adapting the play's deliberate artificiality, which scholars have considered to serve a reflexive purpose, especially where the illusory power of drama is concerned. [21] Questions of distance and proximity from the eye, and how they affect the truth value of what is perceived, abound in the play as well as more or less explicit references to perspectives, and they build up a notion of increasing undecidability between that which exists and that which does not, whether facts (Posthumus cheating on Imogen or not) or beings are concerned (Posthumus being dead rather than asleep as Imogen mistakes his headless body, details of which she should be able to identify as he himself knows her body up to the most intimate detail on her breast). [22] As a result, visual evidence is presented as relative, and untrustworthy, especially as a pathway to truth. In the film, however, the inclusion of images shown in close-ups on screen and to be used as evidence impacts the meaning of visual relativity as it is presented in the play. In Almereyda's adaptation, the uncertainty is not exclusively presented through the characters of Posthumus and Imogen, who easily fall into the trap of the fake. The uncertainty, rather, operates at the level of the viewers, who may realize how unbelievably easy it is for Iachimo to fool the other characters thanks to digital images, even if they are overabundant in our society, and even if their power to deceive has become proverbial.

One should recall that, for Deleuze, crystal-images combine the real and the imaginary to the point of making it impossible for any perceiving entity to tell one from the other. Still, the power of the crystal-image seems to lie at least as much in the nature of the image itself as in the limited power of perception of the receiver. This seems to indicate that a more educated reception of the image could one day expose them as fake, thereby destroying their illusory power from within the very heart of the construction/reception pattern. This possibility is considered by Deleuze himself when he characterizes perceptual mistakes:

> The crystal-image, or crystalline description, has two definite sides which are not to be confused. For the confusion of the real and the imaginary is a simple error of fact, and does not affect their discernibility: the confusion is produced solely "in someone's head". [23]

If being mistaken about the fake results from the confusion between the real and imaginary aspects of the image, truth is defined by the ability to tell the real from the imaginary. The nuance Deleuze introduces here is crucial, and it resonates with the new developments introduced in the *Cymbeline* adaptation, which in turn reverberates on Deleuze's key

concept. What makes the fake powerful is not that it proves able to generate confusion between the real and the imaginary. It is in fact its ability to generate a state of uncertainty, characterized by the inability to tell the real from the imaginary, so that the imaginary must be considered to be possibly real, and *vice versa*, and this constantly.

In the film, Imogen and Posthumus are obviously mistaken by Iachimo's fabrication of digital visual evidence. The purpose is for the viewer to become aware of the two aspects of the image, as an effect of acknowledging Posthumus and Imogen's mistake, and also to take full measure of consequences of this mistake by ascribing it to an obsolescent reception pattern. Another consequence of the process of adapting Shakespeare can be put in slightly grandiloquent terms, if one borrows Deleuze's own phrase: by forcing viewers to tell between the two aspects of the image, the film creates "truthful men". [24]

Conclusion

Through Shakespeare, Almereyda suggests that, as the indexical function of photographic images becomes dispensable, the fake becomes *deeper*, more actual and less virtual, as it further erases the threshold between being and not being, dying and *sleeping no more*. Materializing Shakespeare's perceptual proofs by turning them into images displayed by specific objects is therefore all but cosmetic. [25] It is even more than an update: the inclusion of digital (and to a lesser extent analogical) images misperceived as objective reveals an unexpected collusion between Deleuze and Shakespeare. I do not mean by this that Almereyda's film is a Deleuzian adaptation. I argue, rather, that thanks to filmic adaptation, Almereyda conjures Shakespeare to update Deleuze's notion of the crystal-image. To recycle Deleuze's own phrase: the adaptation is an actual image that contains its own past (the previous and the possible versions of *Cymbeline*) as a virtuality that cannot be told from it. This view helps solve an ancient debate (how can one tell a film is a Shakespeare adaptation rather than just Shakespearian, or an allusion to Shakespeare?). The adaptation is and is not Shakespeare: it cannot be differentiated from versions past in which Imogen and Posthumus were just as easily fooled by Iachimo, yet with different tricks. Or rather, all the possible and actual versions of the play in the past contribute to making *this* present version relevant — as epitomized in the nature of Iachimo's fabrication, in a form of *mise en abyme*, the deception power of digital images is irrelevant without the previous stage (analogical reproduction) as a virtuality. Similarly, Iachimo's manipulation is convincing only because it also virtually belongs to the past, as per the outdated reception of iPad evidence by Posthumus and Imogen.

In other words, the adaptation rekindles the philosophical/ontological power of the concept of the crystal-image (the crystals are seen in the film's last shot). As such, it questions the possibility for adaptations to exist in a specific scopic regime, showing, conversely, that the meaning of an adapted work is subjected to the evolution of our perceptual culture. Even further: in the case of Almereyda's film (and it is what makes his work stand out among other scopic adaptations), the very process of adapting Shakespeare triggers a reconsideration of our scopic regimes, and especially of how swift and barely perceptible evolutions affect our reception of images, with potentially alarming consequences on broader conceptions such as the fake/true binary opposition. Almereyda's *Cymbeline* operates by showing that we tend, as a sensational-driven society, to exaggerate the power of the fake, as other societies have done before, thus reproducing a cultural trend that has existed at least since Plato. This is the case because we consider the power of the fake, especially in the visual realm, to reside in the object. Currently, this is instantiated with media reports about the disastrous consequences of the multiplication of deep fakes (the grafting of someone's face onto a video, which allows for, for instance, the creation of clips in which anyone can be made to say anything, unbelievable though what they say may sound). What the adaptation teaches us or reminds us, thanks to Shakespeare, is that the power of the fake lies in an undecidable reception, which means, on the one hand, that is not ingrained in images of any type, and, on the other hand, that the multiplication of decision processes can, over time, make what was not decidable again, until newly fake and powerful image types appear. In fact, it is almost obvious, watching the adaptation of *Cymbeline*, that the next generation of twenty-year-olds, for instance Posthumus and Imogen's children, will not be fooled by Iachimo — let alone our generation as viewers — because they will be able to tell that Iachimo's pictures are taken out of context or might have been tampered with. In other words, they will have the keys to decide not to consider that they could possibly be real, the same as we should soon be able to tell deep fakes from real videos (be it thanks to machines or otherwise). This means that such an adaptation as Almereyda's teaches us about the delays or lags in the evolution of some scopic culture. Deleuze speaks of "seeing" time in the image-crystal. [26] With his adaptation, Almereyda goes even further. The director puts the play in motion to help us consider the effect of time on how and what we see. His *Cymbeline* reminds us that educating our gaze to the evolution of visual productions and adapting our reception to shifting patterns is at least as important for the future as the faith currently being placed in fact checking by others than oneself.

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Notes

[1] James Williams, *Gilles Deleuze's Philosophy of Time: A Critical Introduction and Guide*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2011, p. 160.

[2] Donato Totaro, "Gilles Deleuze's Bergsonian Film Project: Part 2," *Offscreen*, no. 3 (March 1999), https://offscreen.com/view/bergson2.

[3] See for instance Betsy Sharkey, "Review: 'Cymbeline' in the Instagram Age; an Intriguing Idea That Misses," *Los Angeles Times*, March 13, 2015, https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-et-mn-cymbeline-review-20150313-column.html; Peter Sobczynski, "Cymbeline Movie Review & Film Summary (2015) | Roger Ebert," https://www.rogerebert.com/, accessed July 27, 2020, https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/cymbeline-2015.

[4] Which Lanier describes as “lo-fi and handmade”. Douglas Lanier, “Almereyda’s Cymbeline: The End of Teen Shakespeare”, in Sarah Hatchuel & Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin (eds.), *Shakespeare on Screen: The Tempest and Late Romances*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017, p. 232-250, p. 241.

[5] Ibid., p. 234.

[6] According to Lanier (ibid., p. 240), Shakespeare’s Iachimo “depends on his storytelling skills” much more than in the film. While I agree that the power of the image is emphasized, however, Almereyda does not substitute images for narrative skills, without which Iachimo’s evidence in the film would sound even less consistent, along with Imogen’s reaction.

[7] Betsy Sharkey, “Review: ‘Cymbeline’ in the Instagram Age; an Intriguing Idea That Misses,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 13, 2015, https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-et-mn-cymbeline-review-20150313-column.html.

[8] Peter Sobczynski, “Cymbeline Movie Review & Film Summary (2015)”, https://www.rogerebert.com/, accessed July 27, 2020, https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/cymbeline-2015.

[9] Douglas Lanier, op. cit. His chapter’s full title is “Almereyda’s Cymbeline: The End of Teen Shakespeare”.

[10] Ibid., p. 240.

[11] Maurizio Calbi, “‘Fear No More’: Gender Politics and the ‘Hell’ of New Media Technologies in Michael Almereyda’s Cymbeline,” Actes des Congrès de La Société Française Shakespeare, no. 36 (January 22, 2018), p. 10. https://doi.org/10.4000/shakespeare.4040.

[12] Ibid., p. 4.

[13] Ibid., p. 11.

[14] Ibid., p. 12

[15] Calbi also examines Almereyda’s introduction of gender-related issues in keeping with the film’s use of new media, as if a decent Shakespeare adaptation should be a tribute to the playwright’s ability to condense, in a play, most of the main problems of his time, and

as if, consequently, the role of Shakespeare adaptations was systematically to prove over and over again that Shakespeare remains “our contemporary”, to paraphrase Jan Kott.

[16] Douglas Lanier, op. cit., p. 248, note 16.

[17] Maurizio Calbi, op. cit., p. 7.

[18] Marjorie Prime is the adaptation of Jordan Harrison’s paly of the same name (2014).

[19] Barry Nevin, *Cracking Gilles Deleuze’s Crystal: Narrative Space-Time in the Films of Jean Renoir*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2018, p. 10.

[20] Id.

[21] See for instance Roger Warren’s introduction for the Oxford World’s Classics edition, p. 1-2.

[22] IV.2.296-333.

[23] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2. The Time Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota, 1986, p. 69.

[24] Ibid., p. 133.

[25] In a similar vein, Iago provides Othello with ocular proof in the form of a thing, a handkerchief — yet 21st-century viewers are likely to expect visual evidence to be photographic in kind.

[26] James Williams, op. cit., p. 162.

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