Cahiers Élisabéthains

Bring yourself back online, Old Bill: *Westworld*'s media histories, or six degrees of separation from Shakespeare

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Abstract
This article explores the polysemous intertextuality of *Westworld*, an example of 'complex television', and focuses particularly on its Shakespearean coordinates. In this futuristic show about sentient androids who quote Shakespeare is a deep web of connections to other Shakespeare adaptations in film, digital cultures, and popular music. Through the perspectives of fan studies and media studies, the article argues that what unfolds out of the show's discourses and those of its fans, who engage with it through digital platforms and technologies, is a micro media history of Shakespeare. In turn, the show advances an understanding of Shakespeare as posthuman.

Keywords
Westworld, William Shakespeare, complex television, intertextuality, fan studies, posthuman

Résumé
Cet article explore l'intertextualité polysémique de *Westworld*, un exemple de 'télévision complexe', en s'intéressant plus particulièrement aux coordonnées shakespeariennes. Cette série futuriste, qui met en scène des androïdes sensibles qui citent Shakespeare, présente un réseau profond de connections avec d'autres adaptations de Shakespeare, au cinéma, dans les cultures numérique et la musique populaire. Prenant appui sur les fan studies et les études de l'audiovisuel et des médias numériques, cet article avance qu'une micro histoire de Shakespeare et des médias émerge de la rhétorique de la série et de

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ses fans, qui interagissent avec elle par le biais des plateformes et des technologies numériques. En retour, la fiction propose une perception de Shakespeare comme post-humain.

Mots clés

In 'The Bard', an episode of the cult television show *The Twilight Zone* (1963), the ghost of Shakespeare appears having been conjured by a struggling screenwriter. While Shakespeare in this instance proves unsuited to the new medium, modern television continues to use Shakespearean remains. HBO's *Westworld* (2016–), the high-concept, serial drama about androids and their dangerous human makers, not only calls upon *The Twilight Zone* episode 'The Lonely' (1959) that features an android Alicia, but also summons Shakespeare to build its narrative worlds. In this big-budget series, showrunners Lisa Joy and Jonathan Nolan and their team of writers craft multi-layered and richly referential narratives through a web of intertexts that include Shakespeare.[1] The show, which premiered on HBO and Sky Atlantic in 2016 and completed its third season in 2020, with a fourth greenlighted, exemplifies quality serial television through its puzzle plotlines and a layered 'poetics of storytelling' that characterise what Jason Mittell calls 'complex TV'.[2] Those poetics combine the genres of the American Western with science fiction to depict an immersive theme park experience where uncannily-human-like androids find themselves playthings for wealthy guests. The poetics adapt Michael Crichton's film *Westworld* (1973), which featured Yul Brynner as the fearsome android Gunslinger, to explore 21st-century posthuman preoccupations such as artificial intelligence (AI), big tech, data mining, algorithms, and surveillance capitalism. And the poetics of *Westworld* form an even deeper web of intertexts and allusions that extend from classic literary references (alongside Shakespeare is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*) to Renaissance art (Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man* and Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* both feature in the series); and from science fiction films (*The Matrix* and *Blade Runner*) to indie music culture (Radiohead and Nirvana) and video games (*Grand Theft Auto*).[3]

With such a range of intertexts available, *Westworld* offers viewers a broad spectrum of appreciation, engagement, and identification. Fans and critics alike have delved into the show's Shakespearean quotations, 10 in total across season one and two, especially the use of 'These violent delights have violent ends' from *Romeo and Juliet* in the opening episode; as Katarzyna Burzynska notes, 'the line goes viral'.[4] This is the quotation as a 'cut', to use Bruce R. Smith's term, in the sense of it being both an object and a phenomenon; it is cut *from* Shakespeare but also *into* the diegesis, so that *West-world* functions as a *mise-en-abyme* of the generic phenomenon of quoted Shakespeare in modern culture.[5] From these quotes, viewers have identified deeper resonances between the show's story arcs and Shakespeare's plays, a line of inquiry that is more

persuasive for the first and second seasons – which capitalised on Anthony Hopkins's prior association as a Shakespearean actor – than the third, where the Shakespeare influence recedes.[6]

Westworld not only quotes Shakespeare directly but, as Christina Wald argues in her study of Shakespeare's serial returns in complex TV, also 'the many reimaginations that have been inspired by them'.[7] As such, the show's adaptational, intermedial, and intertextual web run even deeper than one might first realise. Other critics have attended to the show's range of intertexts, both Shakespearean and beyond. Delphine Lemonnier-Texier and Sandrine Oriez draw on Robert Miola's schema for a polysemous inter-textuality in Shakespeare's own work to consider the kind of generative referencing found in *Westworld*.[8] Miola's consideration of both 'author-directed imitations' as well as 'intertextualities that exist in discourses created by the reader' proves conducive to *Westworld*'s model of long-form television and active viewership.[9] Like the androids who move through repetitive narrative loops, the show's viewer also experiences a series of loop effects through the rich citational environment it generates.

This article explores some aspects of that environment with a particular focus on its Shakespearean coordinates. It identifies different forms of quotation in the show – the direct quote, the trope quote (*theatrum mundi*), the character quote, the serial quote, the film quote, and the music quote – and argues that, in *Westworld*, we are only ever six degrees of separation from Shakespeare. Indeed, Joy and Nolan's show functions as a micro-Shakespeare media history, or a Shakespeare through screens. To suggest so is to enter a game familiar from the study of Shakespeare and modern popular culture – the discovery of echoes and references to the works – and extend claims that Shakespeare haunts modern culture, to find yet more evidence of Shakespeare's cultural currency and ubiquity.[10] This game brings the viewing pleasure of identifying how and to what ends a show like *Westworld* deploys Shakespeare and generates in its viewer a set of connections with this and other texts.

Fan studies offer a useful methodology for pursuing *Westworld*'s Shakespeare because of the important ways it has attended to the pleasure of pursuing intertextual exchanges, of wanting what has been described as 'more of' and 'more from' the source material.[11] Work on fandom practices and cultures has already expanded the horizons of adapted Shakespeare, offering not only material objects for our view – a valuable exercise in its own right – but also suggesting how we might theorise uses of and intertextual exchanges with Shakespeare, as well as the desire in the viewer to seek them out in the first place.[12] Is Shakespeare motivating the intertextual treasure hunting, or is *Westworld*? Rather, it is precisely the simultaneity and doubleness of noting both how a television show generates a proliferation of meanings and also how Shakespeare makes uncanny returns. It is the condition of modern television in the digital age that it is accompanied by a range of paratexts: in *Westworld*'s case, these include the 'real' website of the park's corporate owner Delos as well as fan blogs and social media posts about the show at the time of broadcast and afterwards too.[13] Written against the backdrop of contemporary digital cultures, *Westworld* has its own post-show digital spaces where ongoing conversations and speculations about the series provide a research resource for anyone interested in its hermeneutics. They are

regarded in this article as an important archive of its Shakespearean and other inter-texts. Indeed, the videos and GIFs (Graphics Interchange Format) that produce new Shakespeare screens out of *Westworld*, contribute to the interpretation of Shakespeare's overarching significance to the clash between androids and their human creators. The Shakespeare *Westworld* invokes is less a shorthand for the human condition, or a figure of nostalgia for a pre-computational, pre-digital form of expression and ontology, than ocular proof of uncanny loop effects and blurred categories, of the impossibility of any neat binary between human/posthuman.

Screen I: Willbot, or quoting machines

Shakespeare is no longer human, it is now a commonplace to argue, in the sense that the texts have become objects and, more precisely, transmedia digital objects that migrate across media platforms. 'Code', 'downloadable', 'searchable', and 'shareable' are some of the terms that describe the phenomenon of contemporary digital Shakespeares. Google returns results for 'Shakespeare' in 0.95 seconds. Open Source Shakespeare offers digital texts, their interfaces including inbuilt search functions the results of which appear on a screen for us, but are generated in the 'background' by computer code.[14] Shakespeare created and repurposed by users circulates as moving image or as mini-screens in GIFs, memes and tweets. The website Willbot enables us to interact with an AI Shakespeare. Audio and text input generates a verbal response from the Shakespeare bot with accompanying synchronised facial expressions delivered to the user's browser.[15] The effects are uncanny, not least because the user can engage in their own – *Westworld* inspired – baseline test of the world's most famous playwright:

> *User.*   Are you a machine?
> *Willbot.*   Questions like this much grind mine gears.
>
> *User.*   These violent delights have violent ends.
> *Willbot.*   May thee ever harm a guest of the park?[16]

This is to sketch briefly the busy mediascape in which Shakespeare exists and in which *Westworld*'s Shakespearean references can be viewed. As recent work in Shakespeare studies has highlighted, the phenomenology of Shakespeare is one that entails a series of media specific experiences.[17] Each media form brings 'a series of variable frame effects predicated upon other media', as Richard Burt and Julian Yates describe it.[18] This loop effect and continuity between media forms, one enabling or preparing its user for another, means that into the digital media mix should be added the Shakespeare film for it too is part of the show's dense citational environment. Film adaptations of Shakespeare from the late 1990s and 2000s especially are characterised by media consciousness and self-referentiality, perhaps in response to new media and technologies, and theorise their own relation to the Shakespearean original.[19] Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000) is illustrative here for the way it incorporates technology and also raises it to the level of a theme. Ethan Hawkes's Hamlet is something of an amateur auteur who records and then revisits his thoughts on a Pixelvision camera, an already dated technology in the film's

millennial setting, but one that affords this Hamlet an extension of his body and mind just as Shakespeare's character imagines the book an extension of his memory. The play's soliloquies are first heard as playbacks so that they are given a rehearsed, almost mechanised quality.

While Almereyda's *Hamlet* may not be fully cyborgian, it does prepare viewers of *Westworld* for its Shakespeare quoting machine in the guise of Peter Abernathy. As the rancher that might be found in a classic Western, Abernathy (played by Louis Herthum) is a secondary character within the park, his role seemingly limited to being father to protagonist Dolores (Evan Rachel Wood). His original character role as The Professor, a detail that becomes significant, has even been written over. It is in an exchange with Dolores, one that has played out repeatedly as part of the hosts' programmed narrative iterations, that the show's first direct Shakespeare quote occurs.

In this iteration, Abernathy finds a photograph of a woman standing in an urban location (possibly Times Square), a discovery that this android cannot fully compute. Dolores dismisses it in one of the show's most memorable lines, 'This doesn't look like anything to me' (season one, episode one [S1E1]), but the temporal disturbance precipitates a form of anagnorisis that Abernathy verbalises through the resurfaced code of his original build: 'Hell is empty and all the devils are here', he says, using Shakespearean language to warn his daughter about the nature of her world (see Figure 1). The android reaches into *The Tempest* and Ariel's reports of the storm: 'The King's son, Ferdinand, / With hair up-staring – then like reeds, not hair – Was the first man that leaped; cried / "Hell is empty, And all the devils are here"' (1.2.250–3).[20] Ariel creates a visual of a greatly transformed Ferdinand who seems something other than human, his hair 'not hair'. It is appropriate too that it is the words of Ariel, the play's own non-human character, that cut into the dialogue, for, like Abernathy, the spirit also answers to his master's bidding. As Wald observes, 'Like Ferdinand, Abernathy senses a "supernatural" presence, as creatures belonging to an alternative reality interfere in mundane matters', and for her, *Westworld*'s opening season adapts *The Tempest* quite extensively.[21] From the quoting of direct lines, we move into character quote. Potential analogies between the show's and Shakespeare's characters come into play. Abernathy can be read as a Caliban figure that curses his masters in the guise of the park's creator, Dr Ford (Anthony Hopkins), and his associate Bernard (Jeffrey Wright), who themselves function as versions of Prospero; Dolores is in 'Miranda mode' since, like Prospero's daughter, she too is unaware, at least initially, of the repetitive structures that determine her life. The play's own interest in 'the epistemological challenge to differentiate between levels of dream, waking life, reality and make-believe' serve the show's interest in expressing an emergent android consciousness.[22]

Abernathy has yet more Shakespeare at his disposal, whispering to Dolores, 'These violent delights have violent ends' from *Romeo and Juliet* (2.6.9). In the play, Friar Laurence means for Romeo to temper his emotions, to love and desire less hastily. In *Westworld*, the line becomes Abernathy's alert system that indexically reveals his core drive to protect his daughter. But how are we to understand the android's recourse to Shakespeare as found and recyclable fragments in his software? Sarah Hatchuel suggests that in *Westworld*, as in other posthuman TV shows, 'Shakespeare's words
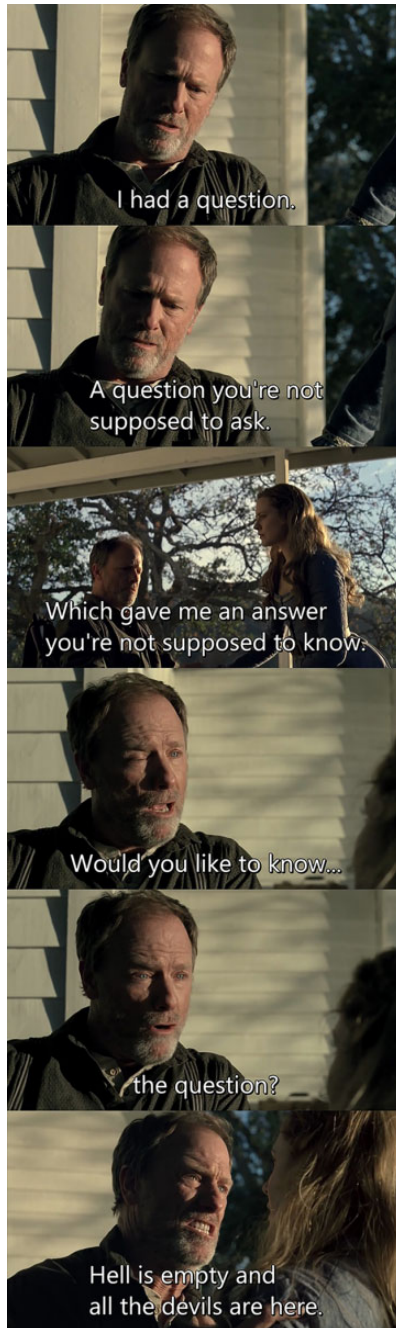
Figure 1. Abernathy and Dolores, *Westworld* (HBO), S1E1.

become the signs through which machines and robots reveal that they are becoming human or rather that they had *always already been human*'.[23] Whether or not Abernathy 'knows' he is quoting Shakespeare is unclear but what is evident is how vital Shakespeare is to *Westworld*'s revelation of its own core thematic drives. As Lemonnier-Texier and Oriez note,

> Among hosts, intertext has a specific enunciative status aiming to produce effects within the fiction and on the spectators, by reviving in the former memories supposedly erased from their artificial memory, and by inviting the latter to consider a horizon of reception where one of the challenges would be the identification of sources (especially Shakespearean) and possible parallels with *Westworld*.[24]

Shakespeare quotations thus signal the hosts' posthuman comprehension, emergent feelings, and their capacity for interconnected cognition; in turn, the quotations coax audiences into a game of identification and interpretation.

Within the show's diegesis, the line Abernathy whispers to Dolores becomes a command phrase and a catalyst for both her agency and her revenge drive. Dolores's new Miranda mode awakens in the other hosts a desire for vengeance that evolves across season one. In episode two, we hear Dolores repeat the same line in a seemingly chance encounter with the show's other major character Maeve (Thandie Newton), causing this host to also have flashbacks of prior storylines and past traumas that propel her towards the possibility of her freedom. But, since this is *Westworld*, it transpires that all these robots' iterations of the line are in fact reiterations: it is heard (again) in season one's finale, delivered by Bernard who utters it as Dolores, in full Western revenge mode as her alter ego Wyatt, shoots Ford in a scene that itself repeats her shooting of Arnold, Ford's co-creator. Elisabeth Bronfen reads these reiterations as exemplary of *Westword*'s serial logic that evinces a 'spectral reiterability' in its use of Shakespeare, who inhabits the storyline without ever fully residing there.[25] As such, it is unsurprising that we should hear the phrase repeat in season two where it now fully signals a threat to the park's guests: in 'Journey into Night', Dolores says it to the captive humans, appropriating it more extensively through the addition of the pronoun, 'She knows these violent delights have violent ends' (S2E1); and in the episode that introduces Raj world, a host Ganju mumbles it before attempting to kill the Man in Black's daughter (S2E3).

At this stage, some viewers would be forgiven for thinking that *Westworld* is quoting itself rather than Shakespeare.[26] As Wald notes, it is 'not only metaphorically but also literally used as a computational command: when Arnold merges Dolores's and Wyatt's codes, audiences can briefly see the input "these violent delights have violent ends" uploaded into Dolores's programme' in a scene set in the diagnostics lab of the Mesa hub, the area below the Westworld park.[27] Fans have helpfully made screenshots of the tablet Bernard uses to access Dolores's profile that highlight this command (see Figure 2).[28] This detail from the show's visual aesthetic reminds us that the Shakespeare spoken by curiously sentient robots is code. This *Westworld* Shakespeare screen may be a throwback to an image in Jonathan Nolan's earlier television show, *Person of Interest* (2011–2016). Hatchuel notes how fans identified a Lady Macbeth cameo in the form of her famous expression of guilt, presented as hexadecimal ASCII computer language in

S2E14, another digital screen Shakespeare that provides viewers with a potential clue to the series.[29]

While *Westworld*'s screen Shakespeare command is appropriate to its narrative and high-tech setting, it also reflects back to viewers Shakespeare's modern formations. These, as Christy Desmet argues, are frequently the consequence of hidden computational operations. Drawing on object-oriented ontology and more particularly Ian Bogost's 'alien phenomenology', Desmet highlights the 'tiny' units that exist for themselves but also relate to each other and ascribes a materiality and agency to them.[30] She brings new insights to the Shakespeare's screens we might think we know, or take as transparently functional, showing her reader two images: first, the online Folger Shakespeare edition of *Othello*, an accessible interface and reader-friendly text; and second, the code, or what the interface conceals, which entails 'a whole host of units/ objects/agents necessary to convey Iago's scripted words' and that 'are indeed alien to anyone familiar with *Othello* as an acted, screened, or printed text. "Iago" and his speech acts are merely two units in a complex configuration of agents'.[31] As viewed through the lens of alien phenomenology, then, Shakespeare cannot be regarded as exclusively human. If, according to Bogost, 'the posthuman is still too human', *Westworld* delivers for those viewers in search of a posthuman sensibility. It rewards attentive viewing with posthuman close-ups that explode the mirage of Dolores's uncannily human form. The tablets that feature so extensively in the show, with their haptic icons indicating hidden applications, further disclose how Dolores is a programmed unit who exists beyond her physical manifestation.

Whether the hosts can escape their programming and potentially rewrite it themselves are key questions to the narrative arc. Shakespeare is the conduit to this potential in the first episode's 'meet your maker' scene that is 'the foundation upon which the show's

entire thematic and emotional structure is built'.[32] Set in the diagnostics lab, it features Ford and Bernard assessing Abernathy, with Theresa Cullen (Sidse Babett Knudsen), the park's corporate director, present too. Yet again, *Westworld* allows viewers to peek behind the curtain to see operations and, yet again, some Shakespeare is what we hear – and see. A *Westworld* host should be capable of processing Shakespeare lines as quickly as a Google search but, within the fiction of the show, it seems Abernathy is not quite there. He is glitching, partly because of the so-called 'reveries' software updates Ford has introduced that allow aspects of the hosts' prior narratives to survive, a form of memory designed to make them more lifelike:

Ford.	Tell me, what happened to your program?
Abernathy.	(*shivering*) When we are born, we cry we are come to this great stage of f-f-fools.
Ford.	That is enough. Tell me, do you have access to your previous configuration?
Abernathy.	Yes.
Ford.	Access that, please. What is your name?
Abernathy.	Mr. Peter Abernathy.
Ford.	Mr. Abernathy, what are your drives? [. . .]
Abernathy.	Well, my daughter Dolores, of course. I must protect Dolores. I am who I am because of her, and, well, I . . . I wouldn't have it . . . I . . . I . . . I wouldn't have it any other way . . . I . . . I . . . I have to warn her.
Ford.	Warn who?
Abernathy.	Dolores! The things you do to her . . . the things you do to her. I have to protect her . . . I have to help her . . . I . . . I . . . She's got to get help.
Ford.	Very good Mr. Abernathy. That's enough.
Bernard.	This . . . behaviour . . . we're miles beyond a glitch here.
Ford.	Access your current build . . . please. What is your name?
Abernathy.	Rose . . . is a rose is a rose.
Ford.	What is your itinerary?
Abernathy.	To meet my maker.
Ford.	Aha . . . well, you're in luck. And what do you want to say to your maker?
Abernathy.	By my most mechanical and dirty hand, I shall have such revenges on you . . . both. The things I will do, what they are, yet I know not. But they will be the terrors of the Earth.
	Peter Abernathy abruptly gets off the chair and grabs Dr. Robert Ford by the shoulders with both arms and stares intensely into his eyes.
Abernathy.	You don't know where you are, do you? You are in a prison of your own sins.
Cullen.	Turn it off.[33]

Performing an android, and an android that quotes Shakespeare, places demands on the actor here. Herthum's Abernathy 'drifts organically from a parent's agony to a child-like stupor'.[34] Abernathy goes from Lear's 'When we are born . . . ' (4.5.181–2) to *2 Henry IV* and Pistol's allegation that with 'mechanical and dirty hand' (5.5.29), Hal has had improper relations with Doll, a set of quotations, along with some Gertrude Stein in between – 'A rose is a rose is a rose' – that riff off Shakespeare as the 'return of the

expressed', itself a play on the return of the repressed.[35] Ford will go on to say, 'just our old work coming back to haunt us' (S1E1), a reference to Abernathy's prior build as the Professor – and to memories that have been repressed – as well as a metacommentary on a scene and series that itself is haunted by Shakespeare.[36] That effect is reinforced by the citational field that includes Hopkins as a major film star and, as such, another form of quotation, a 'meta-filmic quote' that calls upon the viewer's cinematic culture.[37]

The viewer can take the 'inferential walk' – in Umberto Eco's classic description of how a reader is taken 'outside the text' to make meaning of its world within – from Hopkins's Shakespearean roles on stage and screen to his Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), an iconic role that underlays his performance of Ford with a sinister quality, just as it did his performance in *Titus* (1999), Julie Taymor's adaptation of Shakespeare's early Roman tragedy.[38] Perhaps the showrunners Joy and Nolan scripted the set of Shakespearean quotes to capitalise on their casting of Hopkins. His extra-diegetic association as Shakespearean actor is echoed in Ford's character who elected to first design Abernathy as the Professor, as a Shakespearean; we are invited to infer that the host is, like Frankenstein's creature, a version of the creator. As such, are we still hearing in Abernathy's Shakespeare the master's voice, or an emerging Caliban? That he cuts between Shakespeare lines is an act of both improvisation – an android that goes off-script – and also rhetorical violence, a targeted appropriation of his master's prized authors. Abernathy's use of 'mechanical' links his own robotic makeup to his creators and the 3D printers they use to make the hosts.

In reverting to Lear, however, and turning the father's misogynistic tirade against his daughters on to Ford and Bernard, Abernathy appropriates for the android the right to speak that Lear's androcentric nature assumes. Shakespeare thus brings a kind of lyrical dissonance, providing a mood that, amplified by Ramin Djawadi's affecting score, less soundtrack than a character in its own right, develops over the course of *Westworld* as the 'voice of the budding android rebellion'.[39] In season two, Abernathy once again echoes Lear – 'I am bound / Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears / Do scald like molten lead' (S2E3) – to express, with finality, what it is like to be at the mercy of human hands, a fate Dolores releases him from offscreen. However, by this point in the series, the twin aspects of *Lear* – its pathos and its patriarchy – are narratively displaced by Dolores and Maeve as the agents of that android revolution. By season three, the full force of Abernathy's 'mechanical' is realised since Dolores succeeds in printing new hosts herself, an autopoiesis that Lear could only dream of.

Shakespeare can also seem a self-producing entity such is the proliferation in modern culture, but the Abernathy scene foregrounds how Shakespeare is a thing that forms and manifests through an assemblage of parts – voice, gesture, camera, lighting, editing, including the post-production addition of freeze effects to make Herthum's Abernathy robotic – that are both analogue and digital. Shakespeare becomes posthuman in that the text's materiality and presentation are a function of a whole set of objects, prostheses or enabling *techne*. The android lights on something when he invokes Lear's 'stage of fools', an example of a trope quote in the form of the early modern figure of *theatrum mundi*.[40] It expresses his fragile and unsecure ontology (his sense of being, but as a part played) and a phenomenology (his experiences thus far). But even more so, *Westworld*

takes an early modern commonplace and metaphor subsequently valorised as quintessentially Shakespearean, and presents it as a set of available units, or what Craig Dionne identifies as *Lear's* 'automata of written predispositions'.[41] *Westworld*, that is, reflects back, compresses and reimagines modern cultural practices around how Shakespeare is used and understood. If the robots are not fully aware that they are speaking idiomatically but find assurance in this form of words, we may be more like them, (re)turning to the poetic reassurance embedded within a Shakespearean quotation even as we experience it as itself a posthuman thing, a command phrase no longer fully our own.

Screen II: digital cultures

Within the evolving fiction of *Westworld*, hosts speak the common language of code. Maeve, having augmented her processing powers, learns to communicate with the hosts in Shogunworld (S2E5) despite the initial linguistic differences. In theory, host interoperability means that they can access computational systems and code outside the park in the real world, the story of season three. In theory, too, they could access Shakespeare because, as noted earlier, the texts are code. *Westworld* is written in the knowledge of digital networked cultures and, as a text itself, can be understood as working dialogically in relation to them: it creates a futurised version of our digital world, thus engaging viewers in questions about our dependency on haptic devices or the algorithm as the new cultural dominant, and also itself becomes a series of digital media objects in that world. Through the participatory platforms of the Internet, from YouTube to Twitter, and from technologies such as the GIF, viewers have at their disposal multiple entry points into an extended engagement with the show and its discourses.

YouTube's *Westworld* falls into some of the recognisable genres of user-generated content on the platform. These can be categorised as explainer videos, which offer guides to episodes; reaction videos, where fans record their response; character tributes; mashups, that we might now describe as among YouTube's earlier genres; the fan-made trailer; and the vlog.[42] In an example of the mashup, a user combines *Westworld*'s Dr Ford with Hannibal Lecter in a video that plays with the character quote to bring a visceral quality to media cuts.[43] In another video, identified here through YouTube's algorithm and its selection of similar objects to the searched item, we get the trailer, '*Westworld*/ "FUTUREWORLD"', which invites us to imagine if Jean-Luc Picard (Patrick Stewart) from *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987–94) were to visit a new Delos park, Futureworld, the title of Crichton's sequel to *Westworld*.[44] This crossover exemplifies fan practices, where story universes are interlinked, extended, and transformed. Shakespeare becomes the connector between these universes, a nod to *Westworld*'s Shakespeareanisms, with the video using Stewart's performance as John of Gaunt in *The Hollow Crown* (2012) as voiceover. Gaunt's topographical lyricism from *Richard II* introduces the new park and, as it fades out, the sense of loss it conveys is carried through the video as Picard is haunted by another voiceover, the Klingon leader's claim that you have never experienced Shakespeare until you have read him in the original Klingon.

Figure 3. Jenson Kerr, 'Hamlet in the style of Westworld', *Postmodern Shakespeare*, episode 14 (14 May 2017).
Source: www.youtube.com/watch?v=fM5N21ynqLo

The vlog as YouTube genre is played with in Jenson Kerr's '*Hamlet* in the style of *Westworld*', a video performance of 'To be or not to be' as if it were a baseline or fidelity test for a host.[45] Kerr appears seated, bare-chested, and wearing a cowboy hat, three visual cues to the set up in *Westworld*, where hosts are always seated and naked for their diagnostic tests and where the guests chose a hat upon entering the park (see Figure 3). A *Westworld*-style voice command 'bring yourself online' initiates the performance to camera that is interrupted by further commands to add and then reduce emotion. The video ends with a voiceover, 'These violent delights have violent ends', illustrating how user-made content sustains the show's catchphrases.

Westworld GIFs also reiterate the show's quotable text and images through their succession of micro-screens. A search on a site such as GIPHY returns an array of options with official HBO *Westworld* GIFs: Dolores with the text of 'These violent delights' below; a speeded-up Dolores walking through Sweetwater; the piano in the Mariposa Inn; Ford interviewing Abernathy. It is a media form that seems especially suited to a show about simulated narrative loops. The GIFs 'unique spatio-temporal visual patterns that make it appear to loop forever'[46] lend them an archival quality, as if the flow of available choices across these mini-moving screens, looping visuals with no sound, preserve the primary media text through, paradoxically, its disaggregation into parts. Those parts comprise of unseen computational operations that power the GIFs that are embedded in the messaging function of mobile devices, providing for yet more opportunities to quote a show like *Westworld*, or to use its parts to express and then share an emotion. The fan-created Twitter account @WestworldGifs sustains a connection with the show, tweeting out content that describes how much fans miss it, with a tile arrangement of characters' putting a gun to their head; or that marks the anniversary of

episodes.[47] It also amends content to comment on major news events, such as its post in response to the 2020 US election, with Dolores dragging Donald Trump by the scruff of his neck, with the hashtag #VoteHimOut. [48] GIFs are curiously alive with emotions, meanings, and histories.

As these select examples reveal, viewers and fans of the show can pursue the pleasures they derive from it through posting and sharing content online, or perform 'textual poaching' and adapt content.[49] In this way, *Westworld* online is both content – elastic or 'spreadable', it can be cut, edited, curated, reframed, looped, or recontextualised – and a conduit for connectivity.[50] In this way too, *Westworld* is no different to Shakespeare or indeed any other content on the web; online, the texts become entangled and interconnected, so much so that 'These violent delights' might – much like *Star Trek's* allusion to Klingon Shakespeare – come to be recognised as an original *Westworld* quote. But this is the nature of 'cut' Shakespeare that, as Smith argues, 'creates new works of art'.[51] Moreover, in keeping with the show's loop effects, we could also argue that the delivery of this line in a production of *Romeo and Juliet* might trigger associations with the hosts, bringing to performed Shakespeare posthuman reverberations.

Screen III: Shakespearean shogunworld

Viewers of *Westworld*'s season two expecting a continuation of quoted Shakespeare might initially have come away somewhat disappointed. Apart from the two quotations already noted, we seem to have left behind the game of Shakespeare allusions. But Shakespeare reappears in other ways in *Westworld* in the form of the film quote. Season two's 'Akane no Mai' introduces Shogunworld (S2E5), another park operated by Delos. Lee Sizemore, the writer of the host narratives, describes it as offering guests a more extreme experience than Westworld. While there are teasers of this world at the end of season one – samurai soldiers are seen in the behavioural lab – this is the first time viewers are brought into a new world. It is not entirely new, however, since the hosts in Shogunworld narratively replicate their counterparts in Westworld; when Maeve berates Sizemore for his lack of imagination, he replies, 'Yes, fine, I may have cribbed a little bit from Westworld. You try writing 300 stories in three weeks!' (S2E5). In fact, for both characters and viewers alike, there is a sense of *déjà vu* throughout the scenes in the Shogunworld village. Maeve, Hector, and Armistice quickly realise that this world replicates not only their stories but them too – they have their doppelgängers in the form of Akane, Musashi, and Hanaryo. For the viewer, the entry into Shogunworld has an uncanny familiarity, and it soon transpires that we experience *Westworld*'s serial referentiality as, frame by frame, we get a duplication of the story of the raid on the Mariposa (S1E1). A fan-created video has helpfully put these side by side.[52]

Intensifying that sense of *déjà vu* are the cinematic references that suggest character and viewer have wandered into the set of an Akira Kurosawa film. What has already been identified as Shakespeare's ghostly traces in *Westworld* becomes even more spectral since Shakespeare reappears through host texts: Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (1957) and more particularly *Ran* (1985) are ghosts in the *Westworld* narrative machine. Shogunworld offers its guests a simulacrum of the Edo period in Japanese history, the same

Figure 4. Maeve in Shogunworld, *Westworld*, S2E5.

period that Kurosawa set his adaptations of *Macbeth* and *King Lear* respectively. Samuel Crowl notes that, as with the American West, Japan's mythic history 'is a past largely created by film and thus accessible to a modern audience'.[53] *Westworld* authenticates its own representation of Japan through Kurosawa. The production team members note the Kurosawa connection in interviews, with production designer Howard Cummings mentioning the war camp in *Ran* – 'the eight-foot-high curtain walls with all these graphics and emblems' – as the inspiration for the scene in which Maeve and her gang visit the Shogun's camp (see Figure 4).[54] Other images from *Ran* are invoked: the pile-up of bodies, with a mass of arrows in the soldiers' bodies, finds expression in Shogunworld's theatre of cruelty.

This emulation of *Ran's* cinematography invites consideration of what other ways the film might carry over into *Westworld*. The quoting of Kurosawa is not just visual but brings some of that film text's thematic concerns, which themselves incorporate and expand those of *King Lear*, into *Westworld*. *Ran* can be read as a version of 'Hell is empty and all the devils are here' (S1E1) that unfolds the theme of android consciousness – their existence, at the hands of humans, is a figurative hell. Here too in Shogunworld, the hosts come to appreciate the constructed nature of their world. For Maeve, the visit to this world intensifies her consciousness and her desire to set new paths out of these worlds simulated by her human makers. Anagnorisis, a thread in the fabric of tragedy, is pulled out in *Westworld* from *King Lear* via *Ran*, a film that assimilates and releases Shakespeare's play into a cinematic language.[55] In a scene in the Third Castle, Hidetora, the film's Lear, finds himself surrounded by dead bodies; he alone survives, only to endure yet more suffering: he runs out of the now-burning building, 'like a ghost out of the flames', writes Jan Kott (see Figure 5).[56] He must now finally accept the consequences of his hubris. *Ran*, as Melissa Croteau argues,

Figure 5. Akira Kurosawa, *Ran* (Greenwich Film/Herald Ace/Nippon Herald Films, 1985).

amplifies what is evident in *Lear*: 'There is no *deus ex machina* that can help us; humans are responsible for the evil that rules the world'.[57] As Hidetora dies, his fool cries, but the film's Kent figure says, 'Don't cry. It's how the world is made, men prefer sorrow to joy, suffering to peace'. Facing this suffering as detailed in *Ran*, argues Croteau, may ultimately unleash a potential for us 'to be more human(e)', a move towards the posthuman.[58]

If human cruelty is a motif that *Ran* extracts out of *Lear*, *Westworld* makes a dual borrowing from Shakespeare and Kurosawa to foreground what it positions as the desirability of a posthuman world in which the hosts might themselves become a new, better iteration of humanity.[59] The episode foregrounds Maeve's realisation that despite being coded to care only for herself, she experiences empathy for Akane and is willing to risk her own life to protect this host and her daughter Sakura. She also attempts to enlighten Akane and Mushasi as to the simulated nature of their world: 'It's not cowardice to seek shelter from the storm' (S2E5), she says, a metaphor that seems at home in the scene's *Lear*-like landscape. Ultimately, however, Maeve accepts that Akane and Mushasi's decision to remain in Shogunworld represents choice and free will.

While the borrowings from *Ran* are not signalled at the level of the show's fiction, *Westworld*'s Kurosawa film operates on another level as a metacommentary on the recycling and mashing of genres and cultural references in this show and contemporary television and film. If we are moving into the sameness of that culture industry – and Joy and Nolan's own negotiation of their show's standing in relation to it – we are also getting a sense of call and response between texts, as *Westworld* quotes *Ran*, which adapts *King Lear* but also borrows from the Western, in particular the films of John Ford. As such, we move from one film quote to another. The loop effects do not end there, for

Ford's *The Searchers* (1956) is referenced in season one, where Dolores looks out a doorway at the frontier (S1E1), a shot that establishes the significance of doors as figures for revelation and learning across the series. Ford's *My Darling Clementine* (1946) includes a performance of 'To be or not to be' by a visiting actor, Mr Thorndike, who exits saying, 'Shakespeare was not made for taverns, nor for tavern louts'.[60] The film's own incorporation of Shakespeare into the myth of the American frontier may offer another reason for *Westworld*'s Shakespeare quotes as a micro-media history of the Western and its remediation of a specifically American Shakespeare.

   Hamlet reverberates in *Westworld* in so much as the show's exploration of host consciousness and agency is ghosted by the play's most famous expression of states of living and dying. Bernard speaks to Dolores about a question he is grappling with, between 'an unknown' and 'an end' (S2E6) in an exchange that can be heard as a redaction of 'To be or not to be' as Bernard, in a baseline test with Dolores, replays Arnold's contemplation of suicide. This in turn may echo Robert Ford's own quoting of the play when, after having Bernard kill park executive Theresa Cullen, he whispers, 'and in that sleep of death what dreams may come' (S1E6). *Hamlet*'s spectral reappearance is consistent with the show's use of Shakespeare, except that the fragmented quotation from that most quotable of soliloquies is a shared language between Bernard and Ford, created and creator. *Westworld* imagines Shakespeare as 'language [that] does not want to die', as Bronfen puts it, but instead resides as a kind of double-voice for the characters.[61]

Screen IV: OK Computer star-crossed lovers

That *Westworld* plays with doubling is evident in the drama of Arnold/Bernard, the significant revelation of the first season, the doubles that Maeve and her gang discover in Shogunworld, and the whole business of cloning and duplicates that preoccupies the second season and carries on into the third. There are also dual timelines in both season one and season two. To these character and plot layers, as this article has been suggesting, we can add cultural references that are incorporated singularly, as in the use of Shakespeare quotes, but also dialogically through other texts that quote or adapt a Shakespeare. What Kamilla Elliott argues about adaptation theory and rhetoric not really allowing for the to-and-fro between texts applies to *Westworld*, a show that is richly meta-adaptational.[62] *Romeo and Juliet* is another double in the series, appearing as quotation and as an indirect invocation through the show's score. Ramin Djawdi's score primarily comprises orchestral treatments of modern songs, with Radiohead, especially their album *OK Computer* (1997) featuring prominently. Nolan has commented that the use of modern tracks in a Wild West setting reminds viewers 'that this isn't taking place in the 19th century. It's taking place somewhere else – some time else'.[63]

   If the tracks orient viewers temporally and defamiliarise the Western setting, they also complement and enhance the diegesis: in *Westworld*, the score amplifies the hosts' stories. This is brought to a lyrical if disturbingly violent culmination in the season one finale, 'The Bicameral Mind' (S1E10), where Radiohead's 'Exit Music (For a Film)' accompanies Ford's final set piece and transitions into Debussy's 'Rêverie', a leitmotif

for host agency. As Ford speaks about the power of stories, and reveals his final narrative about 'the birth of a new people [. . .] And the choices they will have to make. And the people they will decide to become' (S1E10), a montage introduces each character's perspective at the appropriate point, the melody of 'Exit Music' playing along to create a polyphonic texture. To Shakespeare as an absent presence in this scene – heard once again as Bernard repeats 'These violent delights' – should be added Radiohead's Thom Yorke, whose lyrics spectrally appear and enter into a call and response with Ford's words, creator inviting created to revolt. Fans of the show have parsed this scene and used YouTube to post and share cuts from it. A discussion thread provides interesting insights as to the effects of the synchronisation:

> By reappropriating the melody that goes with the omitted lyrics, the score can overlay those lyrics (to an audience aware of them) onto the scenes that correspond in the score with their place in the original song. [. . .] it doesn't matter whether the scene has Romeo and Juliet overtones [. . .]. What matters is that we are watching the protagonists 'wake from your sleep', kill their 'father', and express in the most violent terms 'we hope that you choke'.[64]

Radiohead thus become the voice of the android rebellion. But, as viewers on the YouTube thread imply, it is a double voice because *Romeo and Juliet* is invoked – a theme that returns in season two, which closes out with Radiohead's 'Codex' (S2E10), itself a song music and video about old and new technologies. Indicative of the loop effects that *Westworld* is interested in and that it uses to advance its dramaturgy, 'Exit Music' was originally composed for Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) to play over the closing credits.[65] While the film memorialises Shakespeare's tragic lovers, it also extends their lives, preserving their eternal youth in celluloid. Yorke's lyrics add to this effect, with their note of elegy and defiance, a modern lyrical expression of *amor vincit omnia*. This in turn invites us to retrospectively read Ghost Nation leader Akecheta's story (S2E8) as a Romeo and Juliet story: 'Take my heart when you go', he says to his lover Kohana; 'Take mine in its place', she replies. The track is more than a paratext for Luhrmann's film, as the history of its composition reveals: Yorke had a 30-minute rough cut from Luhrmann to work with but found further inspiration in Franco Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* (1968) as well as the play itself.[66] According to Tim Footman, the song retells the play's story:

> The lyrics offer a superb summary of the narrative arc that Shakespeare's lovers follow: they wake into realisation of their love; they try to escape the tentacles of the family feud that keeps them apart; they fail, and through a combination of misunderstandings, become 'one in everlasting peace'; and their death becomes a reproof to the warring Montagues and Capulets, [. . .] 'we hope that you choke'. 'I can't do this alone', he sobs; he can't live or love alone, but equally he can't die alone, and Juliet will have to follow him.[67]

This combination of Shakespeare text and its adaptations invites us to identify an embedded media history in the track, a history that continues with its subsequent incorporation into *Westworld*. Delving into the diegetic inclusion of 'Exit Music' reveals much about the show's world building through the assembly of media elements. The identification of one element prompts another and another: consider the shot that features

Figure 6. The gun to the head as repeated image in *Westworld*.

a character putting a gun to their head, first Dolores, then Bernard, and then Teddy, assembled as repeated frames in a fan production (see Figure 6). Given the show's connection to *Romeo and Juliet*, and to Luhrmann's film via Radiohead, is this frame a reiteration of Claire Danes's Juliet (see Figure 7)?

Westworld uses prior adaptations of Shakespeare, with their respective stories of the lovers, each one cloning, expanding, reimagining them, to humanise its androids. They too, we are invited to infer, will live on, despite the tragic circumstances of their textual world. Providing layers, these mediatised elements act as temporal markers that, in the instance of Shakespeare, reveal iterations that are at once discrete, with their own particular forms and contexts, and an interconnected assemblage, the things that make up our modern understanding of Shakespeare. That we can unravel such embedded Shakespeare media histories in a show that combines the Western with sci-fi, riffing off

Figure 7. The gun to head in Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1996).

both of these filmic and TV genres, is unsurprising and indicative of the extended pleasures of viewership that Joy and Nolan's show affords. This is a show written with fan theories and discourses in mind, that leaves Easter eggs for fans to identify and interpret through the participatory spaces of online forums.

Screen V: bring yourself back online, Old Bill

This article ultimately reflects fan practice in its identification of potential Shakespeare connections and intertexts in *Westworld*'s fabric, in its move between Shakespeare as focus of critical inquiry and *Westworld* itself, and its broader theoretical proposition that Shakespeare is 'archontic literature', that is as something programmed for re-telling and a vast archive that accrues meaning through dynamic encounters with different media and their cultures, leading to new textual worlds.[68] *Westworld* may literalise this quality of modern and future Shakespeares in the character of Old Bill, one of Ford's earliest creations, who seems to bear a passing resemblance to one William Shakespeare and who, in response to his master's command, returns himself to his body bag, where he remains in cold storage (S1E5).[69] This simulacrum of Shakespeare (see Figure 8) can, in the language of *Westworld*, 'bring himself back online' should a user choose to access his build, to activate his text, and inaugurate a quoting machine, much as the show does itself through an assemblage of quotations. Attention to user agency – on what can be done with Shakespeare – is all part of the show's emphasis, as this article has sought to convey, on the posthuman. Shakespeare and 'its' adaptational layers are formative to *Westworld*'s posthuman aesthetics and perspective. It is a move that might seem para-doxical, the appropriation of the writer most commonly associated with 'the human condition', were it not for the fact that Shakespeare's expression of humans in his plays, like that of the early modern culture in which he wrote, already recognises the human body as a combination of parts, or as machine-like in its association with or dependency on prostheses and technological extensions such as armour, animals, and books.[70] We might be tempted to call these cyborgian and to see the early modern period in terms less

Figure 8. Old Bill, as the show's Shakespearean ghost, *Westworld*, S1E5.

of Da Vinci's 'Vitruvian Man' – quoted in *Westworld*'s title sequence – than of Albrecht Dürer's and Jacopo Bracelli's Renaissance robots.

Artists themselves become their works. Dr Ford notes this when he remarks, 'Mozart, Beethoven and Chopin never died. They simply became music' (S1E10), a line that conveys the posthuman quality of texts, not just in the sense of coming after their authors, their posthumous remains as it were, but as proliferations and ungrounded objects. Shakespeare, *Westworld* proposes, has long since become text, and hybridises through the show as through modern culture. It is here that one can locate the value in attending to a television show: it provides a close-up of Shakespeare's reappearances in the culture; it highlights how they manifest through prior cultural productions or media histories; and it reveals how a particular medium negotiates and represents its own cultural moment. In its cutting and pasting of Shakespearean text, and in generating intertextual loop effects that seem autopoietic, such that a viewer might feel they are experiencing host processing powers, *Westworld* invites us to think about Shakespeare as a figure of connectivity – between texts and their interpretive communities, between humans and technologies – and of plenitude, the thing that does not need to predominate as a master text but instead proliferates in ways that are unexpected, pleasurable, and transformative.

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Notes

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