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“IT MUST BE BY HIS DEATH”.
“I, CINNA (THE POET)” AND THE
APPROPRIATION OF
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1. *Introduction*

When in 2012 Tim Crouch received a commission from the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) for the World Shakespeare Festival, he wrote the fifth play of his *I, Shakespeare* series: *I, Cinna (The Poet)*. The title does indicate a structural relationship with William Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, but it also denotes a stand-alone product that raises at once a question of identity concerning the authority of the source play. The use of the personal pronoun ‘I’ may suggest an account of that character told by that same character, or it could also point to the intention to personalise the treatment of that Shakespearean character, the possibility to use it as a source of individual inspiration – as, for instance, it is similarly suggested by the ‘I’ added to ubiquitous portable and mobile devices designed by

Apple.¹ Moreover, it may refer to an extreme process of character self-identification. As a matter of fact, the transformational power in the relation between text and audience originates an intense moment of mutuality, “it acts on me as I act on it”, in a dialectic engagement that is true for every act of artistic creation during which ‘I’ “confronts with a form that wants to become a work through him”.² Therefore, every time a spectator or a reader has experience of, or goes through, a Shakespearean play s/he inevitably adapts its words and appropriates them: “reheard, translated into a private lexicon, authorial property becomes, in Michel Garneau’s apt phrase, ‘tradapted’ – as it meets the mind’s ‘I’”.³ The public, then, becomes a medium through which the Shakespearean (trad)adaptation communicates with its literary past, as repository for cultural memory. This phenomenon seems to be part of a dramatic duplication or, possibly, even a multiplication: a new text stands in for an old text, a playwright stands in for another and the body of the actor stands in, somehow, for both dramatic texts.⁴ The actor’s body interacting with the audience is, therefore, a surrogate for the Shakespearean text(s)⁵ and his/her performance is “the

¹ The ‘I’ was first introduced in 1998 with the launch of the iMac, and initially it was intended to stand for several catchwords: internet, individual, instruct, inform, inspire. Almost every product since then has been branded with the same letter losing its shin only in recent years in new issues, as Apple Watch or MacBook, but keeping it for the most used devices such as the iPad and the iPhone, the most personal dialogue one can have with a digital device. See <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/news/iphone-apple-name-imac-i-internet-phone-handset-a6881701.html>.

² M. Buber, *I and Thou*, New York, Touchstone-Simon & Schuster, 1970, p. 60.

³ See B. Hogdon, *Afterword*, in *World-wide Shakespeares. Local Appropriations in Film and Performance*, edited by S. Massai, London, Routledge, 2005, digital edition.

⁴ See S. Freeman Loftis, *Shakespeare’s Surrogates. Rewriting Renaissance Drama*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. xii.

⁵ Taking as an example John Milton’s poem *On Shakespeare*, one of the first examples of ‘surrogation’ according to Sonya Freeman Loftis, she remarks that “Milton’s speaker suggests that readers and audience keep Shakespeare alive not just as an effigy but as an effigy of flesh”. As a consequence, “although Milton is really commenting on Shakespeare’s canon”, he makes that comment by reference to the

enactment of cultural memory by substitution".⁶ Displacing Shakespeare, then, could have the function to reconfigure those *timeless values* and *ethics* that are regularly attributed to him within a traditional frame of reference, but, as I will show, this is not exactly the case with *I, Cinna (The Poet)*.

The plays in *I, Shakespeare (I, Caliban, I, Peaseblossom, I, Banquo* and *I, Malvolio)* were written, directed and performed by Crouch between 2003 and 2011, and first collected in a tetralogy – even though they were not initially conceived as a series. They were principally addressed to young audiences to retell some of Shakespeare's most famous plays from the point of view of one of their minor or secondary characters.⁷ As John Retallack remarked, "[Crouch's] plays speak for the under-represented – the minor character, the young person, the audience. He refutes the 'great man' version of history and finds a thrilling formal release by speaking on behalf of the underdog".⁸ Crouch's mission is to tell the story of the play which hosts the characters, to offer their version for a public of children and teenagers who are possibly unfamiliar with those stories, "but also to make a piece of performance that has integrity in and of itself".⁹ *I, Cinna (The Poet)* was first performed at the Swan Theatre in Stratford in June 2012, and for the first time in the *I, Shakespeare* series Crouch just directed

human body as a symbol of the literary text, or, I would suggest, as a living quotation of it. See S. Freeman, *Shakespeare's Surrogates. Rewriting Renaissance Drama*, cit., pp. xii-xiii.

⁶ J. Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1996, p. 80.

⁷ For the use of 'secondary' or 'minor' in this context see: S. Soncini, "This is you": *Encountering Shakespeare with Tim Crouch*, in *Will Forever Young! Shakespeare & Contemporary Culture*, in "Altre Modernità", XI, 2017, pp. 22-35.

⁸ J. Retallack, *Introduction*, in Tim Crouch, *I, Shakespeare*, London, Oberon, 2011, p. 9.

⁹ T. Crouch, "I, Malvolio": *Bringing Shakespeare to Life for Young Audiences*, in "The Guardian", 16-08-2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2011/aug/16/i-malvolio-shakespeare-young-audiences>.

it, since the main (and only) role was interpreted by Jude Owusu.¹⁰ What is also interesting in this peculiar case of Shakespearean appropriation¹¹ is the fact that the link with Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* was mediated through Gregory Doran's Royal Shakespeare Company staged version, relocated in contemporary Africa. Doran's choice an African setting was inspired by various elements.¹² One of them was the so-called Robben Island Bible, a copy of the complete works of Shakespeare which Nelson Mandela and his fellow inmates read and annotated while they were imprisoned under apartheid in South Africa. Mandela famously signed his name next to the following lines from *Julius Caesar*: "Cowards die many times before their deaths; / The valiant never taste of death but once" (II, 2, 32-33). The same actor – Owusu – who played Cinna the poet in Doran's production, became the protagonist of Crouch's play so as to have a performing duplication as well as a dramatic one. We could then take it as a good example of the dialogic quality of the appropriation, with one version pairing the other.¹³

¹⁰ Tim Crouch subsequently took the role when *I, Cinna (The Poet)* was staged at the Unicorn Theatre in 2020, directed by Naomi Wirthner. The show was also experimentally broadcast live via Zoom in the summer of 2020 in an attempt to bring theatre to life online for young audiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. See <https://www.teamlondonbridge.co.uk/love-london-bridge/2020/7/2/i-cinna-the-poet-unicorn-digital-theatre>.

¹¹ Christy Desmet and Robert Sawyer define 'appropriation' an exchange with bi-directional effects. *Introduction*, in *Shakespeare and Appropriation*, edited by C. Desmet and R. Sawyer, London-New York, Routledge, 1999. Douglas Lanier suggests that "unlike adaptation, appropriation operates not merely on the Shakespearean text but also on the cultural authority attached to that text". D. Lanier, *Shakespearean Rhizomatics*, in *Shakespeare and the Ethics of Appropriation*, edited by A. Huang and E. Rivlin, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 24. For a thorough discussion of the terms, see also J. Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, London, Routledge, 2016².

¹² See <https://www.rsc.org.uk/julius-caesar/past-productions/gregory-doran-production-2012>.

¹³ On the website of the RSC dedicated to educational resources for *Julius Caesar*, one may watch a film closely based on the RSC stage production of *I, Cinna (The Poet)*. It is advertised as a "stimulus to explore *Julius Caesar* in much more depth" (<https://www.rsc.org.uk/julius-caesar/education>). Owusu's presence as Cinna in Crouch's play might even be considered a casual quotation from Doran's stage version of *Julius Caesar*, since, apart from an interest from the RSC in creating a direct link

2. "I, Cinna (The Poet)" and the nature of adaptation

In this article, I would like to show how *I, Cinna (The Poet)* works on multiple levels of agency: as it challenges the relationship between performer and audience, it also undercuts the hierarchical relationship between author and spectator. As he questions the authority of performance, Crouch exploits, at the same time, the authority of Shakespeare. Although just a few fragments of Shakespeare's text remain visible in the retelling, Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* is still *the text* from which the protagonist quotes – and sometimes misquotes – at topical moments, thus preserving its authority as a model and its iconic power. *I, Cinna (The Poet)* offers a good example of the double nature of adaptation/appropriation in which the conservative factor is still significantly evident. For instance, Crouch, through the appropriation of Shakespeare's themes and topics, offers his audience the opportunity to consider if and when the use of violence in pursuit of political justice is ever right. This is an unsolvable problem also at the heart of *Julius Caesar*. Moreover, the transposition of Cinna the poet in a major key does not alter his condition: as he fares so badly in convincing the plebeians not to kill him in *Julius Caesar*, so he fails to have an impact on his environment and presents himself as a poet deprived of authority in *I, Cinna (The Poet)*.

between the two performances, so as to integrate productions for grown-ups with works aimed at young audiences, there are no other direct links. For instance, Owusu/Cinna does not speak with the thick African accent Doran chose for his cast of black British actors, nor is there any other scene element to suggest a connection with that staging. "Playfully asking whether the contemporary United Kingdom might in fact be less progressive than classical Rome", as Stephen Bottoms remarked, "Crouch eschews the geographic and cultural distancing inherent in Doran's decision to set *Julius Caesar* in Africa" (S. Bottoms, *The Emancipated Shakespeare: Or, What You Will*, in *Twenty-First Century Drama. What Happens Now*, edited by S. Adiseshiah and L. LePage, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, p. 68).

Therefore, in Crouch's version Cinna serves to tackle the same crucial questions as in Shakespeare about the importance of determining identity, about the capacity of persuasion and the function of oratory. In his retelling, Crouch manages to make those issues personally relevant to spectators¹⁴ without making the character a form of counter-authority because he just shows, as Shakespeare did, the poet's failure at composing and delivering persuasive oratory. By showing the ineffectiveness of a 'prosaic' poet, Crouch seems to reinforce Shakespeare's assertion that Cinna deserves to die¹⁵ and uses his story as a moral admonition for the audience. What will emerge from this article is that *I, Cinna (The Poet)*, far from denoting opposition, makes use of the conservative quality of adaptation through which it legitimates Shakespeare's cultural power and therefore gives his established authority remarkable stability.

I, Cinna (The Poet) could be defined as a recognizable repetition with innovative modifications: every successful adaptation inevitably implies difference as well as repetition, since "to focus on repetition alone [...] is to suggest only the potentially conservative element in the audience response to adaptation".¹⁶ Therefore, if the recognition of the story is necessary for an adaptation/appropriation to be perceived as such, for its success in the cultural context where it is adapted it must also prove dynamic and innovative. In the final chapter of her seminal work, and possibly as a hint for further investigation, Linda Hutcheon points to the cultural parallel with Darwin's biological theory first introduced by Richard Dawkins: "Cultural transmission is analogous to genetic

¹⁴ See S. Bottoms, *The Emancipated Shakespeare: Or, What You Will*, cit., p. 70.

¹⁵ See L. Sansonetti, *Poetic Authority in "Julius Caesar": The Triumph of the Poet-Playwright-Actor*, in *Shakespeare and Authority. Citations, Conceptions and Constructions*, edited by K. Halsey and A. Vine, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 231-248.

¹⁶ L. Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, London, Routledge, 2006, p. 115.

transmission in that, although basically conservative, it can give rise to a form of evolution".¹⁷ The story propagates and, as is transmitted, it evolves and innovates,¹⁸ but at least a minimum unity of replication will always refer to its matrix, that is the unit of cultural replication Dawkins famously named *meme*. Theatre can be a vehicle for propagation: through the 'adaptive play' a minor character such as Cinna (who can be perceived as a quotation from the source play) expands his own narrative, but constantly refers to the originating background. In contrast with the dismembered Shakespearean quotations with which Samuel Beckett purposely tries to wear out the literary past, Crouch's use of quotations in his appropriation is a symbolic repetition, a reoccurrence of the (literary) past, a sort of revenant, with the power to reinvigorate (it in) the present.

I, Cinna (The Poet) is an interactive play as it demands its audience to respond to the action on stage by writing during the performance. Spectators are prompted by the protagonist to think carefully about the power of words to define and determine reality, about the constant threat to free speech, and to question their role in contemporary society. Cinna makes clear, through the example of his own story, that when ordinary people feel they don't have the power to influence political decisions in their society, they can always try to reverse their marginal role and regain their voice as citizens through an effective and persuasive use of language. That is why, as the performance proceeds, Cinna asks the spectators to exercise themselves in writing, picking up on those issues and, eventually, to write their own version of his story. The aim is to prompt them to assume agency: through such a metatheatrical approach, they are supposed

¹⁷ R. Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006 [1976], p. 189.

¹⁸ Not necessarily following a hierarchical succession as in Darwinian genealogy.

to produce a newly-fashioned account that, however, will inevitably still take advantage of Shakespeare's influential authority to spread its message.

The originality of the self has been variously challenged and appropriating a text is also a question of showing the power to perform identities: it would be as if "identity itself became defined as a performance within a larger network of cultural citations – we perform ourselves by 'citing' others".¹⁹ If in *King Lear* Lear's discarding of his clothes is part of a profound search for identity, in *I, Cinna (The Poet)* the character appears in a different attire from the Shakespearean text and invites the audience to *put on his clothes*, to write their version of his story and to retell it in a sort of *mise en abîme* in order to define his (but also their) social identity as a poet. Since one is constituted by someone else's discourse, this interpellation "requires the recognition of an authority at the same time that it confers identity through successfully compelling that recognition".²⁰ If then the lines on which the empowering discourse is founded are mainly a quotation from Shakespeare, directly or as a paraphrase, it follows that Cinna's voice can acquire an imposing resonance, as an echo of established power. "The quotation creates authority by its very nature and form", as Marjorie Garber noted, "it instates an authority elsewhere, and, at the same time, it imparts that authority, temporarily, to the speaker or the writer".²¹ In some ways, quotation is a kind of cultural ventriloquism, and the present

¹⁹ S. Freeman Loftis, *Shakespeare's Surrogates. Rewriting Renaissance Drama*, cit., p. xvii.

²⁰ J. Butler, *Excitable Speech. A Politics of the Performative*, London, Routledge, 1997, p. 33. Butler refers to Althusser's notion of 'interpellation', the constitutive process where individuals recognise themselves as subjects through ideology (L. Althusser, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1971, pp. 170-186). For a fuller account of Butler's interpretation of Althusser's theory of interpellation, see also J. Butler, *Conscience Doth Make Subjects of Us All*, in "Yale French Studies", LXXXVIII, 1995, pp. 6-26.

²¹ M. Garber, *Quotation Marks*, London, Routledge, 2003, p. 2.

speaker appropriates and virtually incorporates the distinguishing features that characterise the figure being quoted especially when its authority is well recognizable. It would not be possible to address Cinna as a poet outside the frame of the Shakespearean text, since that would mean to assign him a function that does not preexist him as it is clearly intended from the title. The purpose of 'interpellation', then, is "to indicate and establish a subject in subjection, to produce its social contours in space and time" adds Judith Butler, "its reiterative operation has the effect of sedimenting its 'positionality' over time".²² In Crouch's play there are multiple acts of quotation and multiple instances of appropriation. After all, the Shakespearean canon has prompted almost countless creative responses: "from the start, Shakespeare's works have activated their audiences and readers to become (re)writers and to participate in the generation of meaning".²³

3. *Scenes from an announced execution*

At the very beginning of the playtext, before the actual scripted text of *I, Cinna (The Poet)* begins, there is a long quotation (or possibly a citation?)²⁴ from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*: the whole Act III Scene 3, the only scene in which Cinna the poet appears. There is no comment, nor

²² J. Butler, *Excitable Speech. A Politics of the Performative*, cit., pp. 33-34.

²³ R. Hohl Trillini, *Casual Shakespeare. Three Centuries of Verbal Echoes*, London, Routledge, 2018, p. 7.

²⁴ As Sanders remarks, "Quotation can be deferential or critical, supportive or questioning; it depends on the context in which the quotation takes place. Citation, however, presumes a more deferential relationship; it is frequently self-authenticating, even reverential, in its reference to the canon of 'authoritative', culturally validated texts". J. Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, cit., p. 6.

any other reference, it just stands there as an epigraph.²⁵ In the following page, however, in a Note, the author specifies some important directions for production, namely that “This play invites the audience to write during its performance”, as I have just mentioned, and that “space and time need to be given to allow an audience to find their authority in relation to this invitation”.²⁶ It seems, then, that the act of writing in response to Cinna’s spoken story, producing a new (short) textual version of it, is a further appropriation of that story that will receive authority from being a sort of quotation, that is “a throwing of the voice that is also an appropriation of authority”.²⁷ To make this practice work, the authority of the quoted figure must be acknowledged, as is the case with the Shakespearean character, so as to pass its qualities to the appropriating writer/speaker,

“who appears in the act of quoting to have virtually incorporated the predecessor [...] as if the speaker were a Russian doll who had somehow swallowed up these articulate authorities and was therefore able to ventriloquize them from within.”²⁸

If we read the epigraph as a sort of prologue, an explicit declaration to stress the derivative status of the play from the Shakespearean source, then the playtext opens with Cinna’s death, showing thus its self-reflexive nature and the inevitable circularity of the story: if he is the character from that narrative and the story/narration adheres to the source plot, it cannot end but with his death. Is he a ghost, then? Has he forgotten his-story? What story could the audience write if not the story of the death of Cinna?

I, Cinna (The Poet) is a self-standing play whose protagonist just tells the audience a story he borrows from the Shakespearean plot, retold

²⁵ References here are from the published edition of *I, Cinna (The Poet)* and not from its staging.

²⁶ T. Crouch, *I, Cinna (The Poet)*, London, Oberon, 2012, p. 14.

²⁷ M. Garber, *Quotation Marks*, cit., p.16.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 11.

from his point of view.²⁹ There obviously is a re-focalisation of the narrative – since the story is told by just one character – where diegesis gains over mimesis. What we have, in the end, is a transfocalising hypertext or a transfocalised rewriting.³⁰ On the other hand, Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* itself is both event and commentary on that event: the moral implications of Caesar's political execution were already a matter of concern in the reception of classical history in early modern England. It is as if the play was aware of the reception of the story it tells, and, therefore, the protagonists of *Julius Caesar* "are subject to a particular form of overdetermined fame – and so the play embodies a kind of double perspective or parallax view. It is both now – present tense – and then – past; it is both a history, meaning the events in the past, and a present retelling of that past".³¹ In *I, Cinna (The Poet)* we have the same angular perspective which shows different time frames: Cinna (re)tells his story in the present while at the same time he makes constant reference to his stage or dramatic past which, as in a dream, he doesn't remember until he meets the tragic fate he is doomed to by his role in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*.

The examples I selected are intended to show several strategies through which Crouch exploits, and therefore strengthens, Shakespeare's cultural authority. Cinna introduces himself as a writer in his very first line, delivered bursting through a door as he comes back home from getting some food, by telling us he just wrote a poem. He then stresses his

²⁹ "It is only through these characters telling their own story" – as Jan Wozniak observed about the peculiarity of Crouch's *I, Shakespeare* characters to exceed the bounds of the plays they are taken from – "that the plot of the source plays emerges". J. Wozniak, *The Politics of Performing Shakespeare for Young People: Standing Up to Shakespeare*, London, Bloomsbury, 2016, p. 61.

³⁰ See G. Genette, *Palimpsests. Literature in the Second Degree*, translated by C. Newman and C. Doubinsky, foreword by G. Prince, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1997 [1982], p. 292.

³¹ E. Smith, *This is Shakespeare. How to Read the World's Greatest Playwright*, London, Pelican Books, 2019, p. 148.

parenthetical relationship with the world: he feels he is excluded from the events of ordinary life, he watches them but he “is not quite part” of them, he is in “brackets to real life”. In a direct address to the audience, he adds: “Do you understand? Brackets. Brackets contain material that can be removed. Without destroying the meaning of the sentence. That’s me. I’m a poet”.³² In stressing his incidental role as a poet in life, he also prompts the audience to think about the actual non-essential or marginal role he has in Shakespeare’s play by the mirroring effect implicit in intertextuality. He seems as well to point to the irrelevance of poetry, and by extension of art, in the world we live in if it is not supported by effectiveness: indirectly, he wants to encourage the audience to be more than mere observers and to engage in public life, developing an awareness of the power of language. In spite of the fact that his feeling of being enclosed marks a separation from a determined context, Cinna’s position can also point to an explanatory or accessory function he can have as a poet within those marks of separation.

He confesses his audience a secret: he has lost his voice as a poet, possibly because the brackets have softened it. He encourages his audience to take part in various exercises in writing while he indicates them specifically what to write – we should not forget *I, Cinna (The Poet)* is mainly addressed to a young audience.³³ He also writes on his notebook trying as well to find words to respond to the alarming situation in his outside world of political unrest and risk of civil war.³⁴ “Let’s write

³² T. Crouch, *I, Cinna (The Poet)*, cit., p. 15.

³³ Even though in the playtext there is no indication of age suitability, Crouch’s personal site suggests that the play is mainly addressed to kids aged in between 11 and 14: see <http://www.timcrouchtheatre.co.uk/show-on-front-page/i-cinna-the-poet-2>.

³⁴ In his depiction of what is happening in the streets of the city outside, he also inserts a few quotes from *Julius Caesar*: “but the police are waiting by the school gates with their guns, daring us to step outside. ‘This is not a holiday’, they shout, ‘go back indoors’”. The two tribunes from *Julius Caesar* are here represented as policemen. It should also be noted that *I, Cinna* opened almost a year after London was ravaged by

together, you and me. We'll write until we know what to write".³⁵ At one point he invites the audience to write the word 'REPUBLIC' and then asks: "Is this a republic, in here, in this place? Are we equal here? I want us to be equal! Here and now. You and me".³⁶ The collective act of writing is also an attempt to establish equality between the performer and the spectators and to stimulate their active participation. He encourages them to write the words he dictates and even spells them to make the writing easier. While he shares his thoughts on the meaning and the implications of words such as 'FREE' or 'CONSPIRACY', he asks the audience to write on the bottom left corner of the sheet of paper that they have been given one word at a time. He starts asking to write the word 'IT' and after a few lines he asks to write 'MUST' next to 'IT', and so on in a similar fashion with the words 'BE', 'BY', 'HIS' and eventually 'DEATH'. The (death) sentence composed by this 'skipped dictation' is the well-known quote from the opening of Brutus' meditation that would spur his thoughts to action (II, 1, 10-12), and Cinna manages to bring it forth without even pronouncing the line as a whole, but just having it casually written down by, supposedly, each member of the audience. At this point he is rather shaken up by the sentence they have in front of their eyes and suggests to just "read it under your breath"³⁷ so as not to be heard by anyone, thus implying the ominous import of such a phrase. It is a weird way of quoting Shakespeare during a performance, but effective in provoking a feeling of suspense and a good

the notorious riots in the summer of 2011. Images on videos show urban riots, protesters, rallying crowds with banners, and then police with riot shields and scenes of violent confrontations, all of them marking the presence of the present. In his direct address to the audience, Cinna shows he inhabits the same world where his audience lives. This is particularly evident when he prompts the spectators to consider the role of 'political' words and the weight they have: "What is free? You are free! Words are free. There is nothing that cannot be done or undone with words".

³⁵ T. Crouch, *I, Cinna (The Poet)*, p. 17.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

exercise in appropriation. In this worried state of mind, Cinna starts his account of what he experienced on that same day: his story functions as a prelude, or possibly a prequel, to his only scene in *Julius Caesar*. He tells the audience how he would have liked to speak up to the policemen that stopped him when he got out looking for bread, but chose instead to remain silent and scared. “But I say nothing. I am a coward. Cinna the coward. I hide behind my words. I die many times before my death”.³⁸ When he delivers those lines (mis)quoting *Julius Caesar* (II, 2, 32-33), he is not just using that Shakespearean passage to provide wisdom for an educational function, but he is also quoting one of the ‘sources’ of Doran’s production. Therefore, that quotation could also be interpreted as a move that seeks to acknowledge Shakespeare’s global influence and, to some extent, to re-appropriate it in order to bolster his cultural prestige.

Dreams in *I, Cinna (The Poet)* are central, as they are in *Julius Caesar*, especially for what they tell us about the dreamers and the way they misinterpret their imagery. Both Caesar and Cinna might have avoided their tragic destiny, had they rightly interpreted their omens:

“How will our poem start?

He ‘sees’ the audience.

No way! I dreamt of this! That I was here and you were there. You, there! I dreamt this! [...] Sometimes a dream is what will happen in future, do you agree? In my dream, what then, I talked to you and what then?”³⁹

At this point of the play, Cinna introduces the audience to the interpretation of his dream as if it were a *déjà vu*. In a metatheatrical turn he refers to his stage life and to what happens every night he is represented on the stage but, paradoxically, like other illustrious predecessors such as

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in Tom Stoppard's celebrated play, he does not remember his *dramatic future*: he has momentarily forgotten Shakespeare. At every performance, then, he is doomed to recollect his story, to give substance to his premonitory dream. This peculiar device of the dream will come back as a refrain in the course of the play until he – inevitably – sightly misquotes from the source play: "Another dream. I dreamt just now that I did feast with Caesar".⁴⁰ To feast, here, means to share the same fate as Caesar; still, Cinna is unable to understand this premonition of danger exactly as it happens in *Julius Caesar*: "The scene of Cinna the poet is in many ways the most symbolically instructive of the whole play: it demonstrates in action the same theme of misinterpretation with which we have been so much concerned".⁴¹ Only when he meets his tragic fate, he realises that it is the end of his dream: "*This* is how my dream ends".⁴² As what happens to Cinna is emblematic for the entire meaning of *Julius Caesar*, so *I, Cinna (The Poet)* restates what we know about Caesar and Cinna (as a miniature, in the source play) and recycles the story on a different stage, showing the potential of quotation as appropriation.

Various quotations from *Julius Caesar* are camouflaged as titles and excerpts from articles in a daily newspaper Cinna skims through: the title is *The Citizen*, and the date is March 15. They appear either as an account of the events that affect the citizens of Rome, or as reported speech in interviews or statements from the protagonists of those events.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁴¹ M. Garber, *Dream in Shakespeare. From Metaphor to Metamorphosis*, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 2013 [1974], digital edition.

⁴² T. Crouch, *I, Cinna (The Poet)*, cit., p. 44.

“Nor heaven nor earth have been at peace tonight ... Graves have yawned and opened up their dead ... Horses did neigh, and dying men did groan ...’ [...] ‘Is this the end of the Republic? See pages 3, 4, 5, & 6. Brutus Comments page 27’.

‘Brutus says: The abuse of greatness ... Crown Caesar, and then, I grant, we put a sting in him...’⁴³

They are not casual quotations because, even though they “may not mean much yet they indisputably are”⁴⁴ – that is, they still take the audience back to a Shakespearean context to evoke an intertextual meaning. This narrative strategy shows how the presence of Shakespeare’s verbal trace, the *Shakespearean gene*, can mutate and adapt when reproduced in subsequent replicators as it could happen, for instance, when members of the audience are asked to write their own version of the story.

In this regard, I believe that it is also useful to take into consideration what Douglas Lanier suggested when he adapted the concept of the ‘rhizome’, as theorised by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari,⁴⁵ to reconceptualise Shakespearean adaptations as a process of endless becoming. “A rhizomatic conception of Shakespeare situates ‘his’ cultural authority not in the Shakespearean text at all”, Lanier remarked, “but in the accrued power of Shakespearean adaptation, the multiple, changing lines of force that have been created by and which respond to historical contingencies”.⁴⁶ It is worthwhile, then, to observe how the story of Cinna can be transmitted in different narratives and how it will change over time following multiple lineages of descent. It will thus show that Shakespeare’s text is not the only prototype of that narrative, even though it is the ‘strongest’, from which most of the analogies are taken. This stimulating

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁴⁴ R. Hohl Trillini, *Casual Shakespeare. Three Centuries of Verbal Echoes*, cit., p. 3.

⁴⁵ See G. Deleuze et F. Guattari, *Milles Plateaux*, Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 1980.

⁴⁶ D. Lanier, *Shakespearean Rhizomatics: Adaptation, Ethics, Value*, cit., p. 29.

suggestion stresses the adaptational nature of the text in a root system which does not necessarily have a rigid vertical structure of transmission. Such a move will let us recognise the status of the adapted text as derivative of previous narratives as well as its power to ever differentiate itself transforming into something forever new in an 'adaptational chain'. Clearly, the incidence of certain quotations – whether intentional, casual, or disembodied – emphasises the conservative authority of the Shakespearean text and therefore its capacity to provide iconic models of symbolic or political signification, but the choices operated in the proliferation of derivative roots can also throw light on other issues of the source narrative. Hohl Trillini seems to point to the same process when she suggests that we should start reading the many borrowings from Shakespeare not as a line of filial descent, but as an often casual series of replications: "We will understand better how such borrowings work if we put aside family metaphors", she writes, "they distract unduly from the continued life of quoted phrases"⁴⁷ that have found other means in which to prosper. Indeed, certain stories are being told and retold and the retelling itself implies that the same narrative will be spoken in different voices. After all, "a story can be thought as a fundamental unit of cultural transmission".⁴⁸ We could think of a narrative as a replicator which needs a vehicle – an organism – to breed. Sometimes a new vehicle is necessary to propagate the story. As Linda Hutcheon and Gary Bortolotti argue, using biological concepts in a heuristic manner, cultural selection is both conservative and dynamic, and

⁴⁷ R. Hohl Trillini, *Casual Shakespeare. Three Centuries of Verbal Echoes*, cit., p. 5.

⁴⁸ L. Hutcheon and G. R. Bortolotti, *On the Origins of Adaptations: Rethinking Fidelity Discourse and 'Success' – Biologically*, in "New Literary History", XXXVIII, 2007, p. 447.

the evaluation blueprint for the success of a narrative and for its power to be dominant is measured by its persistence in the long term.

Cinna watches the coverage on the assassination of Caesar on television. He says it is being broadcast on every channel, probably on those all-news channels presenting the same scene over and over: “Caesar is dead. Caesar is dead. I dreamt of this. Caesar’s death. This was also in my dream. I watch it over and over again. On every channel. They play it over and over. Watch it a hundred times now. Can’t take my eyes off it”.⁴⁹ He stresses the repetition of the same scene which is being broadcast (probably with different perspectives from various camera angles) also in the following lines. He is (re)narrating Shakespeare’s story interspersing it not only with quotations, but with comments, impressions, and a few details that Cinna adds in order to adapt the hypotext to the topical context. Then, probably the most quoted line by the historical Julius Caesar – words that he probably never pronounced – comes as a news ticker that Cinna reports for the audience: “Breaking news: Caesar’s last words reported: ‘Et tu, Brute? Then fall Caesar’”.⁵⁰ He does not simply quote Shakespeare here, but refers to the reception of classical tradition in our past and present civilisation; after all, Shakespeare himself apparently echoed in that line the words that Suetonius attributed to Caesar.⁵¹

The account of Caesar’s funeral gives us the opportunity to reflect on another kind of quotation used by Crouch. Cinna presents the audience with a live commentary of the funeral orations as if they were a re-enactment of the events from the source play, updated for a contemporary world. In his narration, the quotations from Shakespeare are reported in an

⁴⁹ T. Crouch, *I, Cinna (The Poet)*, cit., pp. 33-34.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁵¹ Julius Caesar pronounces a similar version of this sentence in Greek in Suetonius’ *De vita Caesarum*. See S. Gillespie, *Shakespeare’s Books. A Dictionary of Shakespeare Sources*, London, Bloomsbury, 2016², p. 380.

act of ventriloquism: "He [Brutus] steps up to the microphone. 'Had you rather Caesar were living and die all slaves', he says, 'than that Caesar were dead, to live all free men?'"⁵² At first, Cinna is strengthened in his opinions by Brutus' words and, when Antony speaks, he believes that his words are just some political spin; therefore, he doubts Antony can alter the course of action simply with a statement: "And Brutus lets Antony speak at Caesar's funeral. Listen to him. Lend him your ears! What can words do?"⁵³ In this line he even appropriates Antony's words in what could be a case of transvocalisation:⁵⁴

"The noble Brutus hath told you that Caesar was ambitious' he says. Yes. Duh! 'When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept. Is this ambition?' well, yes! He was a politician. That was his job, to kiss babies and weep for the poor."⁵⁵

It is evident, once more, that Crouch plays with well-known quotations from *Julius Caesar* thus enforcing its cultural power. By the comments Cinna adds to the reported speech, he is clearly trying to influence the audience to follow and agree with his point of view in supporting the conspirators. However, as happens with the Plebeians, he changes his mind and takes sides with Antony when he hears his speech. The trigger for the change in his opinion is the poetic power of Antony's funeral oration:

"I come not, friends, to steal away your hearts ...'
 What language is this that Antony speaks?
 'I tell you that which you yourselves do know,
 Show you sweet Caesar's wounds, poor poor dumb mouths,
 And bid them speak for me'.
 These are words. This is POETRY! [...]"

⁵² T. Crouch, *I, Cinna (The Poet)*, cit., p. 38.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁵⁴ See G. Genette, *Palimpsests*, cit., p. 290.

⁵⁵ T. Crouch, *I, Cinna (The Poet)*, cit., p. 39.

Mark Antony's words change history. [...] Breaking news: Poetry beats Prose."⁵⁶

An audience well versed in Shakespeare's play would pick up these lines immediately. The fragments of direct speech that Cinna repeats are clearly a quotation from *Julius Caesar*, and once again through the convention of the quotation marks not only does he indicate a sign of origin, but also that "this is the real thing, not a paraphrase".⁵⁷ They are well identifiable as a direct citation – even when spoken – because Cinna, and with him Crouch, need Shakespeare's authority to affirm the power of poetry, even though Antony's words in this context are used with a slightly different function than in the source. "This is the poem you will write. And its title, write its title at the top. Its title: THE DEATH OF CINNA".⁵⁸

When Cinna realises his own fate, he eventually remembers his story and inevitably accepts his dramatic destiny. He announces his own death as it is happening: soon after pronouncing the previous lines, he re-enacts his scene quoting Shakespeare's lines, presenting them to the audience as the subject of the poem they are going to write. He is retelling in the present what happened in his dramatic past and indicates how he wants it to be perpetuated in the future. Cinna's fate is assigned him by the Shakespearean hypotext and Cinna becomes aware of it when it is already too late to save his life – it could not be otherwise, since Crouch does not want a different ending for him. Cinna, by prompting the audience to write their own version of the story, questions the authoritarianism of the authority of Shakespeare, but he still makes use and inevitably refers to Shakespeare's cultural and political power. Indeed, he leaves the audience with a well-defined task and an opportunity: his story can serve as a

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁵⁷ M. Garber, *Quotation Marks*, cit., p. 27.

⁵⁸ T. Crouch, *I, Cinna (The Poet)*, p. 43.

cautionary example to illustrate how the failure of language to effect action can lead to a condition of powerlessness. Paradoxically, his tale also shows the immediate effects, and the relative risks, a persuasive rhetoric can have on people.

"This is how my dream ends!"⁵⁹

"You have three minutes. Bring my death to life with your words."⁶⁰

"Tell my story. Write your poems. Send them out. Words work but only if you work words. Remember Cinna, your words will say. Remember the poet."⁶¹

He is now the ghost of himself and could be defined as "both a duplication and an attenuation of the original: in effect a shadowy revenant, a ghost".⁶² As in the best tradition of Shakespearean ghosts, Cinna asks to be remembered. The illustrious precedent, the ghost of King Hamlet, orders his son on parting: "Adieu, adieu, adieu, remember me" (I, 5, 90).⁶³ Whether Hamlet literally takes down on his notebook the last words of the ghost of his father, or just impresses them in his memory, nonetheless he repeats them as a quotation, and actually misquotes them since he misses one "adieu" in his repetition (I, 5, 110). The ghost repeats his "adieu" three times only in the Quarto editions of *Hamlet* (Q1 and Q2) and just

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁶² C. Desmet, *Recognizing Shakespeare, Rethinking Fidelity*, in *Shakespeare and the Ethics of Appropriation*, edited by A. Huang and E. Rivlin, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 45.

⁶³ For the quotation of the ghost, I refer to the text of *Hamlet* edited by John Jowett for The New Oxford Shakespeare (*The Complete Works*, edited by G. Taylor, J. Jowett, T. Bourus, and G. Egan, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017, vol. I), which is mainly based on the Second Quarto (see Jowett's introduction to *Hamlet*). The transmission of the text of *Hamlet* has been a source of debate in editorial history that is still evident in the different approaches to the editorial choices adopted in recent editions. See, for instance, *Hamlet. A Critical Reader*, edited by A. Thompson and N. Taylor, London, Bloomsbury, 2016.

twice in the Folio. Therefore, Hamlet doesn't misquote the ghost of his father in the Folio. This apparently trivial textual issue could be taken as an example of how a misquote in Shakespeare can also show that editors, or scholars, are often doomed to 'misquote Shakespeare' when they have to decide how to reproduce a line if there are various texts available. However, Hamlet's "response to the ghost's final command [...] is to turn to playwriting"⁶⁴ by writing the interpolations to *The Murder of Gonzago*, and so does Cinna when he asks the audience to re-member him by writing a 'body of work' for his story that, in turn, will generate interest in the Shakespearean text. This appropriative model can be taken to illustrate the conservative factor implicit in adaptation; since it tends to reify the cultural authority it draws from, the rhizomatic structure I mentioned before shows how Shakespearean narratives can recombine in ever differentiating particulars constituting a network of connections that adds up to Shakespeare as a 'living embodiment' of cultural life at a given historical moment. This version of "Shakespeare-as-model" does not question its cultural power, instead it "complicates the notion of cultural domination" and "problematizes the model of Shakespearean appropriation".⁶⁵

4. *The afterlife of the character*

The verbal reproduction of the words of a previous speaker implies the incorporation of two into one and possibly, according to a post-structuralist argumentation, the 'death' of the predecessor's authorial voice: "Either the present speaker channels an alien voice with alien intentions [...] or the authority being quoted is swallowed up by the present

⁶⁴ S. Freeman Loftis, *Shakespeare's Surrogates. Rewriting Renaissance Drama*, cit., p. 106.

⁶⁵ D. Lanier, *Shakespearean Rhizomatics*, cit., p. 36.

speaker".⁶⁶ In his 'I' plays, Crouch underlines the importance of the telling – and re-telling, as in *I, Cinna (The Poet)* – of stories in a pure theatrical sense, as usually happens in theatre where stories take shape and are constantly repeated with variations.⁶⁷ Should his spectators ignore the actual plot of *Julius Caesar*, they nevertheless bring with them the story of Cinna to thrive in their fantasy and to further on in virtually infinite possibilities. Roland Barthes famously argued that "Language knows a 'subject' not a 'person', and this subject, empty outside of the very enunciation which defines it, suffices to make language 'hold together', suffices, that is to say, to exhaust it".⁶⁸ To paraphrase his argument, I would say that the 'I' in Crouch's 'I' series denotes a subject not a person, and I would add that it is also an interchangeable, plural subject.

What determines Cinna's fate, both in Shakespeare and in Crouch, is not a simple misreading/mishearing of his name – the poet for the conspirator – but it is a deliberate act on the part of the plebeians that do not recognise his role in society. If in *Julius Caesar* Cinna the poet dies and with him Shakespeare dramatises an attack on poetry, in Crouch not only does he live on as a ghost, but he also asks his audience to retell his story, to become functional poets (unlike him) in the name of Shakespeare – thus, the final authority remains bestowed on Shakespeare's text. The author therefore is not dead but lives as his cultural authority does in the rewritings of the spectators. His story propagates in variants that still bring with them the genes of Shakespeare: they are there to praise Shakespeare's established cultural power, not to bury it.

⁶⁶ C. Desmet, *Recognizing Shakespeare, Rethinking Fidelity*, cit., p. 45.

⁶⁷ See J. Wozniak, *The Politics of Performing Shakespeare for Young People: Standing Up to Shakespeare*, cit., pp. 70-79.

⁶⁸ R. Barthes, *The Death of the Author*, in Id., *Image Music Text*, Essays Selected and Translated by Stephen Heath, London, Fontana Press, 1977, p. 145.

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