

# Too Soon Forgot: The Ethics of Remembering in *Richard III*, *NOW*, and *House of Cards*

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## Abstract

Three interconnected performances of Shakespeare's *Richard III* display the extreme hermeneutical volatility of representation when remediated through a celebrity's personal history. The film *NOW: In the Wings on a World Stage* (dir. Jeremy Whelehan, 2014) documents the Bridge Project Company's *Richard III* directed by Sam Mendes and starring Kevin Spacey (2011-12), a production launched at London's Old Vic and transferred to twelve cities across the globe. Just prior to the distribution of *NOW*, Netflix released its first season of *House of Cards* (2013) with Spacey as the politician, Francis Underwood, at the center of its seamy landscape. Spacey insists in multiple interviews, "The truth is Frank [of *House of Cards*] wouldn't exist without *Richard III*." The *House of Cards* indebtedness goes deeper than the Mendes production since both Michael Dobbs's original book trilogy (1989-1995) and the Andrew Davies-BBC television adaptations of Dobbs's work (1990; 1993; 1995) acknowledge Shakespeare's history play as inspiration. This web of *Richard III* performances and slant appropriations does not simply chronicle literary indebtedness but also prompts questions about epistemological ethics and hermeneutical instability. As of October 2017, these three performances of Richard — the Mendes staged instantiation, the Spacey-as-Richard of *NOW*, and Richard as Frank Underwood — are haunted by the revelation of Spacey's career-long sexual predation. All three Richards began their artistic journey trading on the capital of Spacey's notoriety and deploying a curated history as remediative strategy for producing the 400-year-old play. Now the intersection between celebrity biography and performance confronts the responsibilities of knowing and challenges the affective pleasure viewers take in witnessing the unfettered agency and appetitive voracity of the powerful. The destructive intrusion of Spacey's celebrity biography on the memory and meaning of this suite of *Richard III* performances provokes heightened ethical scrutiny not just of the institutions that protect predatory artists but also of audiences who must acknowledge their own complicity with Richard's seductive immorality and the stars who play his part.<sup>1</sup>

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Historiography constructs the thing it claims to report — provoking both forgetfulness and remembrance of discourse's mediation.<sup>2</sup> Too often, forgetting the mediating hand of historiography

enables moral avoidance, whereas remembering or recognizing the intervention of constitutive discourses can propel ethical obligation.<sup>3</sup> Self-reflexive literary features such as a narrative frame or direct address puncture a fully immersive experience of history, prompting an audience to remember representation transpires "now." William Shakespeare achieves this elbow-in-the-ribs effect through a variety of devices, but in his history of *Richard III*, he does so primarily by means of the would-be monarch's direct address, a habit that many have argued positions audience members as "co-conspirators" with Richard. Isabel Karremann argues persuasively that such techniques throughout the Shakespearean history canon stress "the mediated character of historical memory along with the process of selection, representation and transformation that produces it, thus creating an awareness of the role that forgetting, too, plays in making history (as well as in making theatre)" (Karremann 2015, 25-26). For example, in his initial soliloquy, Richard's thrice-iterated intensifier, "now," spotlights the gap of history itself, an immediate present separated from a past rapidly receding further in drama's forward-moving time. Richard's "now" insists on an immersive immediacy just as it deploys the self-referential techniques of hypermediacy in which the audience remains deeply aware of the aesthetic work performed in linear time.

Over time, hypermedial techniques designed to "wake up" an audience's awareness of representation fail to register with precision, especially when the more transparent strategies of selection and narration have transformed into canonical iterations. While *Richard III* adopts hypermedial strategies (Bolter and Grusin 2000, 19) — that highly visible mode of artistic representation best expressed in Richard's soliloquies and asides — the play also exploits invisible artistic techniques that conceal the selection process by which heterogeneous source materials from Sir Thomas More to Edward Hall to Raphael Holinshed become historical "truths." Indeed, the canonical status of *Richard III* (despite Yorkist protests) transforms Shakespeare's remediation of chronicle history into authoritative historiography, the only version of the Duke of Gloucester's accession that many readers and viewers will ever know. Arguably, as time passes, plays with more radical and subversive assertions regarding heavily mediated truth settle into hegemonic complicity. Though Karremann contends that *Richard III* triggers audience member recognition "that whatever emerges from mediation as 'truth' is always partial and selective, constructed through acts of remembering as well as forgetting" (61), the play's long performance history and canonical position obscure the questionable historicity of the text itself. Shakespeare's cultural status and an audience's lack of familiarity with the competing archival versions of Richard jointly elevate the play's history into transparently authoritative chronicle. It thus becomes too easy to

forget that the providentialist apotheosis of Richmond at play's end owes much to the Tudor dynasty's mythologizing, historiographic-propaganda machine.

A cluster of recent performances of *Richard III* deepen and render more acute the tension between forgetfulness and remembrance at the heart of Shakespeare's meditation on history telling. Three interconnected performances of Shakespeare's *Richard III* display the uneasy oscillation between those cognitive states. Moreover, these versions illustrate the extreme hermeneutical volatility of representation when remediated through a celebrity's own history. The film, *NOW: In the Wings on a World Stage* (Dir. Jeremy Whelehan, 2014), documents the Bridge Project Company's *Richard III* directed by Sam Mendes and starring Kevin Spacey (2011-12), a production launched at London's Old Vic and transferred to twelve cities across the globe. Just prior to the distribution of *NOW*, Netflix released its first season of *House of Cards* (2013) with Spacey as the politician, Francis (Frank) Underwood, at the center of its seamy landscape. Spacey asserts in multiple interviews, "The truth is Frank [of *House of Cards*] wouldn't exist without Richard III" (quoted in Thompson 2014). The *House of Cards* indebtedness goes deeper than the Mendes production since both Michael Dobbs's original book trilogy (1989-1995) and the Andrew Davies-BBC television adaptations of Dobbs's work (1990; 1993; 1995) acknowledge Shakespeare's history play as inspiration. More than documenting literary genealogy, this web of *Richard III* performances and slant appropriations provokes questions about epistemological ethics and hermeneutical instability in the meaning-making transaction.<sup>4</sup> As of late 2017, these versions of *Richard III* are now ghosted by the specter of their lead actor's sexual misconduct and abuse of celebrity capital.<sup>5</sup> On October 30, 2017, actor Anthony Rapp's revelation of Spacey's sexual advances when Rapp was fourteen years of age began a wave of accusations about the lead actor. In response, the Old Vic, where Spacey served as artistic director for eleven years (2004-2015), established an investigation and systemic procedural review (Brown and Weaver 2017). Spacey sparked much public and digital ire when he seasoned an apology tweet by coming out as gay. As a result, the three performances of Richard — the Mendes staged instantiation, the Spacey-as-Richard of *NOW*, and Richard as Frank Underwood — are haunted by the uncontrolled fallout of Spacey's celebrity misconduct.

All three *Richards* began their artistic journey trading on the capital of Spacey's Hollywood caché and deploying a curated history as remediative strategy for producing the 400-year-old play. Now the intersection between celebrity biography and performance confronts the responsibilities of knowing (an ethics of epistemology) and challenges the affective pleasure viewers take in witnessing the unfettered agency and appetitive voracity of the powerful. More importantly, the

revelations about Spacey reinvigorate an interrogative stance not just toward the ethics of the titular character but also toward the often-invisible hand that shapes history. In particular, *NOW* and *House of Cards* highlight the selection process of historiography central to Shakespeare's original play text and freshly accessible when read in the context of Spacey's secret predation. Now that Spacey's celebrity biography intrudes so destructively on the memory and meaning of this suite of *Richard III* performances, observers should recognize more acutely the constructedness of history-telling — a crucial ethical act for audiences and production teams alike. Remediated through Spacey's celebrity biography, these artifacts replicate the patterns of remembering and forgetting endemic to the transfer of historiography. By unhappy accident, Spacey's abuses amplify the true stakes of historiography's repackaged past — the ways in which narrative strategies and selectivity cloak inherently repressive and exploitative powers.

### Globalizing History

The 2011 Mendes production of *Richard III* appropriated a non-Medieval, Fascist-quoting contemporary history to increase its relevance. In the Old Vic production, Mendes opted to isolate *Richard III* from its first tetralogy context and to downplay its dramatization of incipient English nationhood in favor of a more recent reference point. The influence of 2010's Arab Spring on the Old Vic production has been well documented: actors mentioned it in interviews, projected images echoed it, and Spacey's performance channeled the well-known, aviator-sunglasses-wearing Libyan dictator, Muammar Gaddafi.<sup>6</sup> Spacey explains in interviews that the production team "basically looked at a lot of photographs of [Muammar] Gaddafi" when planning Richard's military garb, and the actor confirms, ". . . we based that entire costume on him — I even called it my 'Daf' look" (quoted in Cerasaro 2014). In the interview appended to the published script, both Mendes and Spacey characterize the play's depiction of dictatorship as thoroughly contemporary. In fact, since the production took place as a stand-alone performance, not as part of the tetralogy it completes, the political references functioned in more diffuse ways. Observes Mendes:

When you divorce *Richard III* from the history plays, taking it away from its Wars of the Roses context, it becomes a piece less about monarchy, less about English history, and more about power. In a sense this is one of the first great portraits of a modern dictator. It is astonishing, living in the twenty-first century, that there are still figures today on the front page of every newspaper — Gaddafi, for example, or Mubarak — who are exactly what Shakespeare described and anatomized four hundred years ago. (Mendes 2014, 172)

Here Mendes distances the political critique of Shakespeare's play by shifting its context from the business of English history to the conflicts of the Middle East — violence that, nonetheless, originated in many ways from European colonial interference. Thus, though *Richard III* narrates a highly local moment of emergent English identity-making, the Mendes production sought ways in which its de-localized subject matter could communicate to a wider audience.

By blending visual cues and costuming from 1930s fascistic Europe with references to the Arab Spring (particularly in Spacey's military look), the production adopted a faux globalism that extended beyond styling to appear in promotional interviews and casting choices. This faux globalism garnishes performance with the gloss of a non-Western culture or history but resolutely follows English stage traditions and, more worryingly, reinvigorates distinctly European stereotypes of the non-Western cultures from which it borrows. In the case of *Richard III*, Mendes and Spacey did not cast any persons of Middle Eastern descent as part of their production. Without endeavoring to reconstruct an entire social or cultural structure for its Arab Spring referentiality, the production remained content to make only visual gestures via costuming and accessories and exploit the coincidence of timing through interviews.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the appropriation of the Gaddafi reference unearthed very shallowly buried Orientalist stereotypes of North Africa as home to arbitrary violence and brutal dictatorships. By mentioning the "coincidence" of the production's relevance to the Arab Spring, reviewers like Michael Billington (see note 6) ensured that Richard as Gaddafi or Mubarak gained comfortable purchase when, indeed, Westerners should well have been on the lookout for the rise of Nationalist demagogues within their own borders.

Even before the exposure of Spacey's perfidy, the thinness of the historical window dressing could be detected in the Bridge Project Company membership. In his forward to the printed script, Spacey quotes Mendes: "The idea behind The Bridge Project was born out of a simple desire: a wish for artists, collaborators, and audiences *on both sides of the Atlantic* to experience one another's work, talent, and artistry in the theater" (quoted in Spacey 2014, viii, emphasis mine). The aims of the Bridge Company enterprise emerge in the interview with Mendes also appended to the published script: "Staging *Richard III* with an *international* company allows you to loosen the ties that make it purely English, and in doing so, perhaps it becomes a little more *global*, a study of dictatorship" (Mendes 2014, 172, emphasis mine). Mendes's descriptions of the Bridge Company and his *Richard III* production migrate provocatively through increasingly misleading labels and elide vastly different denotations, first identifying the collaboration as transatlantic, then "international," and lastly, "global." The preferred "global" operates here as a strategic buzzword to heighten relevance and disassociate the canonical work from its "stuffy" heritage. The global

label conveniently disavows an elitist history but only thinly conceals the production's considerable indebtedness to British theatrical traditions. For example, the production began life in the historic Old Vic, borrowed design and costuming elements from Richard Eyre's fascist-set *Richard III* (National Theatre, 1990), and concluded with a *coup de théâtre* taken straight from Peter Hall's *Coriolanus* in which Laurence Olivier's upside-down warrior met his death as a Mussolini (Dir. Peter Hall, 1959).<sup>8</sup>

The production's dilution of Medieval English history suited the planned international tour and the nature of the Bridge Company itself.<sup>9</sup> However, as Rebecca Lemon notes, "the ambition of the Bridge project, at least by Spacey and Mendes's own account, is more conscripted than global, limited to 'both sides of the Atlantic'" (Lemon 2018, 142). The worlds "bridged" by the company remained decidedly Anglo-American and the company predominantly Caucasian, with only two visible ethnic minorities (Nigerian-British Chuk Iwuji as Buckingham; African-American Isaiah Johnson as Lord Rivers/Scrivener), and no actor without a British or American accent, thus rendering highly debatable the genuine globalism of the production. Such insight intensifies now that the documentary film about the production's worldwide tour must be read in the context of a shadow history of Spacey's misbehavior.

### Documenting History

Mendes and Spacey transferred their American and British co-production to multiple cities around the world and claimed the "global" designation by virtue of air miles; however, the documentary film's tourist-style representation of the various countries visited does not suggest truly global cultural interpenetration. As it documents the Mendes production on tour, *NOW* displaces Shakespeare's direct address incipit to *Richard III* with a return to theatrical origins. Rather than open on the beginnings of the production at the Old Vic, *NOW* opts for an alternative historical framing, the ancient Greek traditions of drama inscribed in the stones of the amphitheater at Epidaurus. The film's prologue thus establishes its subject matter as the abiding community of theater and its unique ontology as an evanescent art form both fleeting and persistent. Opening on an empty Epidaurus (the Bridge Company's first non-English tour destination) in the long shadows of sunset, the camera pulls back and up to reveal the curved stone seating. Intercut with shots of the speaking Mendes and Spacey are a blast of behind-the-scenes images and scenic shots of Epidaurus.<sup>10</sup> Mendes's initial statements cue to the film's title: "The thrill of theater is the fact that it's alive, and it's happening once only in front of your eyes." A quickly cut montage pauses longer on a shot of Spacey on stage with "NOW" projected behind him on the flats just as he

declaims the play's initial word. Spacey explains the title of the film: "We called the film *NOW* not only because it is the first word of the first sentence of *Richard III* . . . but also because this film puts you in the present tense, into the live moment onstage, and on the journey alongside us — which is now" (Spacey 2014, x). The opening of *NOW* thus presents Mendes and Spacey in a long line of continuity from the ancient Greeks to the present and as high-minded and well-intentioned collaborators eager to build theater community and enrich artistic common bonds across the globe — though the result looks suspiciously like familiar habits of colonial export.

*NOW* relies upon direct address as a prime tool of *ethos*, creating a tone of earnest credibility through the standard documentary film strategy of intercut interviews. But Spacey's actions outside the frame reveal that such techniques amount to no more than another gapped telling of the really real. Of course, *NOW* does not offer authentic access to behind-the-scenes preparations and performance but rather another deliberately curated history designed to burnish the credentials of its director and leading star. The result is an opening direct address that grants each artist authority and markets by the appeal of *ethos*. The various cast members and crew who chime in function as surrogates for the film viewing audience in that they respond directly and indirectly to the assertions of Mendes and Spacey; crucially, those audience surrogates confirm that Spacey-as-Richard plays a role utterly unlike his own truly benevolent and generous nature.<sup>11</sup> The film is peppered with "treats" provided for the touring cast by the significantly more affluent Spacey — a luxurious meal, a cruise along the Amalfi Coast, a trek to sand dunes in Qatar. The harshly self-aware antiheroism of the Shakespearean opening is superseded by an introduction to the aims of the Bridge Company helmed by the patrons, Mendes and Spacey.

*NOW* records the selection process that constitutes history's construction very much as *Richard III* interrogates the history it bodies forth through both transparent and immersive strategies of narration. Viewed through the behavior of Spacey, *NOW* underscores the artificiality of its conceits. Indeed, the grateful praise of Spacey on the part of cast members functions in hindsight as dubious examples of how history is crafted through first-hand accounts, remembrances, and anecdotes that may well silence a different set of stories.<sup>12</sup> In the production and its film documentary, Mendes and Spacey downplayed one history to increase the volume on another — that of the Arab Spring — but yet another history now supersedes that one: the secret history of predatory sexuality in the creative arts of theater and film. The result, then, is an artifact, viewed in severe retrospect, that unintentionally reinforces the lessons of history's fragility at the center of Shakespeare's original drama, awakening remembrance and driving ethical action.

## Remembering History

Like *NOW*, *House of Cards* (2013-2018) presents itself as behind-the-scenes access — this time to the political machinations of Washington, DC, with Francis Underwood as the audience's Richard III and Chorus-guide. But once again, its techniques of history-telling now come under more intense scrutiny. Comparisons to Shakespeare's drama, specifically *Richard III*, abounded in the reviews for the inaugural season of *House of Cards* (2013).<sup>13</sup> More importantly, Spacey himself repeatedly articulated the connection between the Shakespearean antihero and his characterization of Francis Underwood. In an interview with Anne Thompson, Spacey explains:

The truth is Frank wouldn't exist without Richard III. I mean that literally. Michael Dobbs wrote the book and the original TV show in Britain based on Richard's direct address. I didn't invent that: Shakespeare invented that whole idea of making the audience a coconspirator, bringing you in on his ideas and plans. The experience I had doing that in front of audiences, looking into the eyes of people around the world as I brought them in was a huge thing to learn, before I started shooting "House of Cards." It's different than Frank Underwood looking down the barrel of the camera lens. It's naughty fun looking into the eyes of people around the globe. (Thompson 2014)

Spacey's "naughty fun" now codes quite differently in light of his sexual misconduct; however, the ghost of his predatory actions should not only implicate the star. Indeed, as Richard-Frank-Spacey's co-conspirators, the audience must confront pressing ethical obligation in the form of remembrance, a mindfulness of the invisible power structures informing historiography's decision-making and narrative strategies. Thanks to the #MeToo movement, viewers cannot evade their responsibilities as consumers of the products created by theater and film companies which quietly cover up or look the other way when their star violates other human beings.<sup>14</sup>

Though its immediate kinship with "Now is the winter of our discontent" may not be readily apparent, the pilot episode of *House of Cards* (Dir. David Fincher 2013) mimics Shakespeare's interrogation of historiography. In its scant four minutes, the prologue to "Chapter 1" embodies history's dance between remembering and forgetting, access and denial, discourse and the real. More importantly, it positions Frank as the intervening narrative voice, one so potentially unreliable as to throw the objectivity of history-making into serious question. Over a black screen, the auditory evidence of a crash can be heard — the screech of tires, breaking glass, and the yelp of a dog. When the black screen transitions to image, the series begins in the reduced visibility of night. The camera placed at a low angle records Frank emerging from his brownstone, backlit and authoritative. The camera angle suggests that this figure will make sense of the evidence experienced by the viewer and provide context for meaning-making. As Frank and his driver run to the dog, a barely



discernible crumpled form is visible in long shot only. The camera, again at a low angle, next looks up at Frank from the level of the injured dog. Viewers never see the dog, however; they only hear its whimpers as Frank delivers his first direct address: "There are two kinds of pain: the sort of pain that makes you strong, or useless pain, the sort of pain that's only suffering. I have no patience for useless things. Moments like this require someone who will act, who will do the unpleasant thing, the necessary thing. There. No more pain." Frank delivers most of this address looking slightly to his right of the camera; however, at "I have no patience for useless things," he finally looks directly at the camera. He turns away when he proceeds to suffocate the dog, but back inside the house as he washes his hands, he gazes into the mirror and directly at the camera once again. In this opening and tone-setting direct address, Frank cloaks cruelty in pragmatism and a deeper, realistic understanding of just how the world works, a frankness (pun intended) viewers are invited to admire and even perhaps trust. Remembering that this cool assurance should be questioned requires less effort in light of how Spacey's behavior now bleeds into his portrayal of Frank. Indeed, the camera deliberately conceals from the viewer key elements of this opening scene — the car crash itself and the true state of the injured dog. Viewers witness Frank constructing a discursive frame, a historiographic narrative and justification for his actions, but deepened suspicions about Spacey-as-Frank should alert the viewer to the paucity of evidence validating his canine mercy-killing.

After the charges against Spacey surfaced, Netflix rapidly cut ties with the actor, firing him during the filming of season six. In a short social media posting, Netflix announced that the streaming service "will not be involved with any production of 'House of Cards' that includes Kevin Spacey" (quoted. in Phillips 2017). Following the cascade of allegations, Netflix and the series' producers, Media Rights Capital, admitted "there was at least one investigated incident" on the set during filming of season one (Patten 2017). In their prepared media statement, MRC explained that "Mr. Spacey willingly participated in a training process" following the season one accusation of inappropriate behavior (quoted in Patten).<sup>15</sup> Reuters reports that the Netflix decision to fire Spacey cost the streaming service \$39 million as a result of "stopped projects associated with the actor." The acknowledgement of the loss in the Netflix fourth-quarter earnings report for 2017 "was one of the first public signs of financial cost to a studio or production company following allegations of sexual misconduct against an individual" ("Netflix Takes" 2018). Netflix's Chief Financial Officer, David Wells, explained in a "post-earnings webcast" that though such losses regularly occur, "we just hadn't had one of this magnitude and related to the societal reset around sexual harassment" (quoted in "Netflix Takes"). The sixth and final season's filming paused briefly

during a corporate and creative team rethink and then resumed with Claire Underwood's (Robin Wright) presidency as the focus of its final eight episodes.

Season six of *House of Cards* bookends its story-telling with references to Frank's season one opening direct address. Though "Chapter 66" (Dir. Alik Sakharov 2018) does not begin immediately by handing over the Chorus-like authority from one Underwood president to the next Underwood Commander-in-Chief, the episode echoes "Chapter 1" and furthers the program's extended interaction with the gaps of historiography. Approximately six minutes into the episode, viewers see Claire Underwood in the White House residence seeking out the source of a repetitious thud. The persistent racket sounds ominously like the auditory aftershock of a gunshot. Investigating the source of the sound emanating from former President Francis Underwood's rooms, Claire discovers a network of expanding cracks in the drywall and presses it to make a circular opening through which a trapped bird flies free. The scene cuts to a long shot of the hallway into which now-President Claire Underwood strides, accompanied by the vigorous minor-key underscoring of half-step moving strings and insistent percussion. As she nears the low-angle-positioned camera, it becomes clear that Claire holds the immobilized and seemingly throttled bird in her right fist. Another cut and low-angle long shot reveals Claire exiting the residence with her head tilted up to feel the breeze and strong daylight. Deliberately pulling out of her reverie, she then turns to face the camera directly and addresses the viewing audience to the rhythm of a gradual zoom in, saying "It's not true what he told you all those years ago that there are two kinds, useful and useless. There's only one kind. Pain is pain. Francis, I'm done with you." The bird tweets in her hand, and the upward dissonant shrieks from the orchestra's woodwinds heighten expectation that at this juncture, she will kill the bird. But then she opens her palm, and the bird soars away. Again, Claire looks at the camera and echoes her husband's words, "There, no more pain," and walks forward and off-camera. Through its deployment of gothic-thriller film techniques (extreme camera angles, suspense-intensifying editing, urgent scoring), the moment's visual and auditory signifiers lead the audience to expect a continuation of Frank's violence but then disappoint those accustomed modes of reading when Claire sets the trapped bird free. She knows what the audience has been trained to expect, what the manner of representation predicts, but she herself will choose a different tack. Whereas Frank's opening direct address took place at night and with the suffering animal in question off-camera, Claire's interaction with the audience bursts into daylight and offers more visual evidence to substantiate her claims.

The second and more extended fourth-wall break in the season's first episode emphasizes that Claire's presidency represents a new era of politics-by-daylight and executive office truth-telling. As Claire delivers a Fourth of July speech to assembled troops, the filming toggles between her

formal rhetoric and her intercut direct-camera address to the unseen video streamers. She begins with short interrogatives — "Are you still there?" and "Do you miss Francis?" — but turns to assertion, "Whatever Francis told you the last five years, don't believe a word of it. . . . It's going to be different for you and me. I'm going to tell you the truth." But just as with Francis, this candor is not borne out by the episodes that follow, and the freedom and directness that Claire claims in the opening episode do not last through the final episodes, which borrow from the series' established playbook. The repetitiousness of maneuverings and deceptions, the shabbiness of Claire's truthfulness, and the concealed endgame drive the series to its final episodes. Claire becomes a Richard III fighting the ghosts of the dead — both her husband and his victims — as well as her own guilt by association and collusion. By taking over the role of Chorus, she seeks to be an Act One Richard, Duke of Gloucester, reveling in her power and wit, but she concludes the series an Act Five Richard who cannot shake the recriminations of the dead.

History's narration rests on often irrecuperable forms of evidence, and that inaccessible point of origin manifests in a fascinating plot detail in the final episodes of *House of Cards*. The existence of an audio diary kept by Frank troubles Claire's ascendancy. As reviewers note, the whole of *House of Cards*, season six is haunted by Spacey-as-Underwood's ghost. In particular, late in the season, his former aid, Douglas Stamper (Michael Kelly), campaigns to undo the presidency of Claire. To do so, he reveals that he possesses the audio diary maintained by Frank, archiving salacious details of the dead president's political career and, crucially, Claire's complicity with a range of illegal and immoral acts. Multiple scenes show Douglas listening to the audio feed on earbuds and even occasionally reciting lines aloud for the viewing audience — snatches and phrases the observant viewer will recall from previous seasons ( "Chapter 72," Dir. Alik Sakharov 2018), including Frank's opening monologue concerning pain. In a telling moment, Douglas meets with an investigative reporter, Janine Skorsky (Constance Zimmer), to "share" the diary ( "Chapter 73," Dir. Robin Wright 2018). The camera displays the two seated side-by-side as Janine types a transcription of the diary recited by Douglas. The sheer absurdity of the moment — that she cannot listen directly to the audio diary but must trust Douglas's report — cannot be ignored. At one point, the reporter even asks, "You know what, can you just let me hear it?" but receives a firm denial from Douglas. Though this refusal might be motivated by Douglas's need to protect his former employer, viewers know the real reason we cannot hear the audio diary. The fired star's voice cannot be heard (even in voiceover) because Spacey's crimes cannot be forgotten (much like the misdeeds of his alter ego, the fictional Frank). Spacey's crimes repeatedly surface as the unspoken explanation for Frank's abrupt absence from the series and mediated "appearings" throughout the season. Frank's presence endures through metonymic objects such as his ring, his presidential desk, and his bed.

Similarly, Douglas becomes the proximate object standing in for the absent and disgraced star. As Douglas re-voices the diary, *House of Cards* powerfully replicates the ventriloquized treatment of history's raw materials — one where historical information derives from compromised sources and must be mediated by another. In the way the series opts to conclude its slant appropriation of *Richard III*, *House of Cards* returns its viewers to the problematics of inclusion and omission, remembrance and forgetting essential to Shakespeare's history play.

The changing status of Spacey's celebrity as a meaning-making signifier replicates the dynamics endemic to representation and historiography — of remembering and forgetting, of hypermediacy and transparency. Michael Quinn's important work on the semiotics of celebrity provides a final context for rethinking the interpretive fluctuation in this suite of Richards. He writes: "Celebrities come equipped with an intertext that includes several levels, only the most obvious of which is the conjunction of art and life in a particular role," adding that "only the star's role has the power to overshadow the whole art work" (Quinn 1990, 158). Quinn admits that most of the examples he has in mind "are sympathetic" but that "[c]elebrity can be constructive or deleterious" (158). In the case of Spacey's Richards, the intrusion of personal biography provokes reconsideration of audience complicity with the direct appeal of his performance.<sup>16</sup> A different calculus of human cost now emerges by means of this particular celebrity biography. Mendes and Spacey had chosen the Arab Spring as the context of their meditation on political dictatorship, but in the end the history they told was much closer to home: one of the hidden complicities, silences, and enablings that grease the engine of entertainment profitability. Their *Richard III* now demonstrates how theaters like the Old Vic, eager to trade on the celebrity status of a Spacey, compromise the safety of others to maximize financial gain. Furthermore, both the Harvey Weinstein and Spacey scandals have uncovered the shadow institutional structures in place to protect the powerful from the consequences of their own misdeeds, networks of legal and economic protection that extend from Hollywood to the Washington, DC of *House of Cards*.<sup>17</sup> Shakespeare's radical free play with historiographic authority can thus be accessed anew through this particular set of troubled Richards and an ethics of remembering deliberately reinvigorated, one that empowers and fuels individual and collective action to change cultures of complicity.

### Notes

1. I could never forget the countless contributions of my research workshop colleagues and friends, Karl Bailey and Vanessa Corredera, who question and encourage in equal measure. Thanks to Nora J. Williams and Sally Barnden for organizing the SAA 2018 Seminar, "Remediations of Early Modern Drama," and to the seminar participants for their constructive feedback. Thank

you to my student assistants, Ingrid Radulescu and Elianna Srikureja, for the many ways they lighten burdens and protect space for creativity, and to my undergraduate Honors Thesis researcher, Emma Magbanua, whose work pursues similar lines of interest in the ethics of performance.

2. Michel de Certeau explains the mediating work of discourse in the production of history: "Historiography (that is, 'history' and 'writing') bears within its own name the paradox — almost an oxymoron — of a relation established between two antinomic terms, between the real and discourse. Its task is one of connecting them and, at the point where this link cannot be imagined, of working *as if* the two were being joined" (1988, xxvii, emphasis mine). He defines the historiographical task as a recuperation into consumable narrative of "the real" by means of the "unreal" of discourse, and in the "as if" qualifier, he gestures toward a necessary willingness to forget the persistent gap between the two (xxvii).
3. In their taxonomy of remediation, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin place the concealments and seeming-transparency of immediacy and the visibility of hypermediacy in a dialectical relationship, embedding the element of time and the "now-ness" of audience affect as aesthetic pleasure. Though the visibility of representation varies, both immediacy and hypermediacy drive toward an authentic encounter with the real: "Hypermedia and transparent media are opposite manifestations of the same desire: the desire to get past the limits of representation and to achieve the real. They are not striving for the real in any metaphysical sense. Instead, the real is defined in terms of the viewer's experience; it is that which would evoke an immediate (and therefore authentic) emotional response" (Bolter and Grusin 2000, 53). Indeed, Bolter and Grusin identify related pleasures in these methodologically opposed artistic modes: "What we wish to highlight from the past is what resonates with the twin preoccupations of contemporary media: the transparent presentation of the real and the enjoyment of the opacity of media themselves" (21).
4. Alexa Alice Joubin and Elizabeth Rivlin stress the necessity of just such evaluations of the ethical in performance: "In an age when Shakespeare is increasingly globalized, diversified, spread thin, and applied in service of a multitude of agendas, it is more urgent than ever to analyze the ethical ramifications, byproducts, and problems that inevitably attend such appropriations" (Joubin and Rivlin 2014, 2).
5. I use "ghosted" deliberately to signal the dependence of this project upon Marvin Carlson's *The Haunted Stage*, especially his understanding of actor resumé as a form of intertext pressuring meaning in performance: "The invisible but inevitable ghosting of previous roles in the theatre as well as in television and films has certain parallels to the phenomenon of intertextuality in

reading...and...may be a source of distraction, a valuable tool for interpretation, or a source of enrichment and deepened pleasure in the work" (Carlson 2001, 72).

6. In his review, Michael Billington both invokes and dismisses that historical frame: "But I shall remember Spacey's *Richard* less for its political insight into the world of Gaddafi and Mubarak than for its psychological understanding of solitude" (Billington 2011).
7. Spacey tells Cerasaro, "But, as we were beginning the production, it just so happened that the Arab Spring erupted. And, Sam and I were both quite determined that the imagery that we were using throughout the play — the use of video and the kinds of ways in which we tried to make the play accessible and modern and current and alive and in this moment — led us to making certain decisions like that [echoing Gaddafi's look]" (Cerasaro 2014).
8. In his review for *The New York Times*, Ben Brantley (2012) characterizes the show's design by Tom Piper (scenery), Catherine Zuber (costuming), and Paul Pyant (lighting) as indebted to Eyre's production, and Michael Billington recognizes the reference to Hall and Olivier's *Coriolanus* (2011).
9. Spacey explains the effort to gain financial support for the ambitious Bridge Project collaboration, which would culminate in a global tour of *Richard III*: "Sam Mendes and I pitched the idea to Bank of America and Merrill Lynch, just before the whole financial world crashed, of a three year project with five productions with "Richard III" as the final installment" (quoted in Thompson 2014). Spacey provides a bit more detail about expense-sharing: the host theaters in each city also provided partnership and funding. *Richard III* opened at the Old Vic, traveled to Greece for three performances at Epidaurus, and then returned to the Old Vic for a full run; the tour then moved around the globe, closing at Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM). Spacey financed *NOW* and self-released it (Thompson).
10. The film's silences and elisions are evocative as well; for example, the production of *Richard III* opening *NOW* functioned as part of the larger Epidaurus Festival in 2011, an arts event still mired in the post-2008 Greek economic crisis. In his web-published note regarding the 2011 season of the Epidaurus Festival, chairman and artistic director, Yorgos Loukos, reveals, "When we sat down to plan the 2011 Festival on paper, it quickly became clear we had another difficult year ahead of us. The third year of a profound crisis that has shown no signs of letting up; which extends beyond the economic to society, aesthetics and human relations; which has confronted contemporary Greece – and we are not alone – with a crisis of identity and orientation. What part can art and culture play when you're walking the tightrope of circumstance? What can you look ahead to, how optimistic can you be?" (Loukos 2011). Indeed, the film mutes the local contexts and histories of its host cities, applying a tourist's eye to the highlighted sites even as

it claims to be a "bridge" between cultures and a production rendering globally applicable the history of Shakespeare.

11. The extended portion of the film highlighting the yacht excursion along the Amalfi Coast is scored to Puccini's familiar aria, "O mio babbino caro" ("Oh my beloved father"), a paternal allusion that now rings uncomfortably in light of Spacey's tendency to approach young male cast and crew.
12. In an interview with Thompson (2014), Spacey explains that he assisted the film's director in the editing phase as well; thus, Spacey operates not just as visible "host" of the documentary but also as an influential yet invisible editing presence, ensuring that *NOW* reinforces the star's careful self-presentation as arts patron and philanthropist.
13. For example, in his review of *House of Cards*, season one, Ian Crouch writes, "Richard is having his cultural moment, as it were. . . . Many couch-bound citizens devoted a good portion of the weekend to the new Netflix original series 'House of Cards'" (Crouch 2013). In her introduction to a *Literature/Film Quarterly* special issue on adapted Shakespeare, Elsie Walker describes the intertextual connection: "It would be an exaggeration to say that Spacey's character, Frank Underwood, is Richard. However, Frank's dry wit, rhetorical acumen, indomitable will for power, and capacity for absolute ruthlessness remind me repeatedly of the King. This is most clear in Frank's many asides, when he speaks to us as his co-conspirators, barely able to conceal his own glee while he destroys other people's lives" (Walker 2014, 411).
14. Though she describes the experience of watching Richard as a palimpsest under Frank, Walker's description of her viewing now strikes new notes of aptness: ". . . having identified the connection, I cannot watch *House of Cards* without feeling haunted by his predecessor. Keeping the play in mind, superimposing it upon a viewing of *House of Cards* like a thin layer of tracing paper, makes both the darker and playful details of the show more perceivable" (2014, 411).
15. This assertion does not quite correspond with a CNN report that "Spacey had engaged in a pattern of sexual harassment, making the show's set a 'toxic' work environment" (Phillips 2017).
16. In her provocative essay, Claire Dederer asks, "What do we do with the art of monstrous men?" She reflects: "In the public's mind, man and work seem to be the same thing. But are they? Ought we try to separate the art from the artist, the maker from the made? Do we undergo a willful forgetting when we want to listen to, say, Wagner's Ring cycle? (Forgetting is easier for some than others; Wagner's work has rarely been performed in Israel.) Or do we believe genius gets special dispensation, a behavioral hall pass?" (Dederer 2017).
17. Indeed, Mark Brown and Hannah Ellis-Petersen reported in *The Guardian* that "An investigation into the conduct of Spacey during his 11 years at the Old Vic has concluded that the

actor's star power, which the theatre described as a 'cult of personality', contributed to failings at the organisation" (Brown and Ellis-Petersen 2017).



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