Broadcasting the Political Body: Richard III, #Brexit and #Libspill

MARINA GERZIC

The University of Western Australia

The re-emergence in recent years of nationalist agendas and the far-right in many countries, coupled with the rise of populist leaders such as Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro, and Boris Johnson, has seen Shakespeare and his work—particularly his examination of the rise of tyrants and what makes a good leader—become a touchstone for both the realms of politics and performance. Shakespeare’s work is marked by what scholar Emma Smith terms as “gappiness” (*This is Shakespeare* 2)—a double-sidedness inspired by classical rhetorical models—the result of which is that audiences and readers are forced to confront questions which in turn resonate with their own lives. Or, as Smith surmises, “we tend to find the meanings we need to in Shakespeare’s plays” (*This is Shakespeare* 30). Stephen Greenblatt, for example, turned to Shakespeare’s *Richard III* as a way to explain the unexpected 2016 election of Donald J. Trump as President of the United States. Reaffirming Smith’s “gappiness,” Greenblatt argues that “Shakespeare’s words have an uncanny ability to reach out beyond their original time and place and to speak directly to us. We have long looked to him, in times of perplexity and risk, for the most fundamental human truths. So it is now.”¹

While Greenblatt’s words reflect a US political context, they are also apt in a European one. In the lead-up to the 2016 United Kingdom European Union Membership Referendum vote (commonly known as the Brexit vote), both pro- and anti-European Union (EU) campaigners used Shakespeare and his works to try and establish a persuasive argument about British (or English) and European national identity.² 2016 marked the quatercentenary of Shakespeare’s death. Hashtags like #Shakespeare400 and #ShakespeareLives trended on social

media platforms, and numerous events, from parades to performances, were held around the world to celebrate Shakespeare and his legacy. Shakespeare was thus likely on people's minds, especially in the UK, and subsequently became the go-to figure in attempts to explain the calamity of the Brexit vote.

During the fall-out from the Brexit referendum, the resignation of Prime Minister David Cameron, and the political machinations which culminated in Theresa May emerging as Prime Minister (herself later replaced by Boris Johnson in July 2019), Shakespeare again became a reference point to explain the political instability. Sally Barnden argues that these "Shakespearean fragments [. . .] pick up [an] amorphous set of meanings derived from the ideological positions associated with the speakers" (4). "Brexit, pursued by a bear," became a recurring joke used by journalists, commentators, and satirists. Michael Roth, Germany's EU minister since 2013, in condemning what he termed the "big shitshow" of Brexit, also turned to Shakespeare, stating: "I don't know if William Shakespeare could have come up with such a tragedy but who will foot the bill?" (qtd. in Otterman). Roth later Tweeted:

#Brexit - eine Tragödie. Das wäre noch nicht mal #Shakespeare in den Sinn gekommen... Echt deprimierend. [English translation: #Brexit—a tragedy. Not even #Shakespeare would have conceived of that . . . Very depressing] (@MiRo_SPD)³

Significantly, during the UK Conservative Party's leadership crisis in 2016, following David Cameron's resignation, the figure of Shakespeare's Richard III arose as a symbol of the devastating and destabilizing effect of Brexit. Prior to the Brexit vote, Richard III had also emerged as a symbol of the political instability in Australia which, like Britain, has a Westminster system of politics, a system that seemingly allows for discord and Machiavellianism to fester.⁴ Numerous leadership spills in both of the major political parties

in Australia in the 2010s have destabilized the political landscape, and commentators and the Australian public both turned to Shakespeare's tyrannous hunchback in order to comment on the machinations and political disarray.⁵

Theater also skillfully draws these connections between the complications and unrest in contemporary political contexts and Shakespeare's *Richard III*. In the shadow of the Brexit vote, London's Almeida Theatre staged a production of *Richard III* (directed by Rupert Goold and starring Ralph Fiennes). Broadcast to cinemas worldwide in July 2016, Shakespeare's tale of ambition, deceit, and betrayal was a timely choice. Advertisements for the live broadcast of *Richard III* give insight into how this production became a cultural milestone, especially in the UK. Emphasis was placed on the fact that the production was part of celebrations to mark the quatercentenary of Shakespeare's death, that it brought two of the world's finest acting talents, Ralph Fiennes and Vanessa Redgrave, together, and that it was the first time a production had been broadcast from the Almeida Theatre.⁶ Most significant, however, was the production's focus on the setting, with a promotional blurb situating Goold's *Richard III* in "War-torn England [. . .] reeling after years of bitter conflict," adding that it "examines the all-consuming nature of the desire for power amid a society riddled by conflict" ("Almeida Live: Richard III"). Both lines are less-than-subtle references to the then-impending Brexit vote and the tumultuous (and at times violent) campaigns from both those who wanted to leave the EU and those who wanted to remain.⁷ Like Shakespeare's Wars of the Roses, Brexit has ripped the fabric of the UK apart, and pitted family and friends against each other.

This article will examine the broadcast of Goold's *Richard III*, analyzing how this screen adaptation reflects the political climate in UK in the aftermath of Brexit. I will show how this use of Richard III as a divisive political symbol recalls Laurence Olivier's *Richard III* (1955)—and its ubiquitous conception of Richard—in media commentary following the 2015 leadership crisis in the Liberal Party of Australia. I will conclude with a brief look at the legacy

of Goold's production in 2020, and consider how Richard III continues to be used as a symbol of political instability in both Australia and the UK. This is the case for Rupert Goold's stage production of *Richard III* (2016), and the references to *Richard III* in the Australian satirical news television series, *Shaun Micallef's Mad as Hell* (2012–present), which both use Shakespeare's play and the figure of Richard III to symbolize the political instability that continues to unfold in the United Kingdom and Australia.

“Brexit pursued by a bear”: The Shakespearean Political Body on Stage and Screen

Mirroring Shakespeare's use of the political past and medievalism to comment on his present, modern media also borrows from Shakespeare's plays when discussing and analyzing recent major political events, such as Brexit in the United Kingdom in 2016 and the Liberal Party spills in Australia in 2015. Following the Brexit vote on 23 June 2016, the UK media drew heavily on Shakespearean references in their reporting of Michael Gove's betrayal of Boris Johnson during the Conservative Party's leadership crisis. In 2016, following David Cameron's resignation, Gove and Johnson paired up to form what the media referred to as the Brexit “Dream Team” to lead a new, pro-Brexit government. With Johnson on the verge of launching his campaign to become Prime Minister, Gove put himself forward as a candidate for the now vacant role. Johnson then withdrew from the contest before it began, and the implosion of the “Dream Team” opened the way for Theresa May to become Prime Minister (see Stewart and Elgot). Channeling *Julius Caesar*, a tale of literal political-related backstabbing, variations of “Et tu, Brute” was the headline favored by several journalists, as well as Johnson's own father (see Kearney; Buckley). Gove and his journalist wife Sarah Vine were also cast as the ambitious Macbeths (see Greenslade 2016).⁸ In his analysis of the Tory leadership contest Ben Wright, a political correspondent for the BBC, referred to it as

“Shakespearean,” before surmising it was like “*Richard III* meets *Scarface*, with a bit of *Godfather* thrown in” (Wright).

In the shadow of the Brexit vote, London’s Almeida Theatre staged their production of *Richard III*. Broadcast to cinemas worldwide in July 2016, Shakespeare’s tale of ambition, deceit, and betrayal was thus a timely choice. The past and the future certainly haunts Goold’s production, both in terms of its reception but also the production’s intentions: audiences watching this *Richard III* during the worldwide broadcast would have been faced with the uncomfortable temporality of watching a pre-referendum performance reflecting Brexit concerns in a post-referendum world where Brexit was now a reality. It is important to note that the production opened on 7 June 2016, weeks before the Brexit referendum vote on the 23 June. The referendum thus came smack in the middle of the production’s run, inevitably affecting reception and interpretation for audiences depending on whether Brexit was an unknown or a known, Susannah Clapp’s review of Goold’s production concludes with an observation that invokes Derrida’s idea of hauntology and Marvin Carlson’s work on how the memory of a spectator informs theatrical reception: “And in watching the play, we are always watching ghosts” (Clapp). Goold’s production is certainly haunted by both the past and the future.⁹ The past includes the discovery of Richard III’s remains in a carpark in Leicester, which is dramatized at the beginning of Goold’s production. Going back even further, this past also includes Richard’s death at the Battle of Bosworth, and Shakespeare’s dramatization of Richard’s rise to and subsequent fall from power and his death at Bosworth. The future that haunts Goold’s production is the impending Brexit vote on the 23 June 2016, which had bizarrely already become the past in the cinematic broadcast, due to the date of the screening.

During the live broadcast of *Richard III* from the Almeida Theatre on 21 July 2016, a two-part paratextual interview (by Verity Sharp) with director Rupert Goold framed the broadcast: the first part screened before the first half of the play, and the second screened during

the interval before the second part of the play. In the opening interview, director Goold reflected on the context of his production and offered some insight for his inspiration, noting that, after 2008, a “new sort of populism,” and “a new sort of political leader” emerged.¹⁰ Goold cited figures such as Donald Trump, Boris Johnson, and Nigel Farage as examples of this populism, before adding that these new kinds of political leaders “reflect insecurity or anxiety about the political structures at home.” Peter Conrad states that Goold’s conception of Richard III was originally inspired by Boris Johnson, noting that Goold felt that they both were “physically strange and yet sexually predatory, inherently comic, outside the rules, of questionable motives, ultimately ambitious” (244). Historian Simon Schama also hints at this comparison, quipping in an interview with Rupert Goold at the Almeida on 25 June 2016, (a mere two days after the Brexit vote), that “there is no Bosworth for Boris,” before cheekily asking the audience if there was “any Richmonds here?” (“Shakespeare, History, Nationhood”).

Jan Kott’s characterization of Richard III offers an unsettlingly prescient insight into what a production, with a Richard heavily inspired by Johnson’s character and politics, might have looked like:

The most terrifying kind of tyrant is he who has recognized himself for a clown, and the world for a gigantic buffoonery [. . .]. He begins his performance with buffoonery, and buffoonery is the substance of his part. All his attitudes are those of a clown: the sly cruel ones, as well as gestures of love and power [. . .] Richard ceases to be a clown only in the last act. (45)

An anecdote from Sam Knight’s profile of Boris Johnson in *The New Yorker* notes his affinity with Shakespeare (and Richard III) from an early age, perhaps strengthening the potential for

a Kott-inspired production to make the parallels.¹¹ However, actor Ralph Fiennes who was cast as Richard in Goold's production, offered a very different interpretation. Fiennes's performance as well as his performance history does not support this Johnsonian kind of reading.¹² Even in his false proclamations of innocence, or when appearing before the English public flanked by priests, his Richard was no shaggy-haired amiable buffoon attempting to disarm his opponents and win over the public with his "on brand" dopey charm. Adding to discussions of relevance of the production in relation to post-Brexit referendum Britain, Ralph Fiennes reflected, "suddenly it [the play] became full of a pertinence that perhaps it hadn't had before" (qtd. in Brown). In this same interview when Fiennes is quizzed on which figure in UK politics he thought most closely resembled Richard III more generally, Fiennes answered that "Michael Gove is closest [. . .]. Because all those protestations about 'I could never lead, it's not in my DNA to lead'—that's classic Richard" (qtd. in Brown). Comparisons to Gove are useful in that they help explain Fiennes's thinking behind his performance. However, I would argue that the links to the instability and turmoil caused by the populist politics that resulted in Brexit, and to the misogyny and violence inherent in the Alt-Right political movement, are more convincing.¹³

Ralph Fiennes played Richard as a man devoid of the natural political charisma of past stage and screen Richards, such as Richard Burbage, Edmund Kean, Laurence Olivier, Ian McKellen, and Kevin Spacey. Paul Taylor describes Fiennes's Richard as "so full of misanthropic disdain that he declines to stoop to the outrageous charm with which the hero traditionally seduces the audience into a state of near-complicity" ("Richard III, Almeida"). Michael Billington notes Fiennes's Richard "shows little delight in role-playing" ("Richard III review"), and Sarah Hemming calls him a "cold fish" ("Richard III, Almeida Theatre"). Fiennes's Richard instead attempted to disappear into the "inky-monochrome world" that Goold presents ("Richard III, Almeida Theatre"). Dressed like a "grim-visaged banker," his Richard

was a calculating and conniving political operator with a chilling “contempt for others and vicious in his misogyny” (“Richard III, Almeida Theatre”). Unassuming in his turtleneck and jacket, his Richard was able to prosper in this world where others were “too bent on their own agendas to spot the danger” (“Richard III, Almeida Theatre”). This danger emerged in unpredictable bursts of brazen violence, especially towards women.

Michael Billington highlights the toxic masculinity in Fiennes’s performance, stating that he “gives us a Richard for whom people, women especially, are playthings of his perverted will” (“Richard III review”). In his seduction of Anne Neville, Richard sexually assaulted her in a manner that echoed Donald Trump’s now infamous “Grab them by the pussy, you can do anything” line from a 2005 interview that emerged during the US Presidential election campaign in 2015 (qtd. in Makela); Richard later also brutally raped Queen Elizabeth Woodville on stage in order to ensure she followed his directive regarding her young daughter. The treatment of women in this production was certainly fraught with difficulty, and Peter Kirwan argues this staging decision “is a deeply misguided performance choice that seems [. . .] to be part of a broader escalation of violent strategies to silence female characters.” Sarah Olive characterizes this moment as “brutally effective in detaching the audience’s sympathy from Richard,” although given Fiennes’s lack of charisma in the role, I feel that his Richard never had the audience fully on his side or enlisted in his villainy. The treatment of female characters in this production also reflects the horrific revelations of the #MeToo movement, and brings to life Trump’s obscene claims of being able to “do anything” with women (qtd. in Makela), and to “stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody” without significant consequence (qtd. in “Donald Trump”). Yet Fiennes’s Richard was not one to confidently brag on social media about his nightmarish accomplishments, and instead the results of Richard’s violence were gruesomely visualized on stage, with illuminated skulls tallying the body count.

As well as commenting on the violence and misogyny that is a feature of populist politics and leadership, Goold's production also reflected the anti-immigrant stance that has flourished in the United Kingdom since the Brexit referendum. Goold's *Richard III* was haunted by the specter of the UK's right-wing anti-immigration party, UKIP, and its leader Nigel Farage.¹⁴ Matt Trueman in his review for *Variety* draws parallels between the two, as does Leslie Felperin, who notes the timeliness of Goold's production:

As Richard turns against his supporters and they form alliances and plots against him, it's impossible not to see an allegory of what's going on now with party politics on both sides of the Atlantic, especially given that the play is opening a week before Britain votes on whether to stay in the European Union.

Richard's speech to his army before battle was presented in direct contrast with Richmond's to his own troops, with each hinting at the discussions about immigration that featured heavily in the Brexit referendum campaigns. Richmond's speech to his troops removed his mention of fighting "against your country's foes" (5.3.257) in Shakespeare's text, and framed the battle as exclusively against Richard's tyranny.¹⁵ The anti-immigrant tone of Richard's speech was palpable by contrast, retaining his characterization of Richmond's supporters as "vagabonds, rascals and runaways, [. . .] / Whom their o'eremployed country vomits forth" (5.3.316, 318). He questioned Richmond's Englishness, and the masculinity of his supporters who he refers to as the "overweening rags of France" (5.3.328). Finally, Richard suggested that the invading army will rape their wives and murder their children. Thus, Fiennes's Richard stirred up fears about immigration, mirroring the strategy of the Leave Campaign.¹⁶

"Plots have I laid": #Libspill, *Mad As Hell*, and *Richard III*

On the other side of the globe, Australian politics has also mined Shakespeare's plays for political parallels, especially during times of political uncertainty. In 2010 Kevin Rudd, the former Leader of the Australian Labor Party and Prime Minister of Australia, was ousted from office in 2010 after losing a leadership spill motion to then Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard.¹⁷ Shortly after, Malcolm Turnbull, whose Liberal Party of Australia was in opposition at the time, attempted to console Rudd with some words from Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*:

You common cry of curs, whose breath I hate
As reek of the rotten fen, whose loves I prize
As the dead carcasses of unburied men
That do corrupt my air, I banish you! (Turnbull)

These words would have been familiar to Turnbull, as Tony Abbott had ousted him from the Liberal Party leadership in December 2009.

While former Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard was compared to Richard III in both an opinion piece by Paddy Gourley and in a scathing interview with Liberal MP Christopher Pyne in 2012, it is however, largely the connection between Tony Abbott and Shakespeare's Machiavel Richard III that has been the focus of Australian media.¹⁸ This connection between Richard III and Tony Abbott was first picked up by online media. After the Australian Liberal Party-National Party of Australia coalition won the 2013 Australian Federal Election, leader of the Liberal Party, and subsequently Prime Minister of Australia, Tony Abbott was the focus of two leadership spill motions (referred to as "Libspill" by commentators and the public) in February and July of 2015. With no contender running against Abbott, the spill motion on 9 February was defeated. In an article shortly after the first

leadership spill motion in the Australian Liberal party in February 2015, controversial Australian political commentator Bob Ellis drew parallels between Abbott and Richard after the sacking of Liberal Party Chief Whip Phillip Ruddock: “In his film of *Richard III*, Laurence Olivier, felled by arrows, writhes and twitches on the ground while Richmond’s soldiers jeer him. Tony Abbott is now in a similar twitching and writhing.” Ellis quite dramatically suggests that, just as Richard III sentenced first Lord Hastings and then the Duke of Buckingham to death for treason, Abbott shockingly turned on Ruddock—a long-standing figure of the former Howard Government, at the time the longest serving Liberal MP in the parliament, and a leader in his party that many younger members looked up to—for his perceived disloyalty to the Prime Minister. As party Whip, Ruddock was the eyes and ears of the Prime Minister in the party room, and Abbott blamed him for allowing the spill motion against him to eventuate. As a result of sacking Ruddock, Ellis sees that, just like Richard III in Act V of Shakespeare’s play, Abbott’s days are numbered. But while Ellis suggested Abbott would be gone within weeks, it took until September that year for Turnbull to succeed in his overthrow of Abbott.

The subsequent spill motion held several months later in September was successful, and Abbott’s challenger Malcolm Turnbull defeated Abbott, becoming in the process the new leader of the Liberal Party, and as a result also the new Prime Minister of Australia. After this loss, Abbott addressed the press, stating that he had never leaked or undermined anyone during his political tenure, and was not about to start now (an obvious criticism of ex-Labor politician and former Prime Minister of Australia Kevin Rudd, who constantly undermined his Party and successor after he was ousted in a leadership spill in June 2010). However, despite this “promise,” after Abbott’s re-election to the seat of Warringah at the 2016 Australian Federal election, and much like Rudd before him, he was consistently critical of the policy positions of his party on a number of occasions. This “undermining” and “sniping” was the continued focus

of ridicule on the politically themed series 7 (2017), 8 (2018), and 9 (2018) of the satirical television show on the ABC television network in Australia, *Shaun Micallef's Mad as Hell*.

One of the ongoing skits in *Mad as Hell* involved the use of a photoshopped image of Tony Abbott's face superimposed on the body of Laurence Olivier from the 1955 film adaptation of *Richard III*. This would appear whenever host comedian Shaun Micallef would talk about one of Abbott's episodes of publicly undermining Turnbull or the Liberal Party's policies. Below this image would usually appear a quote from Shakespeare's play that emphasized Abbott's undermining and treachery, likening him to Shakespeare's Richard III for his similar duplicitous behavior; for example, "If I Can Smile And Murder While I Smile" and "Plots Have I Laid, Inductions Dangerous" (both series 8, episode 11), and "Tut, Were It Further Off, I'd Pluck It Down" (series 8, episode 9).

A perfect example of how Shakespeare's *Richard III* and Australian political machinations blend seamlessly in these skits comes from episode 11, from series 8 of the show (airdate 11 April 2018), where host Shaun Micallef discusses Turnbull's disastrous series of negative Newspoll results since he took over as leader.¹⁹ Micallef notes that Newspoll #31 is due to be released in the upcoming few days and it doesn't look good for Turnbull, suggesting an "inevitable party room spill hangs over Malcolm Turnbull." Micallef asks, "seriously who would want to replace him?" before an image of Abbott as Richard III with the subtitle "If I Can Smile And Murder While I Smile" appears on screen.²⁰ Micallef responds to the image, as well as the studio audience's laughter on seeing the image, by dryly stating "apart from him" adding "we all know Tony is very keen to get back in the saddle of the dead horse he's been flogging since Malcolm put him out of our misery in 2015." Micallef then reports on a story that appeared on the *Daily Mail* of Australia website (Margan) about rumors that ex-Liberal Party Treasurer and stalwart of the Liberal Party, Peter Costello, was planning on toppling Turnbull following the release of the next negative Newspoll result. Micallef quotes from the

article, stating that “senior Liberals are said to be urging him [i.e. Peter] to challenge,” before asking “who are these senior Liberals who are urging him to challenge?” A photo of Abbott talking to Costello then appears on screen, thus implying Abbott is behind this rumored coup. Micallef refers to Abbott in this photo as “The Duke of Gloucester there using his honeyed words to talk Peter into murdering the King” before concluding with “meanwhile Tony is working to build support within the party to run for leader again if the Coalition loses power at the next election.” Immediately after this, another image of Abbott as Richard III appears, this time with the subtitle “Plots Have I Laid, Inductions Dangerous.” In this skit Abbott is cast as the Richard III of Australian politics. *Mad as Hell* (and Micallef) elegantly uses Shakespeare’s conception of a tyrannical medieval leader and his Machiavellian tactics to explain Abbott’s political motivations and machinations.

“How good is political instability?” Liberal Party Spill 2019, and Brexit Continues

Writing this article in early 2020 necessitates some updating of circumstances in both Australian and British politics. As I have shown in this article, Shakespeare’s *Richard III*—both Shakespeare’s play and its remediations on stage and screen—has become a reference point to explain the continued political instability that emerged in both these political contexts from the middle of the 2010s. In August 2018, amid media reports that Liberal Party MP Peter Dutton was considering a challenge, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull called a spill motion in a regularly scheduled party room meeting of the Liberal Party. Dutton submitted himself as a candidate for the leadership, but was defeated by Turnbull, who won the ballot. From a page of letters sent to *The Age*, regarding this leadership spill, David Jewell draws parallels between instability in the Liberal Party and Shakespeare’s *Richard III*:

The lesson from the “morning of the long knives” is that those in leadership who make dire enemies of personalities such as Tony Abbott, Barnaby Joyce and Peter Dutton, whose lust for vengeance and power is boundless, do so at their mortal peril. As Shakespeare declared through his Richard III: “I am hungry for revenge. And now cloy me with beholding it.” (“Leadership”)

Following his loss in the first spill, Dutton immediately resigned from the ministry, and two days later requested another spill motion. At this point Turnbull did not re-contest the leadership, and Liberal Party MP Scott Morrison defeated Dutton and emerged victorious as both the new Leader of the Liberal Party and Prime Minister of Australia. In discussion of this second spill by the media and political commentators, Tony Abbott’s name emerged as the likely instigator of Dutton’s campaign, revenge for his 2015 ousting by Turnbull (see Savva 2019; Brissenden and Andersen). However, before Abbott would be able to force another spill and topple Morrison, he suddenly faced a political crisis of his own, a campaign to topple him from his seat of Warringah during the 2019 Australian Federal Election. Abbott’s own (political) Bosworth moment ultimately succeeded and led to Abbott retiring from politics, cooling his heels with a tour to Europe where he has become a cheerleader for Brexit (Bourke). While we know the end of Abbott’s (Australian) political story, the Brexit sideshow has continued, with the UK officially entering a transition period on 31 January 2020. I return to Emma Smith, who draws parallels with Shakespeare’s tragedies and the turn that Brexit has taken since the referendum vote in 2016: “The combination of personal failing and collective paralysis that characterises the current political situation does in fact track the national and individual breakdown depicted in Shakespeare’s tragedies” (“May as Polonius”). Following on from Theresa May succeeding David Cameron as leader of the Conservative Party in England and as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in July 2016, negotiations between May’s Brexit

team and the EU parliament on how to best to untangle Britain from the EU dragged on. May called a snap election in April 2017 in an attempt to strengthen her hand in Brexit negotiations and highlighting her “strong and stable” leadership. However, her plans backfired, and the snap election resulted in further instability. A hung parliament further hampered her Brexit negotiations with the EU and led to two votes of no confidence in December 2018 and January 2019. May’s subsequent inability to get her revised Brexit deal passed by Parliament led to her resignation in May 2019, which triggered the 2019 Conservative Party leadership election.²¹ In June 2019 Boris Johnson won the Conservative Party members’ vote and become Prime Minister. Like May, Johnson was also not able to pass his Brexit deal through parliament and tried various tactics including proroguing the parliament in order that his Brexit deal be passed. The result of the proroguing unsurprisingly led to comparisons with another of Shakespeare’s tyrants, Macbeth, during a Supreme Court hearing on Johnson’s shocking suspension of Parliament (see Bowcott). Like May before him, Johnson also called a snap election to try and resolve the Brexit vote deadlock, and in December 2019 his government was swept into power with a massive majority.

In an opinion piece for *i News*, Allie Esiri argues convincingly that, like Shakespeare’s Richard III, Boris Johnson relies “heavily on the force of his personality” and “brazen political maneuvers” in order to obtain power. Fiennes’ Richard, while more understated in personality, is just as brazen in his duplicitous plots and schemes. Goold’s production of *Richard III*, which reflected the chaos, machinations, and unrest in the political world of the UK following the 2016 Brexit vote, continues to provide insight into the Brexit-shambles that has haunted Theresa May and Boris Johnson’s governments post-referendum, and Richard III continues to be used as a symbol of this chaos caused by Johnson’s offensive and bullish populist leadership style. Much like Goold’s production—(in part) inspired by the type of politics favored by Johnson involving scheming, blustering, buffoonery, and back-stabbing—Johnson has been

recently parodied in *Boris Rex*, a 2019 theater production written by spoken-word artist Charlie Dupré. *Boris Rex* borrows elements from works such as *Richard III* and *Julius Caesar*, and tells the story of Boris Johnson as a Shakespearean tragicomedy (“Boris Rex”). Like Goold’s *Richard III*, *Boris Rex* shifts from “funny to something a bit more disturbing” (May). As I argued earlier, Ralph Fiennes’s performance as Richard III in the Almeida production does not evoke Boris Johnson (so much as the idea of contemporary populist politics), and *Boris Rex* also steers away from such a characterization. Shanine Salmon describes Boris Johnson (played by Luke Theobald) in *Boris Rex* as “a man who believes he deserves the best job and who often struggles to prove that to others but he is also conflicted.” He is more like Macbeth than Richard III, as he tries to work out if he wants “to be Churchill or Thatcher” (Salmon). Boris is not an overt despot or a man with deeply sinister intentions, but more an ambitious clown and a pawn in the plans of Jacob Rees-Mogg (played by Charlie Dupré). Salmon describes Rees-Mogg as an “inexplicable king maker” who is “played with sinisterness.” Like Richard III, Rees-Mogg sets out brazen plots led by his ambition (and exploiting Boris’s as well) and contempt for those around him. Like Goold’s *Richard III*, *Boris Rex* is a Shakespearean rendition of recent British politics during the Brexit years. The production is shaped by the manipulation and betrayal that features in *Richard III*, and reads politics through Shakespeare, and thus I consider it a worthy successor to Goold’s production.

The Almeida performance of *Richard III* directed by Rupert Goold, and the citations of Laurence Olivier’s film adaptation of *Richard III* in the television satire *Mad As Hell*, both turn to Shakespeare to explain what is happening in politics in the UK and Australia. In turn Shakespeare continues to shape that discourse. A discourse which is so organized around Shakespeare perhaps risks becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy, with everyone using narrative forebears to predict an ending. While Australian political life has appeared to have mostly stabilized under Prime Minister Scott Morrison (even though the specter of Tony Abbott

occasionally still haunts the news), despite Boris Johnson's massive majority in parliament, his rule has not provided the promised stability in the UK. At the time of writing, as the UK draws closer to the end of the transition period in January 2021, the election result has instead further destabilized the United Kingdom. All three devolved parliaments (the Welsh Assembly, Holyrood, and Stormont) have now rejected the EU (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill (see "Brexit"), and the Scottish National Party's leader Nicola Sturgeon has described the result as a clear mandate to hold a new referendum for Scottish independence (see Carrell and Brooks). While we cannot be certain of what kind of chaos and unrest Brexit will continue to bring to the UK, we know only one thing for certain: once again Johnson's long-promised biography of Shakespeare has been waylaid by Brexit (Chandler).²² As this article demonstrates, Goold's *Richard III* and the skits featured on *Mad As Hell* insist so thoroughly on reading politics through Shakespeare that the story seems to be already told. Perhaps this explains why Johnson has stopped writing Shakespeare's biography—because it has become clear in these performances that Shakespeare has written his.

Works cited

@MiRo_SPD. "#Brexit - eine Tragödie. Das wäre noch nicht mal #Shakespeare in den Sinn gekommen... Echt deprimierend." *Twitter*, 15 November 2018, 5:38 p.m., twitter.com/MiRo_SPD/status/1063003188729704453.

"Almeida Live: Richard III." *Trafalgar Releasing*, 21 July 2016, trafalgar-releasing.com/events/almeida-live-richard-iii. Accessed 26 November 2020.

“Almeida Live | Richard III Trailer | Almeida Theatre, London.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Almeida Theatre, 10 June 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOWfQkFphI8. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Aulich, Chris. *The Gillard Governments*. Melbourne UP, 2014.

Barnden, Sally. “‘Never did nor never shall’: Shakespeare Quotation and Nostalgic Politics in 2016.” *The EMC Imprint*, 2021 (forthcoming).

Billington, Michael. “Richard III Review—Ralph Fiennes Gets to Grip with Shakespeare’s Ruthless Ruler.” *The Guardian*, 17 June 2016, www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/jun/16/richard-iii-review-ralph-fiennes-almeida-theatre. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Blackwell, Anna. *Shakespearean Celebrity in the Digital Age: Fan Cultures and Remediation*. Palgrave, 2018.

Bourke, Latika. “Tony Abbott Quotes the Bible in London Brexit Speech.” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 September 2019, www.smh.com.au/world/europe/tony-abbott-quotes-the-bible-in-london-brex-it-speech-20190902-p52na5.html. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Bowcott, Owen. “Mother of Parliaments Shut by 'Father of Lies', Supreme Court Told.” *The Guardian*, 19 September 2019, www.theguardian.com/global/2019/sep/18/father-of-lies-supreme-court-prorogation-boris-johnson. Accessed 26 November 2020.

“Brexit: Welsh Assembly Joins Holyrood and Stormont in Rejecting Bill.” *BBC News*, 20 January 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-politics-51181641>. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Brissenden, Michael, and Brigid Andersen. “Liberal Party Elders Lash Tony Abbott for Acts of Revenge on Turnbull's Government.” *ABC News*, 27 August 2018, www.abc.net.au/news/2018-08-27/liberal-party-elders-lash-tony-abbott-for-acts-of-revenge-on-tu/10166590. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Brown, Mark. “Ralph Fiennes: Michael Gove is Just Like Richard III.” *The Guardian*, 20 July 2016, www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/jul/19/ralph-fiennes-michael-gove-is-just-like-richard-iii. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Buckley, Dan. “Boris Johnson’s Dad Stands By ‘et tu, Brute’ Comments Towards Michael Gove.” *The Irish Examiner*, 2 July 2016, www.irishexaminer.com/world/boris-johnsons-dad-stands-by-et-tu-brute-comments-towards-michael-gove-408171.html. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Carrell, Severin and Libby Brooks. “Scottish Independence Vote a ‘Democratic Right,’ Says Sturgeon.” *The Guardian*, 14 December 2019, www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/dec/13/nicola-sturgeon-to-publish-independence-referendum-blueprint. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Caesar, Ed. "Jo Cox, the Brexit Vote, and the Politics of Murder." *New Yorker*, 24 June 2016, www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-politics-of-murder-in-britain. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Carlson, Marvin. *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine*. U of Michigan P, 2003.

Cavendish, Dominic. "Richard III, Almeida, Review: 'Getting Up-Close-and-Personal with Ralph Fiennes and Vanessa Redgrave'." *The Telegraph*, 16 June 2016, www.telegraph.co.uk/theatre/what-to-see/richard-iii-almeida-review-getting-up-close-and-personal-with-ra. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Chakelian, Anoosh. "Facebook Releases Brexit Campaign Ads for the Fake News Inquiry—But What's Wrong With Them?" *New Statesman*, 27 July 2018, www.newstatesman.com/politics/media/2018/07/facebook-releases-brexit-campaign-ads-fake-news-inquiry-what-s-wrong-them. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Chandler, Mark. "Boris Johnson Shakespeare book shelved 'for foreseeable future' after leadership win." *The Bookseller*, 23 July 2019, <https://www.thebookseller.com/news/boris-johnson-shakespeare-book-shelved-foreseeable-future-after-leadership-win-1040601>. Accessed 22 December 2020.

"Christopher Pyne: Gillard as Ruthless as Richard III." *AustralianPolitics.com*, 23 January 2012, australianpolitics.com/2012/01/23/pyne-gillard-richard-iii.html. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Clapp, Susannah. "Richard III Review—King of the Car Park." *The Guardian*, 19 June 2016, www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/jun/19/richard-iii-almeida-review-ralph-fiennes-vanessa-redgrave. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Conrad, Peter. *Shakespeare The Theatre of Our World*. Head of Zeus, 2018.

Connolly, John. "Did Boris's Dirty Tricks Help Hunt Over Gove?" *The Spectator*, 20 June 2019, blogs.spectator.co.uk/2019/06/jeremy-hunt-and-boris-johnson-through-to-the-final-two. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Crompton, Sarah. "Richard III (Almeida Theatre)." *WhatsOnStage*, 17 June 2016, whatsonstage.com/london-theatre/reviews/richard-iii-almeida-ralph-fiennes-vanessa-redgrave_41024.html. Accessed 26 November 2020.

"David Cameron promises in/out referendum on EU." *BBC News*, 23 January 2013, www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-21148282. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. Routledge, 1994.

"Donald Trump: 'I Could Shoot Somebody and I Wouldn't Lose Any Voters'." *The Guardian*, 24 January 2019, www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/jan/24/donald-trump-says-he-could-shoot-somebody-and-still-not-lose-voters. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Boris Rex.” *Charlie Dupré*, www.charliedupre.com/boris-rex. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Ellis, Bob. “Tony Abbott: The Termination.” *Independent Australia*, 14 February 2015, independentaustralia.net/politics/politics-display/tony-abbott-the-termination,7371. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Esiri, Allie. “Boris Johnson and Jeremy Corbyn Could Learn a Few Lessons on Pride Before a Fall From Shakespeare.” *i News*, 3 October 2019, inews.co.uk/opinion/our-flawed-politicians-could-learn-a-lot-from-the-lessons-in-shakespeares-plays-642743. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Felperin, Leslie. “‘Richard III’: Theater Review.” *The Hollywood Reporter*, 17 June 2016, www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/ralph-fiennes-richard-iii-theater-903895. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Ferguson, Sarah. *The Killing Season*. ABC Television Australia, 2015.

Gourley, Paddy. “This Man Shows No Sign of Dragging Us From Our Discontent.” *The Canberra Times*, 2 July 2012, www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6168421/this-man-shows-no-sign-of-dragging-us-from-our-discontent. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Greenblatt, Stephen. “Shakespeare Explains the 2016 Election.” *The New York Times*, 8 October 2019, www.nytimes.com/2016/10/09/opinion/sunday/shakespeare-explains-the-2016-election.html. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Greenslade, Roy. "Newspapers draw on Shakespeare to report Gove's knifing of Johnson."

The Guardian, 1 July 2016,

www.theguardian.com/media/greenslade/2016/jul/01/newspapers-draw-on-shakespeare-to-report-goves-knifing-of-johnson. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Hawker, Bruce. *The Rudd Rebellion: The Campaign to Save Labor Governments*. Melbourne UP, 2013.

Hemming, Sarah. "Richard III, Almeida Theatre, London—'Bleak, bitter.'" *Financial Times*, 18 June 2016, www.ft.com/content/d5cdf386-347a-11e6-bda0-04585c31b153. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Hermansson, Patrik, David Lawrence, Joe Mulhall, and Simon Murdoch. *The International Alt-Right: Fascism for the 21st Century?* Routledge, 2020.

Kearney, Martha. "Boris Johnson's Father: Et tu, Brute?." *BBC News*, 30 June 2016, www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-politics-36677450/boris-johnson-s-father-et-tu-brute. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Kirwan, Peter. "Richard III (Almeida Live) @ Nottingham Broadway." *The Bardathon*, 22 July 2016, blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/bardathon/2016/07/22/richard-iii-almeida-live-nottingham-broadway. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Kott, Jan. *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*. Revised edition. Translated by Boelsaw Taborski, Methuen & Co Ltd, 1967.

Knight, Sam. "The Empty Promise of Boris Johnson." *The New Yorker*, 13 June 2019, www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/06/24/the-empty-promise-of-boris-johnson. Accessed 26 November 2020.

"Leadership: Beware the men who are hungry for revenge." *The Age*, 22 August 2018, www.theage.com.au/national/leadership-beware-the-men-who-are-hungry-for-revenge-20180821-h148mx.html. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Margan, Max. "Could Peter Costello be preparing for a political comeback? Malcolm Turnbull's looming 30th Newspoll loss brings unlikely leadership candidate into contention." *Daily Mail*, 5 April 2018, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5579401/Could-Peter-Costello-preparing-political-comeback-Turnbulls-30th-Newspoll-loss-looms.html>. Accessed 21 December 2020.

May, Elly. 'Boris Rex.' *Broadway Baby*, 20 May 2019, <https://broadwaybaby.com/shows/boris-rex/743720>. Accessed 22 December 2020.

McInnis, David. "Shakespeare in 2016." *Meanjin Quarterly*, Summer 2016, <https://meanjin.com.au/essays/shakespeare-in-2016/>. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Makela, Mark. "Transcript: Donald Trump's Taped Comments About Women." *New York Times*, 8 October 2016, www.nytimes.com/2016/10/08/us/donald-trump-tape-transcript.html. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Olive, Sarah. "Richard III, Almeida Live @ Royal Spa Centre Cinema, Leamington, 2016."

Reviewing Shakespeare, 21 July 2016, bloggingshakespeare.com/reviewing-shakespeare/richard-iii-almeida-dir-rupert-goold-almeida-live-royal-spa-centre-cinema-leamington-2016. Accessed 26 November 2020.

O'Rourke, Kevin. *A Short History of Brexit: From Bentry to Backstop*. Penguin Press, 2019.

O'Toole, Fintan. *Heroic Failure: Brexit and the Politics of Pain*. Apollo, 2018.

Otterman, Philip. "UK 'silver spoon' Cabinet Will Escape Brexit Fallout, Says German Minister." *The Guardian*, 1 April 2019, www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/apr/01/uk-silver-spoon-mps-will-escape-brexit-fallout-says-german-minister-michael-roth. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Richard III. Directed for the stage by Rupert Goold and for the screen by Robin Lough, Almeida Theatre Live, Almeida Theatre, London, 21 July 2016.

Salmon, Shanine. "Boris Rex, Camden Fringe." *View From the Cheap Seat*, 11 August 2019, <https://viewfromthecheapseat.com/2019/08/11/boris-rex-camden-fringe>. Accessed 22 December 2020.

Saul, Heather. "Brexit: Nigel Farage Branded 'shameful' for Claiming Victory 'without a single bullet being fired'." *The Independent*, 24 June 2016, www.independent.co.uk/news/people/eu-referendum-nigel-farage-branded-shameful-for-

[claiming-victory-without-a-single-bullet-being-fired-a7099211.html](https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2020/nov/26/claiming-victory-without-a-single-bullet-being-fired-a7099211). Accessed 26 November 2020.

Savva, Niki. *The Road to Ruin*. Scribe, 2017.

Savva, Niki. *Plots and Prayers: Malcolm Turnbull's Demise and Scott Morrison's Ascension*. Scribe, 2019.

“Shakespeare, History, Nationhood and Us | Almeida Questions.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Almeida Theatre, 15 August 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=w24CmSM_oYo. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Shakespeare, William. *King Richard III*, edited by James R. Siemon. Third series. Arden 2009.

Shaun Micallef's Mad as Hell. Written by Shaun Micallef et al., directed by John Olb. Giant Baby Productions/ITV Studios, ABC TV Australia, 2012–current.

Shipman, Tim. *All Out War: The Full Story of How Brexit Sank Britain's Political Class*. HarperCollins, 2016.

Smith, Emma. “May as Polonius, Gove as Cassius: is Brexit a Shakespearean tragedy?” *The Guardian*, 12 April 2019, www.theguardian.com/books/2019/apr/12/brexit-tragedy-worthy-of-shakespeare-emma-smith. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Smith, Emma. *This is Shakespeare*. Pelican Books, 2019.

Stewart, Heather and Jessica Elgot. “Boris Johnson rules himself out of Tory leadership race.” *The Guardian*, 30 June 2016, www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/30/boris-johnson-rules-himself-out-of-tory-leadership-race-brexiteu-referendum. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Stewart, Heather, and Rowena Mason. “Nigel Farage's Anti-Migrant Poster Reported to Police.” *The Guardian*, 17 June 2016, www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/16/nigel-farage-defends-ukip-breaking-point-poster-queue-of-migrants. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Stewart, Nicholas. *Rudd's Way*. Scribe, 2010.

Taylor, Paul. “Richard III, Almeida, London, Theatre Review: Ralph Fiennes’s Richard is Full of Misanthropic Disdain.” *Independent*, 17 June 2016, www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/reviews/richard-iii-almeida-london-theatre-review-ralph-fiennes-richard-is-full-of-misanthropic-disdain-a7085976.html. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Tenold, Vegas. *Everything You Love Will Burn: Inside the Rebirth of White Nationalism in America*. Bold Type Books, 2018.

Tollfree, Neil. “‘Frankly, that Michael Gove is beyond the pale’—Macbeth.” *News Thump*, 1 July 2016, newsthump.com/2016/07/01/frankly-that-michael-gove-is-beyond-the-pale-macbeth. Accessed 26 November 2020.

“Tony Abbott: Opposition Leader for Life.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Madashellabctv, 11 April 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJuiY9RoloY. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Trueman, Matt. “London Theater Review: ‘Richard III’ with Ralph Fiennes, Vanessa Redgrave.” *Variety*, 17 June 2016, variety.com/2016/legit/reviews/richard-iii-review-ralph-fiennes-1201797939. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Turnbull, Malcolm. “Axed and humiliated: Someone should give this poor bastard a hug.” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 June 2010, www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/axed-and-humiliated-someone-should-give-this-poor-bastard-a-hug-20100629-zium.html. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Walsh, Kerry-Anne. *The Stalking of Julia Gillard: How the Media and Team Rudd Brought Down the Prime Minister*. Allen & Unwin, 2013.

Wilson, Jeffrey R. *Shakespeare and Trump*. Temple UP, 2020.

Worden, Blair. “Shakespeare and Politics.” *Shakespeare and Politics*, edited by Catherine M. S. Alexander, Cambridge UP, 2004, pp. 22–43.

Wright, Ben. “Michael Gove and Theresa May Head Five-Way Conservative Race.” *BBC News*, 30 June 2016, www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-36671336. Accessed 26 November 2020.

Young, Lucien. *The Secret Diary of Boris Johnson Aged 13¼*. Quercus, 2019.

¹ For more on analogies between Trump and Shakespeare tyrant characters, including Richard III, see Wilson.

² For a detailed analysis of how Shakespeare quotation functions politically as an example of nostalgia, especially in the Brexit context, see Sally Barnden's excellent forthcoming article (I thank Sally for giving me access to the postprint version of this article), the conclusion to Blackwell, in particular pp. 167–70, and McInnis.

³ My thanks to my mother, Silvia Gerzic, for her translation of Roth's Tweet from German into English.

⁴ In the Westminster System, a head of government (or head of the executive), is known as the Prime Minister (PM), Premier, Chief Minister, or First Minister. While the head of state appoints the head of government, constitutional convention dictates that a majority of elected members of parliament must support the person appointed. In countries that have a Presidential System, the executive is directly elected and is not responsible to the legislature, which cannot in normal circumstances dismiss it. Such dismissal is possible, however, in uncommon cases, often through impeachment.

⁵ In Australian politics, a leadership spill (or simply spill) is a declaration that the leadership of a parliamentary party (also known as a caucus) is vacant and open for re-election. The term "Libspill," as with the term "Brexit," was a portmanteau that emerged on and was popularized by social media: it is a contraction of the word "Liberal" (from the political party name Liberal Party of Australia) and the word spill. For more insight into the various leadership spills in both the Australian Labor Party and Liberal Party of Australia in the 2010s, see Stewart; Hawker; Walsh; Aulich; Ferguson; Savva 2017; and Savva 2019.

⁶ Fiennes's casting and his celebrity are especially emphasized in the trailer that was released to promote the screening. In a pre-recorded video, Fiennes (in character) delivers Richard's "to dream upon the crown" soliloquy direct to the viewer (see "Almeida Live | Richard III Trailer").

⁷ For example, on 16 June 2016, five days before *Richard III* was broadcast live around the world, British Labour politician Jo Cox, a defender of the European Union, was murdered by a far-right terrorist with links to the English Defence League. A week later, Nigel Farage, leader of the UKIP Party at the time, shamefully claimed the Leave Party had emerged victorious in the EU referendum "without a single bullet being fired" (Saul). Cox's murder led to an agreement by all sides in the Brexit debate to suspend national activities out of respect. For more on the links between the murder of Cox and Brexit, see Caesar. Cox's "shocking death" is also mentioned by Sarah Crompton in her review of Rupert Goold's production of *Richard III*, further connecting the production with Brexit and the political instability and (violent) division in the United Kingdom that resulted from the referendum.

⁸ The satirical new website *News Thump* also made light of this allusion, with "Macbeth" penning a complaint that Gove had gone too far (Tollfree).

⁹ For more on how *Richard III* attracts this ghostly blurring of past, present and future particularly in his reburial, see Blackwell 150–1. As Blackwell eloquently argues, "[s]eemingly 'emptied of history,' Richard can only ever be articulated via cultural intermediaries" (151).

¹⁰ All quotations from the interview are my own transcriptions.

¹¹ Sam Knight tells us that: "Performing plays at Eton, Johnson delighted the other boys by forgetting his lines. Once, when playing Shakespeare's *Richard III*, he pasted pages of the script to pillars in the school's cloisters and spent the performance running between them." This is brilliantly parodied in Lucien Young's spoof teenage diary of Johnson (74–102).

¹² During his two-part interview during the live broadcast Goold referenced both *Schindler's List* (1994) and the *Harry Potter* film series (2001–11), as shaping which he termed “the dark part of Ralph Fiennes,” which Fiennes brought to the character of Richard III. Dominic Cavendish also cites Fiennes’s roles in these films in his review of Fiennes’s performance, stating: “playing those big-screen bad-guys—from that *Schindler's List* psychopath Amon Göth through to *Harry Potter's* Voldemort—has served him well. He can dehumanise his gaze, chill with a reptilian smile. Vein-popping fury is a muscle-memory.”

¹³ For recent investigations of the rise of the Alt-Right movement, see Tenold; Hermansson et al.

¹⁴ Farage’s political success as leader of the party (from November 2010 to September 2016) was one of the big drivers behind the Conservative party’s later decision to give the people a Brexit referendum (for more see “David Cameron promises in/out referendum on EU”), and was a key figurehead in the Brexit campaign of 2016. Farage has gone on to lead the Brexit Party (from 2019 to current), a Eurosceptic political party in the United Kingdom.

¹⁵ Quotations from *Richard III* taken from James R. Siemon’s Arden 3 edition.

¹⁶ For example, Vote Leave, the official group campaigning for Brexit, falsely claimed that Turkey was about to join the EU, and that gun-toting Turkish terrorists and criminals would be soon be everyone’s new neighbors in the UK, and the UKIP Party released a “breaking point” poster, which drew upon the same explicit imagery of an influx of migrants as the “vomit[ed]”-forth runaways (Stewart and Mason). See also, for example, Anoosh Chakelian’s analysis of the misleading adverts that appeared on Facebook during the Brexit Campaign.

¹⁷ Gillard was subsequently toppled by Rudd in 2013, in a political conflict known derisively as the “Rudd-Gillard-Rudd” years.

¹⁸ Gourley’s title and concluding paragraph, however, seemingly imply that Tony Abbott, leader of the opposition at the time, was no Henry Tudor. Pyne described Julia Gillard’s

poker machine policy and her abandonment of a deal with independent MP and anti-poker machine advocate Andrew Wilkie in 2012 as: “what many regard as the most ruthless political act since Richard III disposed of his nephews in the Tower of London” (“Christopher Pyne”).

¹⁹ Newspoll is the political poll published by News Corporation Ltd in their Australia media outlets.

²⁰ The sketch is currently available to view on YouTube (see “Tony Abbott: Opposition Leader for Life”). Quotes from this sketch are my own transcriptions.

²¹ For recent analysis of the events leading up to and following the Brexit vote, see Shipman; O'Toole; and O'Rourke.

²² My sincere thanks to Aidan Norrie, Hilary Jane Locke, Andrew Broertjes, Anna Blackwell, Peter Kirwan, and Kathryn Prince for their invaluable feedback during the writing of this article. My thanks also to the anonymous reviewers for their insightful and helpful commentary.