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SHAKESPEARE IN THE TIMELINE:
An analysis of RSC's *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *#dream40*

Belo Horizonte
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Abstract

This thesis discusses *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *#dream40*, adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare, produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company. The first chapters approach both works in details, which is necessary due to the novelty of the productions under discussion. Both productions were staged on social media websites. This thesis investigates the modes of engagement allowed by these adaptations. When discussing the process through which a playscript was adapted to social media, it is detailed how Twitter and Google+ work as the main stages for these productions. Lastly, in relation to Linda Hutcheon's exposition of the modes of engagement, this thesis approaches how the written texts, visual and audiovisual media, and interactive aspects of social media websites allow for different ways of engaging audiences.

Keywords: William Shakespeare. Adaptation. Social media websites.

Resumo

Essa dissertação discute duas produções da Royal Shakespeare Company, *Such Tweet Sorrow* e *#dream40* que são, respectivamente, adaptações das obras *Romeu e Julieta* e *Sonho de uma noite de verão*, de William Shakespeare. Ambas as produções usaram redes sociais como "palco". Essa dissertação investiga os modos de engajamento do público nessas adaptações de obras literárias para as redes sociais. Para isso, primeiramente, se dá a apresentação de ambas as adaptações tendo em vista seus caráteres inovadores e o modo como os textos dramáticos são adaptados para o ambiente digital, dando ênfase nos "palcos principais" de cada uma delas, Twitter e Google+. Posteriormente, discute-se, a partir dos apontamentos de Linda Hutcheon, os modos de engajamento presentes nessas adaptações, com relação aos textos escritos, à presença de produtos de mídias visuais e audiovisuais e à possibilidade de interação tendo em vista o ambiente das redes sociais.

Palavras-chave: William Shakespeare. Adaptação. Redes sociais digitais.

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1. Introduction

This research focuses on two productions by the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC): *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *#dream40 – Midsummer Night's Dreaming* (hereupon referred as *#dream40)*, which are adaptations of Shakespeare's dramatic texts to the plurimedial environment of social media websites. Through an analysis of *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *#dream40*, this thesis investigates how social media websites can work as virtual stages for literary adaptations. The first two chapters feature analyses of both productions, and in the third and last chapter both productions are put side by side and discussed in terms of the modes of engagement – ways of engaging audiences – allowed by social media websites.

The first production, *Such Tweet Sorrow*, was performed on Twitter, in partnership with Mudlark, a digital product agency, and is an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, whereas in the second, *#dream40*, performed on Google+, the RSC teamed up with Google Creative Lab in order to recreate *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Though Twitter and Google+ differ in many ways, they also share many features. According to Danah Boyd, social media websites are "sites and services that emerged during the early 2000s, including social network sites, video sharing sites, blogging and microblogging platforms, and related tools that allow participants to create and share their own content" (6). Thus, not only Twitter (a microblogging platform) and Google+ (a social network site) but also other media involved in these productions such as YouTube (a video sharing site), Tumblr (a blogging platform), and Last.fm (a social online music service) are all considered social media websites.

Fundamentally, Twitter and Google+ are platforms for communication. Both platforms allow sharing information by either addressing another person or sending an open-ended message, and they are meant to foster public or private communication; it is possible to send a message that can only be accessed by its addressee, or to send it in a public manner. In this last case, the correspondence will be available to the other social media users, who may read,

or even take part in the exchange, contributing to the conversation. When it comes to *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *#dream40*, the platforms were used to send messages with and without specific addressees, but it was necessary that the messages (and other media) were exchanged publicly, so that people could keep up with how the plays progressed.

Due to the novelty of the productions being discussed, important is to substantiate the decision of regarding these productions as "adaptations". Adopting this perspective was first motivated by Linda Hutcheon's definition of "adaptation". According to Hutcheon, three aspects are central when considering a specific media product an adaptation of a former work. As she puts it,

> In short, adaptation can be described as the following:
>
> • An acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works
>
> • A creative and an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging
>
> • An extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work (8)

All three aspects outlined by Hutcheon can be observed in *Such Tweet Sorrow* in relation to *Romeo and Juliet*, and in *#dream40* when *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is concerned.

Firstly, the relation between *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *#dream40* and their source texts is overtly announced. The first production is not only titled after a famous line in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*: "Parting is such sweet / sorrow" (2.2.199-200), but the relation between *Such Tweet Sorrow* and this play is also further discussed on its website,

> More than 400 years ago William Shakespeare wrote *Romeo and Juliet*, introducing "a pair of star-crossed lovers" who defy an "ancient grudge" between their two families with romantic and ultimately tragic results. As well as numberless stage versions, it has been retold in film, opera, ballet and

> musical forms. In this ground-breaking experiment, it is coming to life across and through a social network, Twitter. (“About”)

The producers of *Such Tweet Sorrow*, thus, overtly acknowledge their experiment as a transposition of *Romeo and Juliet*. The name “#dream40” is also a reference to its source text, as “40” is the amount of times the Royal Shakespeare Company had produced *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (Uglow, “A Prologue to #Dream40”). Tom Uglow, a producer of *#dream40,* states that “[e]very director at some point takes a company and tries to re-imagine Shakespeare for their time on their stage. We have the same ambition,” thereby disclosing that behind *#dream40* there are efforts to form a present-day conception of Shakespeare. These media products lay bare their association with Shakespeare and his plays.

Besides, the audience can easily recognize the source texts of both productions. *Such Tweet Sorrow* not only maintained most of the character’s names, but the distinguishing moments of *Romeo and Juliet* were also brought to Twitter, such as the masquerade, secret marriage, and the lovers’ death by suicide. In *#dream40* the names of the central characters were also kept unchanged, and some central moments were also brought to social media, such as the marriage preparations, the lovers getting lost in the woods, and the rehearsals for *Pyramus and Thisbe*. In *#dream40*, however, there is a change of perspective, as new characters were added to the story and they are the ones from which the audience hears the most. Being that so, *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *#dream40* are both acknowledged and recognizable transpositions of *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

When Hutcheon puts that an adaptation must be “a creative and an interpretive act” (8), she excludes plain reproductions from the array of media products she considers “adaptations”. When it comes to *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *#dream40*, the use of social media entails substantial changes to the source texts. The process of bringing Elizabethan plays to

social media websites required inventiveness, *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *#dream40* are not straight reproductions.

Furthermore, both RSC's productions engage with their source texts from their very first moments until the very last. Juliet starts the play preparing for her debuting birthday party, while Romeo is in love with Rosaline, and the play ends with the surviving characters coping with the lovers' deaths. Because *#dream40* is by no means a unified production, it is challenging to delineate its beginning. However, it can be stated that the "plot" of *#dream40* is closely connected to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. From the start, when the characters from *#dream40* anticipate some key points of Shakespeare's play, such as the royal marriage, to the end, since it ends with the complete play script, from Shakespeare, being performed live in Stratford-upon-Avon. The relationships between *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *Romeo and Juliet*, and *#dream40* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, therefore, coincide with Linda Hutcheon's account on how adaptations relate to their source texts.

Julie Sanders' perspective, in *Adaptations and Appropriations*, also enable understanding these RSC's productions as adaptations. The author claims that "adaptation can also constitute a simpler attempt to make texts 'relevant' or easily comprehensible to new audiences and readerships via the processes of proximation and updating . . . Shakespeare has been a particular focus, a beneficiary even, of these 'proximations' or updatings" (19). Even though *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *#dream40* relate with their source texts in different ways, both productions can be considered adaptations, since the use of social media is an attempt to bring Shakespeare's plays closer to the context of social media users. These productions engagement with their source text is much more fluid than early adaptations of Shakespeare's works, especially when *#dream40* is considered. However, such fluidity is a tendency for adaptations produced after the latter half of the twentieth century (Corrigan 27). Therefore,

even if this sort of production is still not widely recognized as adaptation, such designation seems aligned with prestigious works in the field of adaptation studies.

When the two productions are considered, the process of adaptation from play script to social media websites was similar: in both cases, social media pages were created for each character of the adaptation, which means that each play was composed of various pages, which can also be called "profiles" – each profile has a different web address. For this reason, they need to be visited separately – they are public, and can be accessed by any person with internet access. The pages were used to broadcast written messages, videos, and photos on the web. Furthermore, because social media are platforms for communication, the characters often used the tools provided by these media to send messages to each other. As aforementioned, these messages were published in a public manner, so that everyone could see them. For example, in *Such Tweet Sorrow*, the RSC would use Romeo's profile – which they created on Twitter – to send a passionate message to the profile they created for Juliet, and every person who was interested would be able to read their exchange of messages, or even enter the conversation and send a message to them. Likewise, different profiles were created in Google+, representing the characters of *#dream40*, which broadcast, among others, messages, videos, and comic strips on the web.

Despite being performed in different online stages, and being adaptations of different source-texts, in what concerns production and reception *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *#dream40* engaged people in similar ways. I argue that the people involved in both productions can be sorted into the same four "roles," concerning the functions they performed in the adaptation process. First, there are the "producers," which are members of the companies that promoted these plays (RSC, Mudlark, and Google), whose involvement with the plays starts prior to the performance. These "producers" include not only the literal producers, but also the directors,

scriptwriters, and digital developers, among others; thus, they are external to these plays' diegesis. Second, we have the "characters", which are the people who, acting as the characters of the plays, run the pages created in social media for each production. However, though they are also part of the companies, they are different from the producers because they act within the diegesis of the plays. Regarding *Such Tweet Sorrow*, I coined the word "charactor" (character + actor) to reinforce the argument that a specific sort of impersonation emerged from this adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*. The third role is that of "curator," and each play has one, namely Jago Mosca and Puck. These curators are responsible for selecting, commenting and sharing their favorite moments of the production. Their duty is remarkably similar to that of the adaptor, as through the selection of some portions of these productions they create and present their own adaptation of these plays, which may include content by both the producers and the audience. Consequently, the curators belong to both the diegetic and the non-diegetic worlds, as they perform parts in the play, curate their own version of the performances, and mediate the communication between the characters and the audience. Lastly, the term "audience" is used to refer to the people who followed the performance of these plays. There are two different shares of the audience: the observers and the participators. Whereas the observers witness the plot unleashing, the participators actively engage with the play. Because the participators interact with the characters, and can provoke responses from them, it can be stated that the participators, at certain moments, took part in the play's diegesis. During the extent of the performance, one can play more than one role in the plays. *Such Tweet Sorrow*'s curator, for example, was performed by Tim Wright, one of the writers of the play. Wright acted as a producer and as a curator. Henceforth, the words "producers," "characters" (and "charactors"), "curators," and "audience" will be employed when referring to each group of people involved in these adaptations.

As mentioned, *Such Tweet Sorrow* is an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, widely known as a tragedy of forbidden passion, in which two young lovers take their own lives because their families' rivalry prevents them from staying together as a couple. The live performance of this adaptation took place during five weeks, from April 10 to May 13, in 2010. By April 13 of that year, the webpages of the project had already been viewed more than three hundred thousand times ("Case Study: Mudlark – 'Such Tweet Sorrow'").

The second production under discussion, *#dream40,* an adaptation of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to Google+, was performed during a weekend in June 2013. This comedy narrates the story of the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta, but also encompasses three subplots: the lovers – young Athenians who go astray in the woods and are charmed into falling in love; the mechanicals – an amateur theater company that is rehearsing a play to be performed at Theseus and Hippolyta's wedding celebrations; and the fairies – forest creatures who enchant and tamper with the other characters. Even though the producers of *#dream40* would later acknowledge that more active participation was expected from the audience, it was successful in reaching a wide number of observers: the project's website had a hundred and ten thousand visitors during the weekend when the play was performed (Uglow, "An Epilogue"). It is also striking to note that, at the time of writing, the most popular video uploaded by the RSC's YouTube account, which had over four hundred thousand views, is a promotional video of *#dream40.*

When these productions are approached with a diachronic perspective, through the light shed by Intermediality Studies, these adaptations do not seem detached cultural manifestations. On the contrary, a close analysis of these plays reveals that much in these productions is reminiscent of other media forms. In *Understanding Media*, communication theorist Marshall McLuhan stated that "[t]he restraints [of a medium] are always directed to

the ‘content,’ which is always another medium. The content of the press is literary statement, as the content of the book is speech, and the content of the movie is the novel” (305). In other words, every medium accommodates other media forms within themselves. In *Remediation,* a theory of mediation by David Bolter and Richard Grusin, the authors elaborate on McLuhan’s idea, which they consider “problematic examples” (45), since “McLuhan was not thinking of simple repurposing, but perhaps of a more complex kind of borrowing in which one medium is itself incorporated or represented in another medium” (45). Hence, Bolter and Grusin name “remediation” the “formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms” (273), promising to offer “a more immediate or authentic experience” (19). For instance, photography remediates painting, and is remediated by cinema, which also remediates theater; each new medium supposedly presents a more direct access to the represented object.

These productions are not a completely new media form, if such a thing exists. In fact, *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *#dream40* constitute narratives, which makes them particularly suitable as objects for a thesis in the field of Literary Studies. According to Monika Fludernik, author of *An Introduction to Narratology,* a narrative is “a representation of a possible world in a linguistic and/or visual medium, at whose centre there are one or several protagonists of an anthropomorphic nature who are existentially anchored in a temporal and spatial sense and who (mostly) perform goal-directed actions (action and plot structure)” (6). Every aspect of Fludernik’s definition can be observed in *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *#dream40*: representations of a fictional English market town and a fantastical Athens, where several personae are based; the account of unfolding events – mostly in the written verbal medium, but sometimes in visual and audiovisual media – which supposedly happened in real time during five weeks in 2010, or over a weekend in 2013; and due to the actions described in these productions their ends ensued.

Conversely, cultural theorist and critic Mieke Bal, in *Narratology*, proposes the following definition,

> A narrative text is a text in which an agent or subject conveys to an addressee ('tells' the reader) a story in a particular medium, such as language, imagery, sound, buildings, or a combination thereof. A story is the content of that text, and produces a particular manifestation, inflection, and 'colouring' of a fabula; the fabula is presented in a certain manner. A fabula is a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors. (5)

In other words, a narrative text requires a medium-based communication between an addresser and an addressee, in which a series of events is communicated. In *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *#dream40*, the characters are both agents and subjects, as the point of view varies depending on what character made the report of a specific action. Usually, the audience have access to different perspectives of the same event. Bal's theory encompasses narratives in media other than verbal (written) language, including narratives in a combination of media – such as *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *#dream40*. Moreover, when Bal's description is taken into consideration, most Twitter and Google+ users (and not only those which use the platform to tell fictional events) can be considered narrative agents, having their followers as addressees, while their publications' records could be considered a story. In this, Bal's theory differs from Fludernik's, who only considers narratives those stories in which the actions are goal-directed, which cannot be categorically affirmed about the actions reported on Twitter and Google+ by their regular users, but is an appropriate claim in relation to adaptations such as the ones discussed in this thesis. That being so, even though these stories are told in an unconventional manner, one can arguably call *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *#dream40* narratives. Minor

discordances aside, both Fludernik's and Bal's narrative theories grant these adaptations the status of "narrative."

However, these are new subjects, and there is an evident lack of studies about adaptations of literary texts to social media. The existing criticism on *Such Tweet Sorrow* is meager, and probably due to its novelty, *#dream40* has not yet inspired any thorough research. There are, in fact, two acute critical works that focus on the medium usage in *Such Tweet Sorrow:* "Social Shakespeare: *Romeo and Juliet*, Social Media, and Performance" by Geoffrey Way – a scholar interested in Shakespeare and digital media –, and "He Speaks . . . Or Rather . . . He Tweets': The Specter of the 'Original', Media, and 'Media-Crossed' Love in *Such Tweet Sorrow*", by Maurizio Calbi – whose research interests include media appropriations of Shakespeare. Way discusses how social media websites worked as a stage for two productions of the star-crossed lovers tragedy; besides *Such Tweet Sorrow*, he focuses on *Romeo and Juliet* by the Sloss Performing Arts, a theater company from Alabama. He argues that participating in a social network site is a social performance (403), and that dramatic performances in social media are "an opportunity to reevaluate the concepts of live and mediatized performance" (412) because, as he puts it, *Such Tweet Sorrow* features characteristics of both live and mediatized performances. Calbi focuses on *Such Tweet Sorrow* as an adaptation to Twitter and its self-referential aspects. He claims that this production "continually drew attention to itself as a Twitter adaptation" (137) due to the constant references made by the characters to Twitter and its features. Establishing a dialogue with both texts is of major importance, because they shed light on the unsettled question of having social media, specifically Twitter, as a stage for dramatic performances. However, Way and Calbi overlook the role played by the modes of engagement these media allow, which, in my opinion, are extremely important when attempting to understand the particularities of

reception in relation to dramatic performances in social media websites. Conversely, among the critical reviews *#dream40* has inspired is a three-page critique by Pascale Aebischer, in which she not only describes this production in relation to its chosen stage, but focuses on the experience of reception of *#dream40.* Thus, even though brief, Aebischer's approach to *#dream40* is pertinent to this thesis.

Therefore, despite the relevance of this sort of production, not much has been written about digital storytelling, and "more literary and theoretical studies of digital storytelling are certainly needed," as futurist Bryan Alexander, in *The New Digital Storytelling*, puts it (xiii). There are even fewer critical studies that specifically discuss adaptations to social media websites – which were not originally created, or usually regarded, as media used for dramatic performance. Overall, the amount of critical papers that discuss *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *#dream40* available on Internet databases is surprisingly small, especially considering the reputation of the Royal Shakespeare Company.

Since the popularization of the term "transmedia story", by Henry Jenkins, much has been discussed in relation to this approach to storytelling. Possibly due to transmedia franchises using social media to expand their story worlds, one may feel compelled to designate *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *#dream40* transmedia productions. In *Convergence Culture* Jenkins puts that,

> A transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole. In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best—so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics; its world might be explored through game play or experienced as an amusement park attraction. Each franchise entry needs to be self-contained so

> you don't need to have seen the film to enjoy the game, and vice versa. Any given product is a point of entry into the franchise as a whole. (95-6)

There certainly are more than one media platform involved in these RSC productions. Nevertheless, it cannot be stated that every media product that compose these adaptations is complete in themselves. Instead, they are fragmentary. Some fragments of these productions cannot be appreciated outside their intended context – as it is with the "Hamster of Fate" video series, from *#dream40*, discussed in the second chapter. Finally, not every fragment provided access to the rest of these adaptations. For example, one can access – through a link shared on Twitter – a video posted on YouTube that shows Juliet singing. However, it is not possible to access *Such Tweet Sorrow* from this video. When it comes to this adaptation, there is nothing on YouTube – nor it the videos, their titles and descriptions – that acknowledge them as part of a larger production, let alone a link to the production website or its Twitter accounts, as discussed in the third chapter. That being so, there are similarities between adaptations to social media and transmedia storytelling, however, *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *#dream40* do not fall under the most reputable definition of "transmedia story".

Even though both *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *#dream40* are produced by the same company, they are examples of how adaptations to social media websites can be formed differently, especially in what concerns the strategies of visual representation they employ. However, they share some characteristics that seem to be of utmost importance concerning this sort of digital performance. Thus, by discussing both productions, this thesis aim at a more accurate description of this genre of cultural productions, which is still in the making. Social media represent new possibilities in performance and storytelling, and are spaces that are slowly being occupied by literary adaptations. Because I do subscribe to digital media scholar Janet Murray's idea that "narrative beauty is independent of medium" (273), any

media in which stories are told is interesting to me. Moreover, considering that "the Shakespearean canon has served as a test bed over many centuries for the process of adaptation" (Sanders 51), if one is curious about the future of adaptation, it is particularly interesting to pay attention to recent adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, especially to the so-called new media. I expect that my research will be a contribution to a necessary broader study concerning the peculiarities of adaptations from literary works to social media websites.

Due to the novelty of the objects being discussed, the first and second chapters are throughout descriptions of these productions, also encompassing an evaluation of the functionalities of the social media used as stage. First, the discussion is centered on *Such Tweet Sorrow*, which was produced three years before *#dream40*, the production discussed next. Both chapters also feature an account of these performance's setbacks – which, in both cases, can be attributed to the novelty of this sort of production – and their contributions to the genre of social media adaptations, which they are inaugurating.

The third chapter is an analysis of these productions in relation to the modes of engagement they allow. With regard to the modes of engagement introduced by Hutcheon in *A Theory of Adaptation,* it will be argued that each mode of engagement affects the experience proposed by adaptations from literary works to social media websites. Here, I will discuss how the written-texts, visual and audiovisual media, and the interactive quality of social media correspond, respectively, to "telling," "showing," and "interacting." Finally, I will conclude by presenting my research findings and its limitations. I will also indicate how future researches can take the discussions introduced by this thesis further.

2. *Such Tweet Sorrow*: A performance of *Romeo and Juliet* on Twitter

Such Tweet Sorrow is an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* to social media web sites, Twitter being its main stage. This play, performed during five weeks, was produced by the RSC in partnership with Mudlark, a company that creates and designs games and other digital experiences. A plurality of media composed *Such Tweet Sorrow,* and it would not be an overstatement to say that, during the time of its performance, this play was ubiquitous on social media websites.

YouTube, Facebook, Tumblr, and Last.fm, among others, worked as "auxiliary stages". Furthermore, the production had a website, suchtweetsorrow.com, where the audience could find information regarding the last events of this performance. As its name reveals, the main stage of *Such Tweet Sorrow* was Twitter. As Kirsten C. Uszkalo and Darren James Harkness define in "Consider the Source: Critical Considerations of the Medium of Social Media", Twitter is a platform to publish "140-character, short-form message to a group of listeners who can respond; it is the broadcast of a single thought" (16). In other words, some of Twitter's features are its mandatory brevity and its nature as two-way communication. It is also advertised as a platform to share thoughts and bits of information synchronously and that is simple enough to be inclusive. The content of the videos posted on YouTube is also significant. Juliet, Romeo and Mercutio, interpreted by actors from the Royal Shakespeare Company, had each their own personal accounts in which they uploaded videos, discussing their fictional personal lives with anyone interested in watching them. Facebook, for example, was used by Juliet, who resorted to this platform to invite people to her masked ball, which was not a real event. During the masked ball, the production used Last.fm – a website that makes it possible to see the title of the songs to which someone is listening – so that the

audience could access Laurence Friar's Last.fm and listen the playlist he made for Juliet's birthday party while it was supposedly happening.

This chapter concentrates on *Such Tweet Sorrow* and is divided into five sections. In the first, there is a brief description of Twitter as a platform for communication – its terms of service, interface, and some conventions shared among the users of this social medium. In the second section the focus will be on the "charactors" of *Such Tweet Sorrow*, a word coined to describe the central agents in this performance, highlighting that, in this adaptation, the actors and the characters they performed become one in the environment of social media. The third section features a plot summary of this production, which is included in this chapter not only to provide a general survey of the play, but also to demonstrate its linearity and coherence. In the fourth section, I argue that the incorporation of "auxiliary stages" (websites other than Twitter used for this performance) was responsible for updating *Romeo and Juliet*'s *contretemps* – untimely situations, according to Derrida, who views them as central to *Romeo and Juliet* as a myth – for the world of social media. Lastly, in the fifth section, I conclude with an assessment of *Such Tweet Sorrow*'s setbacks and contributions. Together, the following sections provide an overview of some central aspects of *Such Tweet Sorrow*, in order to understand how this production worked as an adaptation of a literary work to social media websites.

2.1. The Stage: What is Twitter and How It Works

Twitter was *Such Tweet Sorrow*'s main stage. The producers themselves advertised *Such Tweet Sorrow* as *Romeo and Juliet* "happening live and in real time – in modern Britain and on Twitter" ("Home"). In this section, the focus is on the stage itself. Regarding *Such Tweet Sorrow*, the goal is to elucidate what Twitter is, what it takes to create an account on

that website, how the website's interface looks, and what the user conventions are when it comes to the production of tweets.

Twitter is a platform for keeping up with matters that may be of interest – not only artists, companies, news outlets, and politicians, but also ordinary people. According to the company, 320 million users access the network monthly ("Company"). Every Twitter user can "follow" and be "followed" by other users on this platform. That means that after signalizing their interest in a content by clicking on the "Follow" button displayed on a specific page, any updates will be displayed on the users' timeline, in inverse chronological order. This specific order emphasizes the real-time aspect of Twitter, as the publications' organization prioritizes the most recent posts, by showing them initially. As an online platform for communication, Twitter is widely known both for its real-time aspect and for the strict rule regarding the maximum size of tweets (the term for the publications on this website), which can never be longer than 140 characters. Both defining characteristics had a great impact on how *Such Tweet Sorrow* resulted.

Twitter, as a company, claims its mission is "to give everyone the power to create and share ideas and information instantly, without barriers" ("Company"). When discussing the performance of *Such Tweet Sorrow*, many aspects of this watchword can be used to demonstrate the role played by Twitter as a stage for literary adaptations. First, the platform is democratic, as it is free, and everyone with an e-mail address and internet access can easily create an account. Twitter emphasizes that to provide any information other than an e-mail is entirely optional; therefore, an electronic mail is really all it takes to create an account in this platform. Secondly, it encourages creativity. In its privacy policy, Twitter foresees and allows the use of pseudonyms, differently from other social media websites such as Facebook and Google+, in which creating accounts for fictional characters, or even using a name other than

one's real name, violates the terms of use. Lastly, Twitter sells itself as a tool for immediate and unrestrained communication, which, as a largely used medium, enables the producers of creative enterprises to reach wide audiences.

Even though Twitter's policy is very favorable to unconventional uses – such as the performance of a tragedy written at the end of the sixteenth century – it is still debatable whether the collection of short texts published on different web addresses could be considered a narrative. It is worth commenting that on the aforementioned Twitter website's "Company" section, there is an image in which "tell your stories here" can be read, which not only announces this platform's narrative aspect, but also encourages a certain use of this tool. Moreover, every publication in this website works as a tentative answer for "What's happening?", an insatiable question posed by Twitter for every user, in every access. By continuously answering this question, one creates a trail of tweets, a fragmentary tale of one's daily living. Therefore, to consider the collected publications on a social media website, such as Twitter, as a narrative – an ongoing report of actions and situations in one's life, aimed at the specific audience composed by one's followers – is compatible with many current definitions of "narrative". Twitter itself recognizes its users as storytellers.

Fig. 1. "Tell your stories here" *about.twitter.com/company*. Accessed 10 April 2016. Author's screenshot.

In fact, due to Twitter's layout, the presentation of *Such Tweet Sorrow* is similar to that of a dramatic text. The publications are chronologically disposed, even if shown in reverse chronological order. Moreover, each publication is always accompanied by its author's name and profile image, which facilitates the identification of the narrative agent and is visually reminiscent of the disposition of a dramatic text on a page. Furthermore, when setting up a Twitter account, one has the possibility of writing a 160-character bio, usually consisting of a short description of one's biography and interests. When dealing with an adaptation from a play script to social media websites, the possibility of adding a bio to a profile allows the producers to create a sort of list of *dramatis personae,* informing who is the actor playing each character, and its role in the play. Therefore, the way the information is organized in a Twitter profile bears some resemblance to the way a play script is usually presented in printed form.

Profile images – selected by the users when setting up their accounts – play a major part in this medium. Mostly, when it comes to *Such Tweet Sorrow,* the profile images are pictures of the actors who interpreted the characters. These images, repeatedly shown to the audience, were of major importance to the construction of these characters. The bios, as they are self-made descriptions of one's personality and interests, are also relevant when setting up an identity in this social website. However, among *Such Tweet Sorrow*'s central characters, The Nurse (Jess Capulet) and Friar Laurence are the only ones whose profiles feature a bio. Their bio spaces are not meant to break the fourth wall; on the contrary, their bios perfectly blend with the ones of regular Twitter users. The profile pictures and bios, which could be considered paratexts, not only affect the way the characters were constructed, but also indicate the strategic narrative uses the producers of *Such Tweet Sorrow* made of Twitter as a medium for storytelling.

Fig. 2. "Tweets from *Such Tweet Sorrow* Charactors." Accessed 26 Mar. 2016. Author's screenshot.

As aforementioned, the values of Twitter as a company closely match the central elements of this production – Twitter promotes real-time communication, considers itself a medium in which people tell stories, and encourages creative uses of its tools. It may be even more interesting to observe how this production aligned itself with what the users of Twitter made of this tool, or, in other words, how these dramatic performances were constructed in a way that simulates the social performances of Twitter's users. In "Social Shakespeare: *Romeo and Juliet*, Social Media, and Performance," Geoffrey Way dwells on dramatic performances in social media, taking into consideration that social network sites "develop their own specific sets of user practices" (402). Concerning Twitter and *Such Tweet Sorrow*, he states, "the performance embraced the site's user conventions, and provided the means for the audience to participate actively in the production" (412). Thus, when conveying the story to its audience, many aspects of Twitter's specific set of user practices were of major importance, and the use

the characters made of hashtags, for example, contributed to encourage the participation of the audience. The hashtags are tags preceded by hash signs (#) that work by gathering all publications on a specific social media website that features a specific tag. They make it easier for people not only to find others that share similar interests or are engaged in conversations that may enthrall them, but also function as tools for promotion, useful for a specific media product to reach larger audiences. Thus, hashtags are a resourceful way to encourage audience participation. A perfect example in *Such Tweet Sorrow* is the #savemercutio, used by members of the audience who were charmed by Mercutio, and desperately wanted to save him from his expected death in Shakespeare's text.

The acronyms, vastly used on many social media websites, are ubiquitous on Twitter and were also used on this performance. On Twitter, where brevity is a mandatory trait, the use of acronyms is an important ally. When communicating emotions, ideas, and reporting events in a maximum of 140 characters, being able to shorten vastly used words and expressions is immensely useful, which is what the acronyms make possible. Way states that "the characters made it easy for the audience to participate, as users did not have to adapt their dialogue to match those of the characters since the characters had already adapted their dialogue to the conventions of Twitter" (411). That is, no effort was required for the audience to address the characters adequately; on the contrary, the effort was on the producers' side, who recreated Shakespeare's play script taking into consideration Twitter users' consolidated practices, such as the use of acronyms.

Such rewriting and adjustments of the source-text to the site's user conventions not only made the audience's engagement effortless, but also helped to convey a stronger sense of verisimilitude, which was also certainly enhanced by the use of multiple platforms. It is most likely that if *Such Tweet Sorrow'*s central characters were real present-day teenagers they

would not write on Twitter using Shakespearean language, and would use more than one social media website.

Twitter is indeed an easy-to-register social medium, which foresees and endorses various uses of its services. Furthermore, it allows for real-time communication, making it possible for these "charactors" to interact with each other and with the audience during the performance of *Such Tweet Sorrow*. Besides, the Elizabethan style of *Romeo and Juliet* was adapted to fit Twitter's user conventions, which included the use of hashtags and acronyms, making the interaction effortless, as the members of the audience did not feel pressured to modify their speech in order to be a part of *Such Tweet Sorrow*. Naturally, after comprehending how Twitter was used in this adaptation, the next section of this chapter will focus on the group of people who factually brought Shakespeare's tragedy to the environment of social media: the charactors of this play.

2.2. The "Charactors" of Such Tweet Sorrow

In this section the discussion will concentrate on the roles performed by the RSC actors in this play. The word "charactor" is being used in this thesis in order to reflect the great level of involvement between the actors and the characters they performed in this adaptation. On top of discussing the role of the charactors in *Such Tweet Sorrow*, this section features an exposition regarding how each of the six charactors were represented in this social media adaptation. Finally, special attention will be given to a specific agent in this play, Jago, who was simultaneously a participator and observer in this play, and represented the roles of both the curator and "hater" in *Such Tweet Sorrow.*

Six were the central characters in *Such Tweet Sorrow*: Juliet (Charlotte Wakefield), Tybalt (Mark Holgate), Romeo (James Barrett), Mercutio (Ben Ashton), Friar (Geoffrey

Newland), and Jess (Lu Corfield) – a character analogous to *Romeo and Juliet*'s Nurse. The names in *Such Tweet Sorrow* already point to a "repetition with variation" (Hutcheon 4) in relation to Shakespeare's play script. These profiles were controlled by six actors from the RSC, which despite having a schedule to follow – written by Tim Wright and Bethan Marlow, from Mudlark – decided how events should be reported and each tweet should be written. During an interview, James Barrett explained how this creative process worked: "We had the five week grid which was very basic . . . It was morning, afternoon and evening for each day of the five weeks. So we kind of knew what was coming up on what day" (Barrett). Using the support the writers provided to them, the actors would compose the publications and decide what was the suitable way to convey the scheduled information to their Twitter followers.

The necessity of creating a neologism, "charactor", in order to address the role played by the actors of this production of *Romeo and Juliet* arises from the particular sort of connection between the actors and the characters they played in *Such Tweet Sorrow*. The actors who played both Romeo and Mercutio addressed this huge level of commitment in interviews. Barrett stated that "[i]t was inhabiting the character to an extent that I had never heard of, let alone done before . . . [t]here was what I was doing, what James was doing, throughout the day and what Romeo was doing. I was constantly thinking Romeo" (Barrett). In a very similar note, after the end of the performance, Ben Ashton, the actor who played Mercutio, also expressed his enormous attachment to the character: "That is what was so good about *Such Tweet Sorrow* – you were fully immersed into it. When it ended, I kept on going to my computer thinking I'd better check Twitter. Then I'd remember. I'm dead" (Ashton). The actors played their characters from morning until night time, with no pre-established work schedule. They were not physically in front of an audience or camera, which would remind them that they were performing. In fact, they kept living their routines, but during five weeks

they used social media as if they were a different person. The actors believe that this work pace resulted in a specific sort of connection between them and the characters they played. Therefore, it is the intricate relationship between the actors and the characters that the word "charactor" aims at conveying.

One can state that a "movement of proximization", as described by Gérard Genette (304), was performed in this production, as *Romeo and Juliet*'s diegesis was brought closer to *Such Tweet Sorrow*'s audience, in temporal, geographical, and social terms. As the play's director, Roxana Silbert, argued, "[w]e broke down the story beat by beat and then we had to do a lot of re-imagining of who the characters are now and where they would be. What would stop people getting together nowadays? Because your father is unlikely to marry you off to somebody else, all that sort of stuff" (Silbert). Similarly, the relationship between the Nurse and Juliet was changed from personal attendant to older sister, thus conveying a contemporary feeling to this play. There is ample evidence of the "movement of proximization". However, even though the reader may feel tempted to draw relations between *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *Romeo and Juliet*, a comparison of both media products in terms of plot is not central to this thesis. In order to introduce the charactors of this adaptation, I will provide some brief descriptions of their roles in this performance.

Such Tweet Sorrow's Juliet is a fifteen-year-old girl who lives with her father and stepmother, and will move to Australia in the summer. She lost her mother when she was five, is the younger of three siblings, and the only one who has not yet moved out from her parents' home. As her profile picture shows, she is quite an upbeat person, portrayed as a typical teenager who uses social media to vent her enthusiasm on the young adult franchise *Twilight*. She also complains about her family and brags about her relationship with Romeo.

Fig. 3. Julietcap16. “Juliet’s Profile Image.” Photograph. *Twitter*. Accessed 11 Feb. 2016.

Juliet’s middle brother, Tybalt, is seventeen and used to live in a boarding school, but during the first week of performance he is expelled for drug possession. The photo used as his profile picture also denounces much of his personality, as he is a distrustful teenager and a bully of sorts.

Fig. 4. Tybalt_Cap. “Tybalt’s Profile Image.” Photograph. *Twitter*.

Accessed 11 Feb. 2016.

Jess Capulet – nicknamed “Nurse” – is Juliet and Tybalt’s older sister, a character who seems to be concerned about her family and siblings. She is twenty-three years old, lives and works in a nearby city, and has running as a hobby. On her bio she states that the Capulet family is “[t]hat dear octopus from whose tentacles we never quite escape. Nor, in our hearts, ever quite wish to,” a quote, slightly modified, appropriated from Dodie Smith’s *Dear Octopus*. Having Juliet on her profile picture reinforces how family plays a major part in her life.

Fig. 5. Jess_nurse. “Nurse’s Profile Image.” Photograph. *Twitter*. Accessed 11 Feb. 2016.

In this adaptation, Laurence Friar is not a friar, but the owner of a local cafe, who is close to all the characters. Friar is very enthusiastic about social media’s power of connecting people, especially the youth. He considers the grudge between Montagues and Capulets their small town’s biggest problem. He is confident that discussing this situation with young members of the community could be one way of putting an end to this rivalry. However, as it is hinted by his mysterious bio – “Some things best kept private. Come in to cafe and ask me if you want to know” – and profile photo, he is more complex than one may be led to believe.

He is a user and dealer of narcotics and, due to this, some community members, such as Jess, do not find his proximity to teenagers appropriate.

Fig. 6. LaurenceFriar. “Friar’s Profile Image.” Photograph. *Twitter*. Accessed 11 Feb. 2016.

Romeo lives with his parents and spends much of his time playing videogames and partying. In the beginning of the play he is infatuated with Rosaline, a girl who lives in the United States and with whom he plays an online game. He is not a fan of social media websites, and the only reason he creates his Twitter profile is his close friend Mercutio’s insistent persuasion; thus, he is the last character to start posting on Twitter.

Fig. 7. Romeo_mo. “Romeo’s Profile Image.” Photograph. *Twitter*.

Accessed 11 Feb. 2016.

Mercutio, on the other hand, is a heavy user of social media websites. He is always connected, shares private moments and photos, frequently updates his YouTube channel with videos of his friends and himself, and has faithful and passionate followers on social media. He is very close to Romeo and an ardent defender of the Montague family.

Fig. 8. mercuteio. "Mercutio's Profile Image." Photograph. *Twitter*. Accessed 11 Feb. 2016.

Concomitantly, one more character, Jago Mosca – played not by an actor, but by one of *Such Tweet Sorrow*'s writers, Tim Wright (Calbi 139) – was simultaneously an agent and spectator due to his privileged position, as he knows the characters personally and has real insight into their lives. He tweets about the events of the play, interacts with the audience, and constantly teases the characters. On his Twitter's bio he introduces himself by saying that he is "in the same class as juliet [*sic*]. maybe even classier" – his characteristically provocative way of letting the audience know why he knows so much about the events of *Such Tweet Sorrow*.

Jago's Tumblr is even more important, since it is where he performs his role of curator, selecting and commenting some events of this performance. Just like Twitter,

> Tumblr is also posed as a microblogging platform. Tumblr users can follow another user without following back, which forms a non-reciprocal social network; a Tumblr post can be re-broadcasted by a user to its own followers via reblogging. But unlike Twitter, Tumblr has no length limitation for each post, and Tumblr also supports multimedia post, such as images, audios or videos (Chang et al. 21)

In his Tumblr, Jago describes, using his own words, his position in relation to the other characters of *Such Tweet Sorrow*, "I see everything, but they don't see me. They don't know that I am a camera, a spy camera, a cold-eyed reporter, a magpie, a thief. A tea-leaf" ("Who I Am & What I'm About"). He is much more of an observer than an agent. However, he does participate in specific moments of the performance, as in April 23 – the day in which Shakespeare's birth and death are commemorated – when he was robbed by Tybalt and his friends. As Maurizio Calbi puts it,

> He [Jago] is simultaneously inside and outside the performance. He is mostly invisible to the other characters ("Nobody sees me in this town . . . I see everything, but they don't see me"), including Juliet, one of his classmates ("She's in my class at school. not that she ever looks at me," *TW* 11 Apr., 3:56 p.m.), and it is this invisibility that allows him to interfere with the action, as when he hacks into Mercutio's mobile phone and starts sending death-threatening tweets to Tybalt. However, he is by no means invisible to the audience. Not only does he clarify in the "Who I Am & What I'm About" section of his Tumblr blog that this is the right place to "tune in to the gossip, catch a whiff of that stench coming up from the Capulet drains or fall down the

> gaps between the Montague tweets"; he also strongly encourages interaction. (139)

Jago is important to the dynamic of this production, especially because he antagonizes both Capulets and Montagues, puts one family against the other, and is an archetype for the Internet hater – an unpleasant figure that has gained power and visibility since the popularization of the Internet. As Internet culture critic Joseph Reagle puts it,

> *Haters* try to upset and belittle others by expressing extreme hostility and attacking any aspect of a person that is likely to cause distress (such as gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and appearance). The widespread use of the term *hater* likely began with the expression 'Haters gonna hate' from hip-hop culture. (ch. "Alienated")

Jago, thus, represents this hostile and hateful figure that seems to be anywhere on internet, from the commentary sections at news outlets to social media websites.

Anonymity is a fruitful soil for the appearance of haters. According to Reagle, "[u]nder deindividuation, we lose sense of ourselves and inhibitions. Under depersonalization, morality shifts toward a different set of norms" (ch. "Alienated"). As evidence for that claim, Reagle discusses some experiments that evaluated if people changed behavior when deprived of identification,

> In 1969, psychologist Phil Zimbardo reported an experiment in which people were asked to administer shocks to others. Research accomplices then pretended to receive the shocks. Researchers found that participants who wore large lab coats and hoods were more willing to shock others than participants who wore name tags. Zimbardo believed that the veiled subjects experienced *deindividuation*: a loss of a sense of self and social norms. (ch. "Alienated")

The fact that it is easy to create an account on a platform such as Twitter, and that one can use a nickname in place of one's given name not only makes it a propitious place for fictional productions of the like of *Such Tweet Sorrow*, but it also makes this platform a favorable environment for the appearance of people who, anonymously, act as haters.

Anonymity is part of the construction of Jago as a character, which can be attested by the picture in his Twitter profile, which does not reveal his face, and by his chosen name on this platform, which is likely a pseudonym. Actually, his profile picture is a reference to the nickname of his choosing, as it exhibits some objects of no cash value he stole from the other characters of the play, justifying the "klepto" portion of "Jago_klepto," his Twitter username, as an abbreviation of kleptomaniac. The name choice has a purpose, as it also evokes characters from Shakespeare's *Othello* and Ben Jonson's *Volpone*. Calbi observes that Jago's name alludes to "aspects of the Shakespearean character such as malignity, resentment, and the ability to manipulate as well as features of the Jonsonian parasite such as the penchant for social commentary and critique" (139). Jago Mosca, then, borrows his personality traits from both Shakespeare's Iago and Ben Jonson's Mosca. These references evoke an association with the classical characters, if the audience members are acquainted with these plays and characters. The producers of *Such Tweet Sorrow* made intertextual references to the English Renaissance theater, linking this representation of the "internet hater" to equally disruptive characters, indicating that the target audience of this production is supposedly knowledgeable of Shakespeare, his contemporaries, and Internet culture.

Fig. 9. Jago_klepto. “Jago’s Profile Image.” Photograph. *Twitter*. Accessed 11 Feb. 2016.

As already indicated, the actors and charactors of *Such Tweet Sorrow* were strung together by social media profiles. After the performance, the actors themselves addressed the difficulty of establishing the boundary between fiction and real-life, to understand where their own selves ended and their characters’ personalities started. Such connection, which this thesis attempts at representing through the word “charactor,” is possibly related to how lengthy this performance was – it lasted five weeks – and the extent of daily engagement required from the actors, who posted as their characters from morning until night time, without establishing or delimiting their work schedule. Moreover, the charactors were not restricted to the environment of Twitter. Jago, the curator, for example, developed his personality and acted also through his Tumblr page. As a result, *Such Tweet Sorrow*’s intricate plot was fragmented and scattered into different social media pages and platforms. Fortunately, the producers made available daily summaries of the play on its website, allowing the audience to have a more coherent and concise access to this production. Even though the website is currently offline, by using the *Internet Archive*’s “Way Back Machine” one can still access this material as it was available at the time of the performance, and the following plot summary is primarily based on these daily entries.

2.3. A plot summary of Such Tweet Sorrow

The setting of *Such Tweet Sorrow* in an English market town in 2010, around the tenth anniversary of Susan Capulet's death in a car accident. The car's driver survived. This accident resulted in a conflict between the victim and the driver's families, the Capulets and Montagues. The story revolves around the troubled relationship between Juliet Capulet and Romeo Montague, as they fall in love despite their families' quarrel.

In the beginning of the play, Juliet, who is fifteen, lives with her father and stepmother, and the three will move to Australia in the summer. Juliet's sixteenth birthday party is held on the tenth day of the performance and is a major turning point. As suggested by Jess, Juliet decides to have a mask-themed party, which is attended by the uninvited Romeo and Mercutio, who could easily pass by Laurence Friar – who was in charge of the party's security. Romeo and Juliet, unable to recognize each other due to their masks, spend the night together and plan to meet in the following morning. Just a few days later Juliet discovers that Romeo is a Montague. At that time, Jess and Friar are already aware of their relationship, and help them by organizing a secret date at Friar's cafe. At the same time, a table tennis tournament, also organized by Friar, takes place, and Tybalt loses to Mercutio. Jess realizes that Juliet and Romeo's relationship may be going too fast, and stops encouraging Juliet. The young couple, however, still find encouragement and support from Friar. Romeo decides to tell Juliet his father's version of the car accident that killed her mother. According to Romeo, Susan Capulet was in an extramarital relationship with his father, and they were in love. Juliet is surprised but convinced of this version of the story, and decides to spend the night at a hotel with Romeo without telling anyone. When Jess arrives at the cafe, she sees Friar giving drugs to Tybalt, which makes her suspect that Friar helped her sister to run away with Romeo. Concomitantly, Romeo and Juliet secretly get married at a registry office. On the following

day, Juliet tells Jess that she is now married, and does not plan to move to Australia. Simultaneously, Tybalt discovers through Friar that Juliet had some secret dates with a Montague at the cafe, and goes after Romeo. Mercutio also discovers, through Romeo, that the girl his friend has been dating is a Capulet, and decides to seek revenge on an upcoming football match. After the match, Tybalt and Mercutio could not be found. Mercutio shows up, tweeting from the hospital, curses both Capulets and Montagues, and dies. A day later, the audience gets to know that Tybalt also died, after being knifed at the football match. Witnesses claim that Romeo, who is on the run, killed Tybalt. Juliet refuses to believe that Romeo is guilty, and is afraid that he might be injured or dead, and threatens to slit her wrists. Jess and Friar, who are adamant that Tybalt's death was an accident, side on to find a solution to these young lovers' future.

The last week of performance was as filled with miscommunication and tragedy as one could have expected. Juliet, after reading Tybalt's Twitter feed, is convinced that her brother is responsible for the fight that led to his death, and discovers that her father is resolute on taking her to Australia by Wednesday. Jess, who is not convinced of Romeo's innocence, refuses to let Juliet stay at her house, and does not go against her father's plans. Juliet resorts to Friar, who publishes in his website a poem indicating that he left her some milk with propofol – a short-term sedative drug – available in his flat. On the day she was supposed to fly to Australia, she should drink it and sleep through the day to miss the flight. To avoid raising suspicion, Juliet announces on Twitter that she is eager to fly to Australia, but flees to Friar's flat, posts about her plans of having a new life with Romeo, and drinks what Friar called the "milk of amnesia." On the next day, Romeo, who was disconnected from Twitter and unaware of Juliet and Friar's plans, finds an unconscious Juliet, and interprets her last tweets as a suicide note. When he posts on Twitter about his despair on finding his wife

dead, Friar is offline. The next time Friar connects, Romeo is already dead, after drinking whiskey and swallowing an overdose of pharmaceutical drugs. Juliet wakes up after twenty minutes, discovers that Romeo killed himself and apologizes to Jess for the suffering her next actions will cause. She ignores her sister's and Friar's attempts to stop her via Twitter, cuts her wrists and dies.

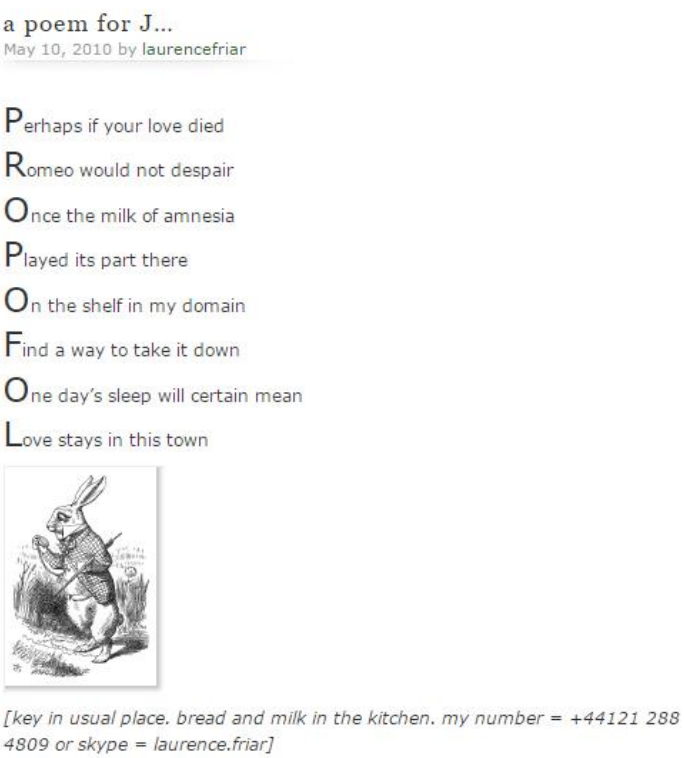

Fig. 10. laurencefriar. "a poem for J..." *lfek.wordpress.com*. Accessed 22 Mar. 2016. Author's screenshot.

After the star-crossed lovers' death, the performance continues for one more day. Jess hurries, trying to save Juliet, but finds her dead, while their father reactivates Tybalt's account trying to locate his daughters. Jess asks Friar to come to his flat to help her comprehend this calamity. During the following day, both Jess and Friar resort to Twitter to find advice on how to face this unfortunate situation. Jess decides that love is the only emotion that is worth having at that moment, as the hate between the families had sparked all the tragedy. Friar is

willing to face the police, to tell the truth and be a friend to both families. The last tweet of the play comes from Tybalt's account, as his father uses it to apologize to Jess and call her back home.

2.4. The Use of Other Websites: Contretemps *and Asides*

Even though Twitter is the main stage of *Such Tweet Sorrow*, as I intended to demonstrate in the previous sections, other websites were also of great importance not only to the development of the story, but also to significant aspects of this production. In this section I will discuss how the use of other social media platforms also contribute to the overall signification of this performance.

In his introduction to Jacques Derrida's "Aphorism Countertime," Derek Attridge argued, "For many more than have seen or read the play, the story of *Romeo and Juliet* has become a byword for love blighted by mischance and destroyed by unfortunate timing" (414). This essay was originally published as "L'Aphorisme à contretemps"; in French, the expression "à contretemps" is employed when describing situations that happen at an inopportune time, deviating from a desired time schedule. In *Romeo and Juliet* the *contretemps* are not secondary in importance. On the contrary, as highlighted by Derrida, Romeo and Juliet are the heroes of *contretemps* in our mythology (417). Particularly, until the very last scene, the woe of Juliet and her Romeo is due to a steady lack of synchronization, the reason Derrida considers the *contretemps* to be an overarching aspect of the play. Among the examples of *contretemps* in *Romeo and Juliet* pointed out by Derrida, a specific *contretemps* is particularly liable for the star-crossed lovers' tragic end. The letter from Friar Laurence to Romeo, which was supposed to warn him that Juliet was not dead, and would be awake and fully recovered after two days, but never reached its addressee (416), directly

triggers the ultimate double suicide. Had Romeo been knowledgeable about his lover's well-being, it is unlikely that he would still take his own life.

Derrida's essay is exemplary in showing that social media seem inappropriate as stage for a production of this tragedy – especially in relation to Twitter, which is advertised as a tool for real-time communication. This is true particularly because conversations between the charactors happened in a public manner (a requirement for the audience to follow the performance), and, potentially, the charactors could read each other's conversations. Would *Romeo and Juliet* still be a tragedy if the lovers had access to such communication tools? In *Such Tweet Sorrow,* instant communication services were not enough to save Romeo and Juliet. The producers adapted the difficulties in transferring information, present in the source-text, to the environment of social media. The stray letter was updated for the digital environment in the shape of a post on Laurence Friar's blog. Using a different platform for communication – in this case, a blog maintained by Friar – Romeo missed the poem that was used to communicate Juliet about the plan in which she would become temporarily unconscious. Thus, it was by means of different websites and networks (and, more specifically, through the dissemination of core information of *Such Tweet Sorrow* in different platforms) that the producers emulated the final *contretemps* of *Romeo and Juliet*, showing that even with social media websites at their disposal, miscommunication is still quite plausible.

The use of platforms other than Twitter was also of great importance when evoking the aside, a dramatic device used throughout *Romeo and Juliet* and other plays by Shakespeare. Once more, the fact that the charactors can read and respond to each other on Twitter makes this aspect of *Such Tweet Sorrow*'s source-text seem unrealistic. In particular, it does not fit the conventions of a play in social media that a charactor can address the audience without

being read by the other charactors. Differently from traditional theater, in which asides are part of the tradition, within social media there is no tradition to support such device. This apparent obstacle did not stop the producers of *Such Tweet Sorrow* from suggesting "asides." These asides, however, were performed on a different stage.

Jago, the curator of *Such Tweet Sorrow* uses Tumblr as a platform to communicate with the audience without the interference of any other charactor. As Calbi puts it, his Tumblr pages "mainly function as a kind of metadramatic multimedia blog/chorus that intermittently provides a partial and ironic commentary on the (fictional) events as they take place or soon afterwards" (140). Because Jago's comments are published on a different social medium, his commentary does not share the space where the other charactors interact. His opinions are safe from responses or scrutiny, making it another instance in which a specific use of social media evokes the dramatic text. In her "Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality" – a benchmark for the studies of the field – Irina Rajewsky develops the concept of intermedial reference, which occurs when a "given media-product thematizes, evokes, or imitates elements or structures of another, conventionally distinct medium through the use of its own media-specific means" (53). The intermedial reference, then, happens when a specific cultural product suggests the presence of a different medium, without incorporating it, but rather referring to it. One could, thus, read Jago's Tumblr as an intermedial reference to the aside. The asides allow a direct communication between a character and the audience, without the knowledge of the other characters. Jago's position as an observer who sees everything and is not seen is reinforced by the use of a different medium, which is disregarded by the other characters, allowing a direct relationship between this character and the audience and evoking the use of asides, present on traditional productions of *Romeo and Juliet*.

As we have seen, Twitter is definitely the main stage of *Such Tweet Sorrow*. It is not, however, the only stage of this adaptation of Shakespeare's tragedy. When the plot, or the dramatic technique, asks for a private conversation between charactors, or even for a charactor to address the audience in private, Twitter falls short. When the need appeared, the producers of *Such Tweet Sorrow* used alternative stages, presenting *contretemps* and asides with a contemporary twist. In this chapter's last section, I will briefly discuss *Such Tweet Sorrow*'s setbacks and achievements.

2.5. The Aftermath: Such Tweet Sorrow's *Setbacks and Achievements*

Arguing that a given media product was successful, or unsuccessful, without clearly establishing the grounds for analysis is likely to be a pointless discussion. In this sort of assessment there is a risk of producing one-sided, possibly inconclusive evaluation. When it comes to *Such Tweet Sorrow*, for example, one could propose not only a quantitative evaluation, in relation to the numbers of people who engaged with the production, but also a qualitative evaluation, which could, for instance, focus on the originality of this adaptation, or on how the engagement between the producers and audience has come about.

If numbers are considered, it may be argued that *Such Tweet Sorrow* failed to deliver the number of followers the producers desired. As the director of this production announced on an interview, "Twitter is an international form that anybody can access. And of course it is free. We are hoping, conservatively to reach 10,000 people" (Silbert). However, according to what the interviewer Thom Dibdin wrote later, the numbers were not as high as expected, as "Juliet might have the most individual followers with a peak of 5928 on 29 April, but Mercutio's following has never stopped rising. It had grown to 3,829 at his final tweet on Monday evening and, intriguingly, was still going up 48 hours later" (Silbert). Not even Juliet

who, among all characters, accumulated the largest number of people accompanying her publications, achieved sixty-percent of the desired audience. Definitely, focusing on numbers may produce an evaluation that reflects factors that are unrelated to its aesthetic qualities, such as how the adaptation was promoted. Still, when the numbers of followers are taken into consideration as assessment parameters, one could argue that this adaptation was not successful.

If the criterion is the engagement established between the audience, the charactors, and this production, however, it is hard to argue that it was anything but a total success. Particularly, two initiatives call attention to the great involvement between some members of the audience and *Such Tweet Sorrow*. The first are the "Mercutio Groupies," which, as Dibdin puts it,

> [Were a] group of the production's 5,000 odd followers who first fell for @mercuteio's cheeky charms, then slowly began to realise that if the production was going to follow its natural course, then their favourite character was going to have to die. Facebook pages were set up, a Save Mercutio group started and the Mercutio Groupies lobbied hard and furious to try and change the course of the drama. They even went so far as to tempt @mercuteio out for carnal pursuits instead of attending events where they thought he would meet his end. (Ashton)

The other initiative from the audience that is worthy of attention is the so-called "groundlings" – some people who got so involved with *Such Tweet Sorrow* that decided that to interact with the production using their own social profiles was not enough. These people went as far as creating fake *Such Tweet Sorrow* characters. When it comes to interaction, even

if the production may not have involved as many people as they planned, some people who followed this play were active in their interactions.

In relation to the aforementioned "Mercutio Groupies," when interviewed, the actor who played Romeo remarked that, "[t]he medium of Twitter meant it was the first time an audience had been given the opportunity to do something like that in a performance of Romeo and Juliet . . . Mercutio is a very charismatic character and obviously in the theatre people aren't going to start talking to each other and being in a group" (Barrett). Thus, one can argue that *Such Tweet Sorrow* was successful in allowing the audience to engage with *Romeo and Juliet* in a way that traditional theater does not allow.

Moreover, the production of *Such Tweet Sorrow* unintentionally indicates a new possibility of interaction within social media productions. Some members of the audience created new Twitter profiles, bringing other *Romeo and Juliet* characters (such as Benvolio, Rosaline and Paris) to Twitter, as @BenVoli0, @Lovely_Rosaline, and @_boyparis. They decided to participate in the performance and started tweeting as characters from *Such Tweet Sorrow*. Possibly, @BenVoli0 was the most successful impersonation of a *Such Tweet Sorrow* charactor, and was even mentioned by two official charactors, Laurence Friar (@LaurenceFriar) and Jago (@Jago_klepto). At first, when the producers realized that the audience was mixing up the real and fake characters, they decided to correct people, providing the list of the official charactors, an attitude that some, such as the editor of *AllEdinburghTheatre.com* deemed controversial,

> While you might want to watch conventional theatre without the distraction of your surrounding audience members interjections, in a performance lasting five weeks their comments and witticisms are going to become part of your appreciation of the performance itself. Indeed, the cast have done away with

> the fourth wall from the start, asking for comments and suggestions from their followers on twitter, replying in character and even going so far as to invite them down the pub.
>
> Where it got out of hand was the perception from the organisers – who go under the twitter name of @Such Tweet – that people were becoming confused by Mr Volio. They warned off several of those who had mistakenly included him in publicly tweeted lists of players – in fact there are only six players: Juliet, her big sister Jess, their brother Tybalt, Romeo, his best pal Mercutio and Laurance [*sic*] Friar who runs the local internet cafe.
>
> The first intervention seemed a little heavy handed and only fuelled a debate about the role of the audience in the show. Ultimately, however, sense prevailed and the organisers publicly posted a link to information about the "groundlings" – the audience in the cheapest area of the original Globe theatre, who would have heckled the first performances of *Romeo and Juliet*. (Dibdin)

Even though the attitude of the producers towards the "groundlings" may have been faulty at first, the spontaneous appearance of these unasked-for characters, who represent such a participative and brand new form of interaction, was revealing of how social media worked as stage for dramatic performances. Such particularity was explored by how *#dream40* – which followed *Such Tweet Sorrow* – was projected.

One may take into consideration how the producers themselves were involved in their creation. When Ben Ashton addressed his character's death in this production he stated, "There was a definite finality . . . I did feel a massive sense of loss. Normally when you are doing a show and your character has to die, you know that in ten minutes you are going to be up and walking around. In this one, you know that that's it . . . That. Is. It! It is no more. I will

never tweet as Mercutio ever again" (Ashton). The actor who played Mercutio seems to believe that his connection with this character was greater in Twitter then it would be in a traditional stage, as this performance did not involve "walking around," something that he does despite being in character, but "tweeting as Mercutio," which he never did after the death of his character. The end of that role represented the full stop of a virtual persona he created, which felt as a "definite finality." Similarly, James Barrett, who played Romeo, concerning the end of his role in *Such Tweet Sorrow*, states, "It is strange – suddenly I am not living two lives at the same time. I've got all my life back, which is very nice – but I do miss it!" (Barrett). These statements suggest that dramatic performances in social media result in a particular connection between actors and characters, which deserves an in-depth research. Even though preliminary, these findings are some of the contributions of this adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet.*

Finally, because *Such Tweet Sorrow* was the first performance of its kind, as Silbert claims, its novelty is substantial. The RSC, which at the time of this production had young actors in their staff who were active in social media websites, had the initiative of bringing *Romeo and Juliet* to an environment that was familiar to their own staff, which resulted in a new perspective towards these canonical characters:

> We also had to imagine these characters in a non-traditional way: what websites are they looking at? What games are they playing? What is their social media? How do they use Facebook? We started to think about characters in that space and because we are working with quite young actors, that is absolutely native to them. Charlotte Wakefield who is playing Juliet is 19, she has 2000 followers on Twitter on her own personal name. It is absolutely part of what she does every single day. (Silbert)

Such Tweet Sorrow was groundbreaking as it inaugurated a new genre of cultural productions. In this chapter, I discussed how Twitter works as a stage for dramatic performances and how the boundary between actors and characters can become blurred in a performance on social media. Moreover, I also pointed out how it is possible to convey a linear and coherent plot through this surprisingly fragmentary communication tool, even when the aforementioned plot depends heavily on miscommunication. Finally, the production under discussion was approached under different perspectives, to demonstrate what were its setbacks and contributions. Among *Such Tweet Sorrow*'s successes is its status as *#dream40*'s predecessor, as it leads the way in the previously unexplored path of adaptations from literary texts to social media websites. Its successor will be discussed in details in the following chapter.

3. *#dream40:* A performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* on Google+

#dream40 is a production by the Royal Shakespeare Company in partnership with Google's Creative Lab. The first part of this production is an adaptation from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*'s play script to Google+, followed by a live performance at Stratford-upon-Avon. Aiming at great audience participation, this production used a very innovative storytelling technique, assuming a posture that pleased both the open-minded and the more conservative share of its audience. Although it promoted evident changes to Shakespeare's text and characters during its online segment, the performance was concluded with a traditional reenactment of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*'s unabridged play script.

Audience interaction is a distinguishing feature in this production, starting from its title, which includes a hashtag whereas "dream" is a reference the source text, "40" concerns the number of productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by the Royal Shakespeare Company (Uglow, "A Prologue to #Dream40"). Considering the system of hashtags, which works in similar ways in both Google+ and Twitter, Lankshear and Knoble's account of hashtags is elucidative:

> Prefixing a word or phrase with a hashtag (#) automatically groups together all posts that include the same hashtagged word or phrase. For example, many television shows spark viewer-generated commentary on Twitter while the shows are airing. Tweeters can use the hashtag feature and the name of the show (e.g., #GhostHunters, #TopGear) to join in a conversation with others about the show. Twitter also uses these hashtags to identify topics 'trending' on the service, too (e.g., #Wikileaks, #2011predictions). (Lankshear and Knobel 57)

Therefore, the choice of having *#dream40* as the title of the performance makes automatic the grouping of every publication that contains the title of the production in it, in every social medium that supports hashtags usage (e.g. Google+, Twitter, Facebook). It is due to the use of a hashtag, for example, that it is possible to claim that *#dream40* trended at the fourth position worldwide at Google+, meaning that during two days *#dream40* was one of the most used hashtags in the world (Uglow, "An Epilogue"). Thus, considering how important the role played by the audience was, featuring a hashtag in its title was an interesting choice, as this feature not only helps audience members connect with each other, but is also a helpful instrument for quantifying the production's outreach.

Following the methodology employed in the first chapter, the first section on *#dream40* is a description of its stage, Google+. After that, the second section is an exposition of the sort of irreverent media product shared on Google+ during the performance of *#dream40*. In the third section the focus is on some strategies used by the producers of this adaptation to let their respect for Shakespeare shine through their irreverent production. The fourth section approaches the fact that *#dream40* was condemned to a short life span, due to the ephemeral nature of social media, and how the interactive timeline, constructed after the performance ended, increased its longevity. Finally, after analyzing this production from various angles, the fifth section dialogues with an assessment of *#dream40* – written and published by its creative director on his blog – and discusses some drawbacks and contributions of this production, in order to ascertain what future literary adaptations to social media websites can learn from *#dream40*.

3.1. The Stage: What Is Google+ and How It Works

The online performance took place on Google+ during a weekend in 2013, from June 21 to 23. Google owns the social network used as a stage in this adaptation. Even though this platform has strict terms of service, which denotes that Google+ may not be inclined to support its use as stage for fictional productions, *#dream40* successfully capitalized on some of its features. Its system of circles is especially interesting for a play like *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which has a large number of characters and subplots, and the Google+ Communities were a great addition when it comes to audience bonding.

Google+ service is based upon circles, which are composed of people who share interests. Ideally, users would be part of many different circles, with their families, coworkers, close friends, or people with similar hobbies, circling around the specific shared interest of this singular social group. This separation into groups aims at facilitating the way one shares information within social media, as one can send a message, or share a link with a separate group of people, without individually selecting their addressees every time she posts on Google's social media website.

This feature was fundamental for the performance organization, as the characters were arranged into four circles: court, fairies, lovers, and mechanicals – plus Robin Goodfellow. Puck is central to this production, as his profile works as a bridge between the canonical characters, the characters constructed by the *#dream40* production team, and the content created by members of the audience. Though a fictional character, Puck plays the role of a curator and host, pervading all circles.

To investigate if Google+ is as welcoming to creative uses as Twitter, the platform previously used by the RSC for *Such Tweet Sorrow*, one must go through its terms of service, which are shared with other Google products and services. If Twitter proudly announces that

an e-mail and a name (which can be a nickname) are enough for one to create an account, Google asks for the user's name, birth date, sex, and country of residence. Even though this may be seen as a slight difference, these extra requests in relation to one's factual existence can complicate the production of fiction within the platform. Concerning the use of pseudonyms or nicknames, Google also foresees the use of a nickname, which can be included along one's first and last names, differently from Twitter, where the nickname entirely substitutes any other name a user may have provided to the company. Moreover, on its support page, Google states that "Google+ profiles are meant for people. If you're trying to create a profile for something like your business, your band, your family, or your pet, a Google+ page may work better for you" (Google), indicating that the platform does not encourage the creation of profiles for fictional characters. Overall, it seems that Google, as a company and service provider, is less friendly than Twitter when it comes to creative uses of its platforms. It is likely that the choice of stage was due to Google's Creative Lab being RSC's partner in this production, and not to a particular fondness this platform may have for non-conventional usages.

When it comes to audience bonding, however, Google+ has a handy feature, which was explored by this production to encourage participation: Google+ communities. From the beginning, the audience was expected to play a major role in *#dream40*. On the digital program, available on the productions' hotsite, the audience was invited to actively participate and produce content, which included creating and interpreting minor characters in the play: "Pick some lines, bring them to life. You can invent a whole new character and play along for 3 days, or write one witty newspaper headline. Or draw a comic, or bake cupcakes, or do a dance, or knit one of the characters a scarf" (Google+ and RSC). Such description is reminiscent of the narrative configuration considered by Janet Murray as the one that better

utilizes the characteristic features of a reality mediated through computers: "The format that most fully exploits the properties of digital environments is not the hypertext or the fighting game but the simulation: the virtual world full of interrelated entities, a world we can enter, manipulate, and observe in process" (280). For those who were "feeling in need of some help", who could not understand how to interact with *#dream40,* the producers uploaded some suggestions on the official community on Google+, in which "1000 people from across the world" (Uglow, "*#dream40* Epilogue") interested in taking part in the three-day performance discussed, shared ideas, and prepared themselves during a period of two weeks. Some of the suggestions included choosing songs, sharing their best dream using the hashtag #bestdream, writing alternative endings, among others. When the performance finally started, the audience not only had built expectations regarding the production they were about to watch, but also prepared themselves for their participation in advance.

Google+ as stage carries two features that contributed to *#dream40*'s outcome: the organization into circles and the Google+ Communities, even though the site's terms of service do not indicate any appreciation this platform may have in relation to productions such as *#dream40,* which uses this social medium in a non-standard way. While the organization into circles suits the manner *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is constructed, with its numerous characters and subplots, the Google+ Communities were essential for the preparation of *#dream40,* making possible for the audience to take part in the arrangements for the play. After elucidating how Google+ works, the following section exposes some media productions that compose this irreverent adaptation of Shakespeare's comedy.

3.2. What Is #dream40

According to its creative director, *#dream40* is a "non-linear play that leaks across multiple realities in real-time" (Uglow, "*#dream40* Epilogue"). Whereas *#dream40* is both an online play and a traditional outdoor production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, its online aspect better fits the purpose of this thesis. As it is in fact a non-linear play, one cannot summarize its plot, as I did to *Such Tweet Sorrow* in the previous chapter, because there is no single plot to be summarized. For this reason, in this section some elements of this production will be discussed so that one can grasp how *#dream40* worked.

Similarly to *Such Tweet Sorrow*, the characters from *#dream40* used social media to publicly share their perspective in relation to some fictional events, images, and plans. The other fictional characters from the play, as well as the members of the audience, could read their publications, write commentaries and even share with their own social media followers. Everything shared on social media was assumed to be public information. Therefore, when Hercules – a character that is only mentioned in *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* but is one of the protagonists of *#dream40*'s online play – shared his plan of rendering Theseus unconscious in order to make him undergo cosmetic procedures that he would likely disapprove, Theseus instantly found out about his plan. He even commented on his publication, letting Hercules know that he was now aware of his intentions. Accordingly, the online segment of *#dream40* was composed of publications in social media, with which the other characters and the audience could interact by reading and commenting on them.

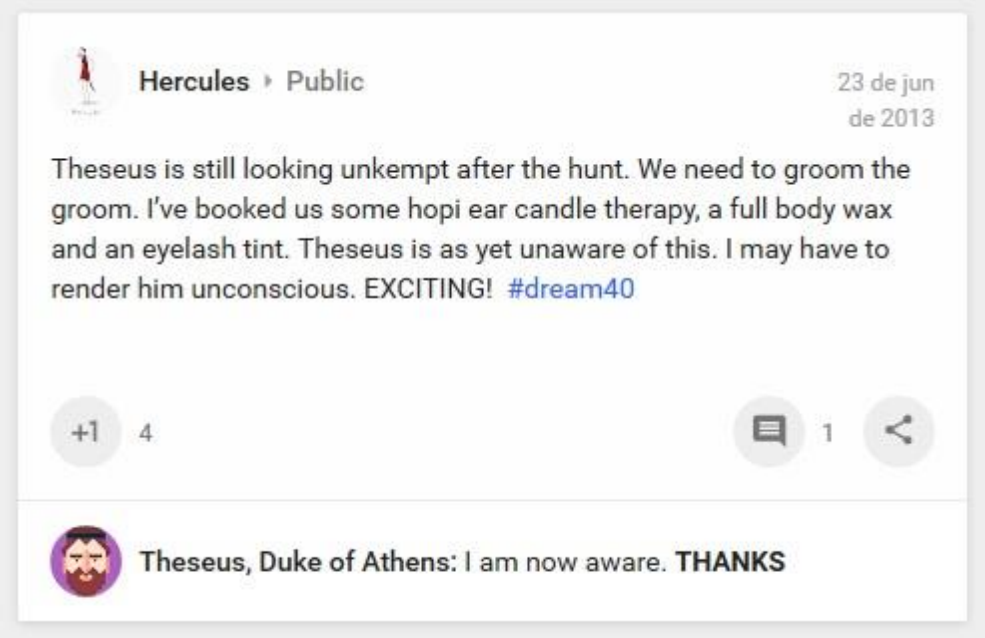

Fig. 11. "Hercules' surprise" *https://plus.google.com/109456743466045632904*. Accessed 26 Jan. 2017. Author's screenshot.

Examples of this sort of content shared by the characters of *#dream40* are the comic strips published on Antiope's Google+ profile. In *#dream40*, Antiope is Hippolyta's sister, who is responsible for organizing her wedding reception, but is unfortunately in love with Theseus, Hippolyta's fiancé. Among the drawings Antiope shared are the outline of a picture of the bride and groom, with Antiope's hand concealing Hippolyta's face, and other comic strips about her own unhappy love life. There is one comic strip shared on her profile, which serves to demonstrate two overarching aspects of the play: references to other works by Shakespeare, which were also abundant in this play; and the lighthearted tone, which prevailed in *#dream40*. This comic strip, posted by Antiope as if it were photos from Hippolyta's hen night, shows the bride wearing a ribbon in which "bride to be! (or not to be)" can be read – an obvious reference to Hamlet's monologue –, and the last square shows Hippolyta throwing up. The producers of *#dream40* adapted the comical aspect of *A*

Midsummer Night's Dream to social media, using references from other works by Shakespeare to make humorous remarks about the characters of *#dream40*.

Fig. 12. "Photos from Hippolyta's bachelorette party"

https://plus.google.com/107535207425680887357. Accessed 7 Jan. 2016. Comic strip.

These text-based publications and images are not representative of *#dream40* as a whole. In *#dream40* another sort of content was also created, which stands out from the sort of content that is conventionally shared on social media websites. Examples are the profile created for Phoebe, the name given to *#dream40*'s moon – in a reference to the titan in Greek mythology, which is how one of the lovers once refers to the moon in *A Midsummer Night's*

Dream. Among others, Phoebe gave information regarding her lunar phase from first quarter, passing by waxing gibbous, until the last day of performance, when she became "100% super full!," on June 23rd, 2013 – the day when the marriage was celebrated, and the live performance was held at Stratford-upon-Avon, which was actually a full moon night. Other examples are the series of videos, such as the *Fairy Flying School,* which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, and the *Hamster of Fate,* which were posted on YouTube by *The Knight's Herald,* a fictional news outlet about the characters of *#dream40*. The *Hamster of Fate* series of videos are quite intriguing. These videos start with a quote from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and show a toy hamster choosing between two pairs of words that represent a possible path for the story. In one of the videos, for example, the question is "what should Oberon do, after drugging his wife and making her sleep with a donkey?", and the options are "apologize" and "fix." The videos always end with the hamster rolling over one of the words, which reveals an arrow pointing at the other option (*Hamster of Fate - Apologise or Fix it*). Over a dozen videos like this were produced, following this exact same script. If, at first, *#Dream40* seems hard to comprehend, it was constructed to be that way, it is "incomprehensible" on purpose:

> One of the wonderful things about experiencing Shakespeare is the time it takes simply to immerse yourself in the language, and from then to understand what is going on. We want to do the same – but the other way around – contemporary language in contemporary streams of social media – which are just as incomprehensible until you immerse yourself in the stream, follow the characters, 'hear' the story and comprehend layers of meaning. (Uglow, "A Prologue to #Dream40")

Thus, videos such as the ones from the *Hamster of Fate* series seem completely strange when taken out of context, partly because they were developed to be watched within the specific context of *#dream40*.

Fig. 13. "*Hamster of Fate*" *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dRlu0nY2efA*. Accessed 7 Jan. 2016. Author's screenshot.

Just like *Such Tweet Sorrow*, *#dream40* availed itself of social media potential to be an immersive stage – an idea that is central to this thesis and that will continue to be developed in the next chapter. As Uglow puts it,

> Conventional theatre starts with a stage. An audience comes, sits in front of it, they suspend reality, enter the narrative's reality and are entertained. But why a stage? We don't need a stage. Modern theatre makes the audience walk, or puts them in a car, or makes them the actor; our stage is online, it is fragmented,

> glimpsed, experienced and amplified through sharing – the narrative exists around us and immerses us. ("A Prologue to *#Dream40*")

As a stage, social media websites put the performance amidst the audience, and the audience is surrounded by performance. There is no offstage, no front or last rows. The audience experiences the production from the inside, as social media is the space occupied by both the impersonators and the public.

In view of *#dream40* being more of a "glimpse" than a linear narrative, I do not intend to encompass all of its dimensions within this thesis. This adaptation was constructed to be experienced in real-time, in the stage of social media. This section aims at an exposition and discussion of some elements of *#dream40* as a groundbreaking adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* In spite of appropriating Shakespeare's comedy in an irreverent way, the producers were attentive not to seem disrespectful of its source text. The topic of the next section is, thus, how the producers of *#dream40* attempted to provide an "irreverent" adaptation with a sense of "reverence."

3.3: Bringing Shakespeare to Social Media: The Reverence of an Irreverent Adaptation

Even though *#dream40* promoted immense changes to Shakespeare's comedy, which were of major importance in providing a truly unique perspective on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the producers seemed apologetic about these "infidelities." Even if one may consider that such alterations are acts of ingenuity and as such deserve to be praised, this overtly reverential attitude can be comprehended when the criticism of previous Shakespearean adaptations is taken into consideration. In the process of adapting Shakespeare to social media, the producers of *#dream40* embrace and promote change, but constantly remind the audience that this production does not intend to disrespect either Shakespeare or his works.

One can understand the causes of such an extensive commitment to demonstrating deference to Shakespeare's play when one considers how some prominent critics of Shakespearean adaptations, such as Deborah Cartmell, have noted that "reverence for the text and the author" are "prerequisites" to a successful Shakespearean adaptation (37). When it comes to that, Tom Uglow, from Google's Creative Lab, claims in a straightforward manner that the producers knew from the beginning that "the play itself would be sacrosanct" ("A Prologue to #dream40"). In other words, even though the digital moment of the performance was permissive, encouraging people to create new characters, leading to a certain demystification of Shakespeare's play, the producers planned from the start that in its second part the play script would be performed as a "sacred text."

First, this reverent attitude assumed by the producers towards the source text and its author is signaled by two promotional videos of *#dream40* (which can be considered paratexts of this production), made by The Brothers McLeod and published on the RSC's official YouTube channel. In the first, published on May 1, 2013, William Shakespeare is brought to social media in the form of a cartoon character who tells and explains the plot of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to a pig named Francis, in a reference to Francis Bacon. When Francis asks, "How is the play gonna be seen?" Shakespeare answers, "Outside, on a stage, of course." The pig suggests, "Great, but what if we stick it on the net? That could be our stage." In an attempt to convince "Shakespeare," Francis says that the people who will be joining the production can "follow, get involved, make stuff, tell their mates, and get all the characters' friends and family to spill the beans. Lysander's sister, Mrs. Snug, that Evil Weaver." Then the Bard, showing excitement, announces the production and invites the audience to get involved in it. Another video, published later with the purpose of explaining how an online play works, also features Francis, who takes Shakespeare "to the future," with a time machine. Francis

announces the days when the play will be performed and the kinds of interaction that are expected from the audience. The playwright then asks, “So anyone can mess around with my play?”, but Francis denies it: “Your play stays as it is, but they surround it with noise, memes, and infographics, and animated pig gifs, and blogs, and songs, and anything, really”. Almost convinced, but still skeptical, Shakespeare adds, “I see. I like it, but I still love a live performance.” The pig then announces the live performance of the play in Stratford-upon-Avon. The Bard enthusiastically concludes, “A play glimpsed by the world, reflected in circles, a dream shared.” Both videos, while announcing and promoting the interactive aspect of the play, use a representation of the Bard himself explicitly approving such an experimental and innovative performance – after all, as the producers humorously seem to state, it is not treason if the author himself, brought to the present by a time machine, gave his blessings. Furthermore, by referring to Francis Bacon, and consequently to the controversial Shakespeare authorship question – as this philosopher is one of the most popular authorial identities proposed for Shakespeare’s play scripts – the production questions the cult around a historical figure about whom so little is known. Simultaneously, it is through the dynamic presence of Francis Bacon that these videos allude to the collaborative composition practices of the Elizabethan time – one may argue that the overall interactive aspect of this adaptation aims at emulating such practices.

Unexpectedly, it is through Shakespeare that these videos reveal this production’s propensity for a chaotic disposition, as people were invited to contribute to *#dream40* producing whatever sort of content they thought was fit. Moreover, the source-text is itself rather puzzling; *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* has a dream-like atmosphere, built through a large number of characters, subplots, and fantastic elements put together. Fearing that *#dream40* will be a “mess” is completely reasonable, as it adapts a specifically hazy play, and

invites the audience to create even more characters and subplots. The cartoon Bard also worries that some additions to the text may not be of good quality. After hearing from Francis about the forthcoming audience's creations, he inquires, "How is anyone gonna find it all?", and even more worryingly, "But what if some of it is crap?". As a solution for both problems, Francis introduces Puck, the curator of *#dream40*, who was responsible for connecting the bits and pieces that compose this production. As the cartoon pig explains, Puck selected and shared "his favorite bits" with the audience during the play. This figure was the attempt by *#dream40* at putting together the pieces of the puzzle that resulted from bringing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to the collaborative environment of social media.

Puck not only brought the audience from the margins to the core of the performance, but also brought *A Midsummer Night's Dream* closer to the audience's context, provoking what Genette calls "movement of proximization." Puck, for example, mentioned various contemporary cultural products, such as the television series *Doctor Who* and the reality show *The Voice*, bringing the events and characters of this production closer to its audience in temporal and geographic terms (Genette 304), as these were popular television programs at the time of the performance. Through Puck's Google+ profile the production gave meaning and attributed value to the content produced by members of the audience, and facilitated the interaction, as this character shortens the distance between the diegesis of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the context of its contemporary audience.

Fig. 14. "Combination of Theseus, Puck, Helena and Bottom's profile pictures" *dreaming.dream40.org/stage*. Accessed 7 October 2016. Author's screenshots.

During the performance, for those who were not familiar with the play, there were visual clues for which characters were genuinely from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and which ones were created specifically for *#dream40*. Canonical characters, such as Theseus, Puck, Helena, and Bottom, were visually differentiated from the other characters. The Google+ profiles of all characters feature drawings of the corresponding character. The drawings of the canonical characters are remarkably similar in style: they are all portraits, showing only the head of the characters with colored backgrounds, consisting of geometrical shapes resembling the square-shaped basic unit of digital images – pixels. Whereas this first set of images looks professionally designed, the other characters, specifically created for this

adaptation of the play, look almost as if they were created by a child, as they are made by simple lines with abrupt ends, even though they were drawn by The Brothers McLeod, professional illustrators and animators who worked for the RSC and Google in *#dream40*. They are less colorful, their backgrounds are white, they may include representations of the character's body, and are generally more expressive. This difference in visual representation suggests that the two sets of characters deserve different treatment. While the first group is adorned with matching, and cleanly designed profile pictures, the second group bears drawings that let their improvised aspect shine through. Such distinction may also be a strategy to evade the fixation over fidelity that exists among some Shakespeare enthusiasts. By segregating these characters and making it explicit that they do not belong to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the producers highlight and address their "infidelity" once more.

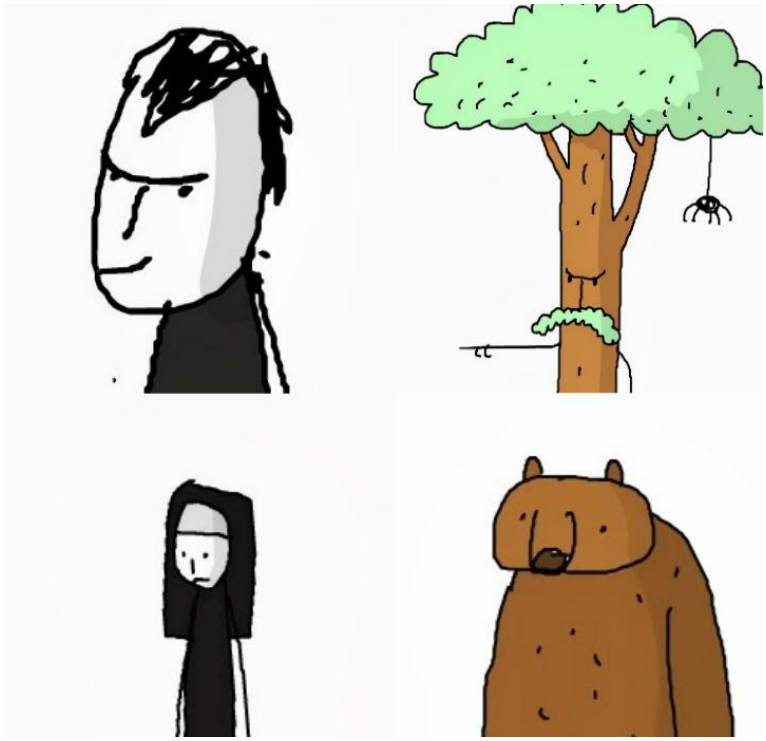

Fig. 15. "Combination of The Evil Weaver, Duck's Oak, Ophelia, and The Bear's profile pictures" *dreaming.dream40.org/stage*. Accessed 7 October 2016. Author's screenshots.

As mentioned earlier, the live performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – the second moment of *#dream40* – was the moment in which the producers truly adopted a reverential posture toward the source text, and, in an announced effort to remain faithful to it, the complete play script was performed. As Aebischer describes it,

> Starting in a rehearsal space for the opening court scenes, Gregory Doran's site-sensitive staging moved outdoors for the forest scenes, ending in the Dell behind the Courtyard Theater just after Holy Trinity Church's iron tongue of midnight had told twelve. While the rehearsal costumes drew attention to the metatheatricality of Shakespeare's play, the production spatially separated actors from their audience, stuck to Shakespeare's script, and had a clear beginning, middle, and end. ("Performing Shakespeare through Social Media")

From moving through locations in Stratford-upon-Avon, which are similar to the ones described in the play script, such rendering of Shakespeare's play seems to work as an attempt to recollect the dramatic fragments that were spread across the internet during three days and to organize them once again in a reverent, linear, and cohesive way. Nevertheless, the producers dared once more to challenge paradigms, and in "a departure from theater etiquette" (Aebischer, "Performing Shakespeare through Social Media") the audience was encouraged to use their cellphones during the performance, as they thought that to respond to this play by means of social media publications was the proper way to interact with it.

The producers of *#dream40* used many devices to provide their groundbreaking adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with a sense of respect to Shakespeare and his works. To this end, they availed themselves of straightforward strategies, such as to overtly announce that no disrespect was intended, and even using a fictional time-machine to bring a cartoon-like Shakespeare to grant his approval. Lastly, the drawings used to represent each

character indicate which ones are originally from the Shakespeare canon and which ones were invented for *#dream40*. Such commitment in showing respect to the text they adapted may be related to the fact that, when it comes to producing Shakespeare plays, the Royal Shakespeare Company is quite experienced. It is more than likely the RSC is aware that critical acclaim is unlikely to be expected from an adaptation that demeans Shakespeare or his plays, as Cartmell observed (37). Even after the end of the performance of *#dream40*, the producers were still concerned with providing the play with a sense of reverence in relation to its source-text, adding a voice recording of the complete play script of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to the compilation of social media publication they elaborated and organized as an interactive timeline, which will be discussed in the following section.

3.4. The Interactive Timeline: An Artifact of #dream40

Publications on social media websites are simultaneously ephemeral and durable – unless the person who published decides to delete her publication, it can be still be accessed years later. As a performance, *#dream40* lasted a single weekend. However, much of what was published in those two days can still be accessed at the time of the writing of this thesis, almost four years after the end of this production. Nonetheless, these publications seem deprived of context and it is hard to grasp any meaning from some of the pages. An extended lifespan was granted to *#dream40* when its producers elected some publications from both the audience and the characters, organized and presented them along with a dramatic audio recording of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*'s play script.

This collection of Google+ posts and audio from the play was called "timeline," a name that precisely reflects how information was disposed on that page, as time was

organized in a linear way. Through the extent of the audio recording interesting publications from the play were marked by the profile image of the characters who posted them.

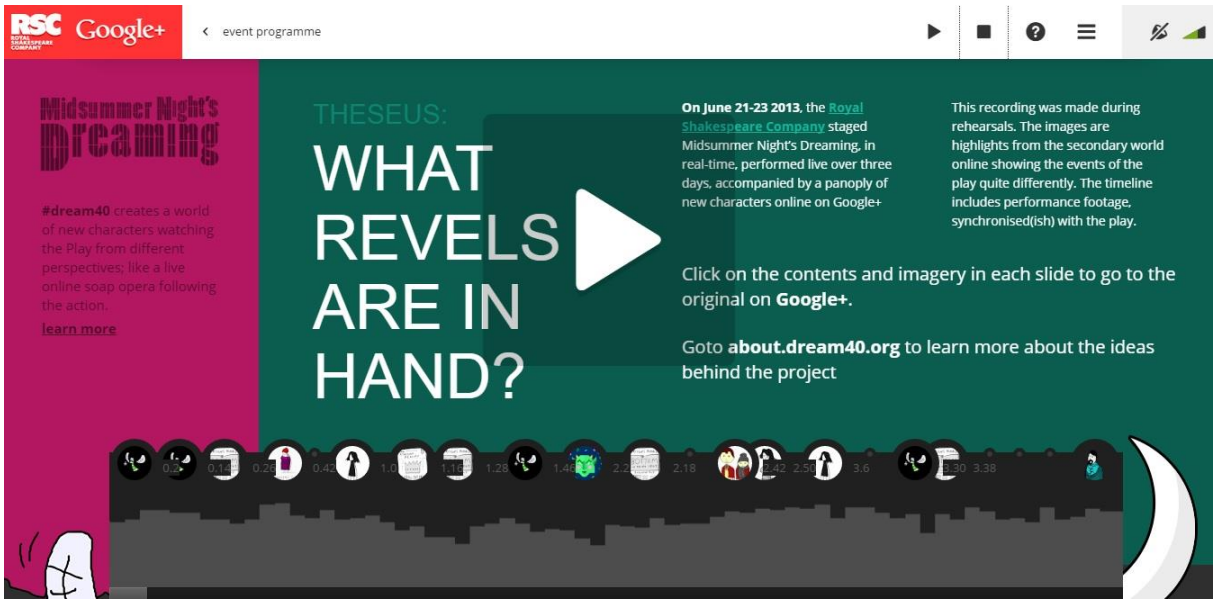

Fig. 16. "#dream40's timeline" *dreaming.dream40.org/timeline*. Accessed 7 October 2016. Author's screenshot.

Concerning the compilation and production of this timeline, it is impressive how *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, published fifteen years before *#dream40*, addresses this aspect of this performance in such an appropriate way. The live aspect of the performance in social media was of major significance, but ephemeral. As Murray puts it, Shakespeare's works can be reenacted by succeeding generations across the globe, and within different cultures, and the repeatable quality of his plays marks him as a storytelling virtuoso. Murray sees the ephemerality of role-playing storytelling as a sort of drawback, as these productions cannot be repeated, which happens due to the collaborative and improvisational aspects (278). Preserving elements of this performance by means of an interactive timeline, thus, dialogues with her expectation regarding the future of storytelling. As Murray puts it, "perhaps, in time, role-playing might experience a Homeric transition: a consolidation of a collectively

improvised tradition into a simple repeatable work" (278). Those who want to revisit *#dream40*, or did not have the opportunity of witnessing the performance in real time, can experience an interactive timeline that was produced and published weeks after the end of the performance. When the producers of *#dream40* decided to organize those publications, in order to produce a coherent and unified timeline, characteristics Murray associates with great fiction (276), they tried to move a step toward a less ephemeral role-playing storytelling, which can be revisited, or experienced afterwards. Even though one can believe that the timeline is "coherent and unified," it is not organized in the same way as traditional storytelling. In the webpage where the timeline was published, the audience is advised to do the following: "Listen to the play but feel free to hit pause whenever you'd like to explore the digital world spun around it. There are news sites, gossip, blogs, podcasts and even websites for the local pub and nunnery" ("Timeline"). One can certainly ignore such advice and experience the timeline in a linear way. If one decides to follow the many links that are part of this timeline, however, one would have a different experience. As Pascale Aebischer describes it,

> Clicking a link does not interrupt the voice recording but opens up a new window which, more often than not, contains multiple hyperlinks that can lead the viewer even further away from the timeline and Shakespeare's plot. It is not for nothing that one pathway ends on a reading of Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken". ("Performing Shakespeare through Social Media")

For the readers who, like Aebischer, followed the hyperlinks that the timeline offered, the reading experience would probably not feel coherent, and would feel more like experiencing loosely connected media products than to listening to a unified story. The timeline, however, consists of publications on Google+ organized in a linear order, accompanied by the audio

recording of the complete canonical text from rehearsals of the play. Hence, the *#dream40*'s timeline can be considered a cohesive and repeatable product of a rather chaotic performance, even if it encourages detours.

Even though the timeline does not make *#dream40* repeatable in the sense that it will be performed again, it is a step away from the ephemerality of social media. This compilation can be considered a contribution from *#dream40* to the adaptations to social media as a genre yet to be consolidated, as the timeline made this production's lifespan longer. In the following section, the major drawbacks and contributions of *#dream40* will be discussed according to Tom Uglow, from Google Creative Lab.

3.5. The Aftermath: #dream40's *Drawbacks and Contributions*

Performed in 2013, *#dream40* is experimental in nature, and, as an experiment, one can learn through its examination. The producers of this adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* did not have another non-linear play staged on Google+ to learn from, but as *#dream40*'s creative director Tom Uglow puts it, "next time someone wants to have a non-linear play that leaks across multiple realities in real-time performed physically and digitally simultaneously to a global audience they will not have to explain it from the ground up to blank looks and puzzled faces. They can point at the RSC's *seminal* 2013 production and say 'like that, but much better'" ("*#dream40* Epilogue"). Precisely, the focus of this section is, in a dialogue with Uglow's thoughts regarding *#dream40*'s outcome, as published in his blog, to comprehend what this production's major drawbacks were, and thus, how future productions of this kind can use the experience derived from *#dream40* to improve on this new genre of media products.

In "*#dream40* Epilogue", written by Tom Uglow and published on his personal website, the creative director shares some of his personal views concerning the outcome of the experiment, including the audience's use of cellphones during the live performance, the low rates of interaction, and the rather chaotic nature of the play. About the former, he states,

> Mediating theatre via a screen isolates the participant. Screens break the willful suspension of disbelief. When we physically sit together as a collective audience (simultaneity) this [*sic*] we become part of that moment; the actors transport us as a whole (transformation) to another world. But operating a phone or ipad [*sic*] drags us out of that world into a solitary world connected to our lives. Which is not where we should be at that moment. ("*#dream40* Epilogue")

He seems to consider that even though the electronic gadgets are a valid medium for consumption of cultural goods, the screen would not improve the reception of a live performance. On the contrary, cellphones and tablets would work as anchors, preventing the audience from diving into the fictional world where the action of the play happens. Even though Uglow's comments on the matter are purely derived from his experiences, as he announces in his text, they are an indication of how entertainers are struggling to understand how social media can be used to promote new experiences without disturbing treasured established practices. Although the "screens" represent excellent means of promotion, as the audience of *#dream40*'s live performance would probably be much smaller without the aid of social media and online publicity, "screens" potentially divert the audience's attention, not to mention how disruptive their brightness can be on the usually dark spaces of theaters. Thus, as a hybrid production, *#dream40* reveals the controversial place technology occupies when it

comes to production and reception of art in the contemporary society. “Screens” are crucial in promotion, but may disturb live performances.

When it comes to participation, Uglow claims that *#dream40* reached more people than expected, but despite that a great share of the audience decided to consume the production passively. From the beginning, *#dream40* was advertised as a production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* that would embrace all sorts of interaction. A great share of its audience, however, was composed of “observers” instead of “participators”. According to Uglow, in this production, the ratio of passive and active contribution conformed to the “general 90:9:1 rules”. That is, “In most online communities, 90% of users are lurkers who never contribute, 9% of users contribute a little, and 1% of users account for almost all the action” (Nielsen). As to digital social interaction, a general trend has been observed, since it is usual for ninety percent of all content within a digital community to be created by one percent of the user base. Even though participation inequality “existed in every online community and multi-user service that has ever been studied” (Nielsen), the producers of *#dream40* failed to acknowledge that a share of the audience would rather observe than participate in the production. According to the creative director, “those that didn’t [interact] found the fragmented, fractured and intentional disorganization deeply off-putting” (“*#dream40* Epilogue”). Uglow believes that some strategies would have helped to achieve a less unequal participation ratio, such as to “[a]sk clearly and make it easy. When we specifically asked people to do something it worked well . . . However we had a community of 1k [one thousand] people who actively signed up yet we didn’t successfully ‘ask’ them to do as much as they clearly wanted to” (“*#dream40* Epilogue”). The wide-open invitation, which suggested varied contributions of many different kinds, may have sounded intimidating and such approach may be accountable for an increase in the participation inequality.

Conversely, specific directions could have helped to decrease such inequality. Moreover, the creative director believes that if *#dream40* had provided "easy ways to 'just watch'," instead of fighting "the desire to consume passively" (*#dream40* Epilogue), it would have created a performative social media experience appealing not only to the minority who actively participated, but also to the far greater share of the audience who chose not to actively engage with the production.

Nevertheless, even the aforementioned small portion of the audience who were willing to actively collaborate with *#dream40* faced an immense difficulty, which the producing team realized on an early stage: "Until new paradigms for interaction are defined it is impossible to interact within them". Moreover, because it is impossible to define a paradigm for interaction without having people interact beforehand, *#dream40* had a paradox "buried firmly at its heart" ("*#dream40* Epilogue). The lack of guidance concerning a possibility of communication that recently came into existence can be staggering, as described by Murray:

> The media explosion of the past one hundred years has brought us face-to-face with particular individuals around the world without telling us how we are to connect with them. The exploration of space has taught us that we are all part of a single society but not how to find our place in it. The capaciousness and specificity of the computer offers us a way to model the behavior of single individuals within great groups of people, to make up fictional worlds in which we can enact the confusions of membership in a newly visible yet overwhelmingly various worldwide humanity. (282)

Hence the necessity to create and propose specific roles to be played by audience members. In a new model of participative media product – in which the paradigms of interaction are not yet consolidated – the possibilities of interaction should be clearly delimited. Such a

groundbreaking production, which allows for an innovative model of reception, must plainly communicate which are the contributions expected. Otherwise, there is a risk of having an audience overwhelmed by the plethora of possible experiences, which may stall them when facing the proposed fictional reality – particularly if it uses as a stage a platform in which the non-participation of a large share of its crowd has already been noted.

Finally, Uglow believes that the narrative, which he calls "overarching," failed at being coherent, and that would be one of the central aspects where improvement is needed. He considers that the production lacked a director who would supervise both the digital and live performance, in contrast to preparing the two parts of production separately, as "one vision directing every aspect" would possibly help hold the performance's coherence ("*#dream40* Epilogue"). This would be especially important when one considers the subplots *#dream40* encompasses. There are several scattered narrative pieces, and a significant part of them currently inaccessible due to the ephemeral character of social media. This cultural product is so diffuse that to summarize its plot is, nowadays, an unrealistic task. Aebischer successfully lists some of its subplots,

> While in their *dérive* some spectators will be enticed by the frantic preparations for Theseus's stag party by his nervous best man Hercules, and others may discover another facet of this protagonist by listening to Abbess Volumnia's increasingly hysterical SoundCloud podcasts that chart her journey from sexual repression to voluptuous abandon in Hercules's arms. . . . Others will seek out a trajectory of resistance to the politics of the play as they watch Ophelia's desperate vlogs detailing life in the nunnery, read Mrs. Egeus's embittered denunciation of her husband's oppression of herself and Hermia in *The Knight's Herald*'s "court gossip" column, and explore the antibourgeois

> politics of Beagle the Bellows Maker. ("Performing Shakespeare through Social Media")

Some, such as Aebischer, may find that the subplots make possible and encourage an "exploratory stroll," which she calls a virtual *dérive,* through the many media products that are part of this experiment, making the audience a coproducer of their own "individual narratives". Thus, the many different characters, plots, pages, and virtual spaces can be understood as enhancers of the role-playing aspect of this production. Meanwhile, due to the performance's length (three days), and the great number of new characters introduced by the producers (30 new characters), it is comprehensible that a portion of the audience would find the production confusing and hard to follow.

Uglow does not underestimate the challenge that is to transpose an all-encompassing theatrical experience to a digital environment. As he puts it, "Physical theatre is amazing. Literally magical. That is quite intimidating. It is almost impossible to translate the play into a similar digital parallel" ("*#dream40* Epilogue"). Even though *#dream40* probably does not fulfill Murray's expectations as an artistic cybernetic experience, which would develop "beyond the pleasures of a compelling entertainment to attain the force and originality we associate with art" (273), it is a cutting-edge experiment that tested the grounds for the narrative and performative arts, and there is much to learn from its successes and failures. Through an analysis of the media usage in *#dream40,* one gets to learn about the difficulties involved in promoting an interactive performance on a digital stage. Despite its shortcomings, *#dream40* also works as a showcase for the possibilities of social media websites when used as stage. If one considers that any adaptation is a "reading," and "any text can generate an infinity of readings, so any novel can generate any number of adaptational readings which are inevitably partial, personal, conjunctural, interested" (Stam 188), this production by the RSC

and Google Creative Lab carries within itself many diverse "readings." It is not only what its creators planned, wrote, and made of it, but also the product of its large and unpredictable audience, composed by Google+ users who in many instances acted solely as observers, but sometimes acted as coauthors of this performance. *#dream40* is distinctive for not being a single adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* derived from a particular reading. It is a production that encompasses many adaptations of Shakespeare's text, and the participatory environment of social media is a key component of this outcome.

Overall, Google+ served its purpose of being an interactive stage, even though the production did not achieve as much participation as it desired. Bringing the diegesis of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to social media prompted various irreverent media products, such as the *Hamster of Fate* and the *Fairy Flying School* videos, which did not result in disrespect toward Shakespeare and his works, as the producers of *#dream40* made continual efforts to demonstrate. The fact that the timeline contains an unabridged audio recording of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is interesting, especially considering that "in both academic criticism and journalistic reviewing, contemporary popular adaptations are most often put down as secondary, derivative" (Hutcheon 2). Robert Stam argues that there are still critics who rely on "fidelity" when discussing how successful a specific adaptation is, thus subscribing to the notion that literature is superior to other media:

> By adopting an intertextual as opposed to a judgmental approach rooted in assumptions about a putative superiority of literature, we have not abandoned all notions of judgment and evaluation. But our discussion will be less moralistic, less implicated in unacknowledged hierarchies. We can still speak of successful or unsuccessful adaptations, but this time oriented not by inchoate notions of "fidelity" but rather by attention to "transfers of creative energy," or

> to specific dialogical responses, to "readings" and "critiques" and "interpretations" and "rewritings" of source novels, in analyses which always take into account the gaps between very different media and materials of expression. (194)

Still, even though authors such as Stam and Hutcheon contest the idea of adaptations as inferior works, this is a notion that still prevails in our society: "disparaging opinions on adaptation as a secondary mode – belated and therefore derivative – persist" (Hutcheon xiii). It is also substantial to have in mind the idea that Stam's article deals with film adaptations, which have certainly gained some respect and popularity over the years. When it comes to adaptations to social media, a new trend that has *#dream40* as one of its early exponents, it is crucial to acknowledge that there is still much respect to be conquered. That being so, the timeline, which can be seen as an illustrated audiobook of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, is a non-intimidating introduction to this category of media products. Thus, it is without choosing sides that *#dream40* is at the same time creative and reverent. It welcomes and promotes changes while it deliberately avoids modifying the source-text when performing it for a live audience, or when constructing its timeline, the most long-lasting artifact of this performance.

In brief, the current chapter aimed at a concise exposition of some of *#dream40's* central characteristics. In the first section, the chosen stage, Google+ was discussed. In the second section, it was necessary to approach some media products that constituted this performance, which includes many irreverent approaches to Shakespeare's work. In the third section I discussed how this humorous approach to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* did not affect the producers' feeling of "reverence" towards the source-text and its author, something that was particularly highlighted in all stages of this performance, from the promotional videos to the interactive timeline, its last fruit. This timeline was discussed in details in the

fourth section, as it constitutes a strategy that made *#dream40* less ephemeral than a performance to social media is condemned to be. Finally, the production was analyzed through the light shed by a text written and published by *#dream40*'s creative director, in order to think about how the way this play resulted can benefit future creative endeavors of this kind.

In the following chapter, *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *#dream40* will be put side-by-side. Even though there are major differences between these plays, such as the genre of their dramatic source-texts, the virtual stages in which they were performed, among others, the fact that they were both staged in social media websites affects the way the audience can engage with both productions in similar ways. Considering the exposition of both productions featured in the previous chapters, the next and last segment of this thesis aims at elucidating the possible modes of engagement of social media websites when adaptations from dramatic texts are considered.

4. The (immersive) modes of engagement in adaptations from dramatic texts to social media websites

This chapter focuses on the potential ways of engaging audiences on adaptations to social media websites, in order to understand the media specificities of social media websites when used as stage for literary adaptations. The first section debates the idea of "immersion" as presented by Janet Murray. There is a necessity to examine this notion because the "sense of immersion" is repeatedly brought to attention when the specificities of new digital media are discussed. The second section approaches the written-text fraction of the productions under discussion, in relation to the concept of "remediation," and their similarities and differences in comparison to epistolary novels. The third section discusses the photographs and videos integrated in *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *#dream40* as instances of authentication; these media forms are considered proper ways of providing evidence, especially within Internet culture. The fourth section deals with the interactive aspect of adaptations to social media websites. It is argued that when the use of avatars in social media is considered, the "sense of immersion," as discussed by Murray, stops being a metaphor concerned with a suspension of disbelief to be a description of the audiences' condition in relation to narratives in social media. Finally, the last section is a summary of the ideas previously presented, in order to reinforce this chapter's discussion in relation to the specificities of the engagement in social media websites.

Much has been written in regard to media specificity. Horace's notorious *ut pictura poesis* is one of the first attempts at comparing the arts, a discussion revived in the eighteenth century by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, who elaborated on the boundaries between painting and poetry in his influential essay on the *Laocoon.* Scholars who recurrently proclaim Horace and Lessing as their predecessors have been debating on what makes different media alike.

When it comes to adaptations, literature, cinema, and video games, for example, cannot convey meaning in the same way. As Linda Hutcheon puts it, "being shown a story is not the same as being told it—and neither is the same as participating in it or interacting with it, that is, experiencing a story directly and kinesthetically" (12). The challenge, however, is to pinpoint the media particularities that create such differences. Because the three modes of engagement described by Hutcheon can be identified in the adaptations discussed in this thesis, the categorization developed by her will be used as a departure point for identifying how the specific characteristics of social media websites operate within the media products here discussed.

In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Hutcheon proposes an innovative scholarly perspective towards adaptations:

> An emphasis on process allows us to expand the traditional focus of adaptation studies on medium-specificity and individual comparative case studies in order to consider as well relations among the major modes of engagement: that is, it permits us to think about how adaptations allow people to tell, show, or interact with stories. We can be told or shown a story, each in a range of different media. (22)

The author considers that the role played by the audience in the consumption of a certain adaptation is key to comprehending and analyzing such experience. "Telling," "showing," and "interacting" are the three modes of engagement put under discussion, the first related to literature, the second to cinema and the last to video games. According to Hutcheon, "Each mode of engagement therefore also involves what we might call a different 'mental act' for its audience" (130). Hutcheon considers reading as the required process of the telling mode of engagement and states that "we imagine and visualize a world from black marks on white

pages as we read" (130), whereas, in the showing mode "our imaginations are preempted as we perceive and then give meaning to a world of images, sounds, and words seen and heard on the stage or screen" (130). Finally, when it comes to interacting, Hutcheon argues that "we are involved even more directly, physically and mentally, as we concentrate intensely and respond physiologically" (130). Taking Hutcheon's modes of engagement into consideration, this chapter aims to discuss some particularities of social media websites in relation to the author's categories.

Hutcheon's theory serves the purposes of this thesis, as she addresses interactive media in her analysis, and she does not arrange media into any sort of hierarchy. Traditionally, however, "show" and "tell" are considered modes of narration, therefore, a great potential for misunderstanding arises from the terminology she proposes. Within the context of narratology, "show" and "tell" are strategies that can be employed equally in written verbal literature – Wayne Booth's distinction between the two rhetorical strategies in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* has become well-known among critics. Even though Hutcheon's insights provide the grounds for the following analysis, for the purpose of this thesis, in order to avoid misunderstandings, the words "show" and "tell" will not be used as descriptive of modes of engagement. Furthermore, by resisting her terminology I also aim at highlighting that modes of narration are not medium-specific, focusing only on the idea that these plurimedial productions allow for all three engagement practices described by Hutcheon.

In both *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *#dream40* the audience could engage with the narrative by means of reading written verbal texts, seeing visual and audiovisual media, and interacting with the characters and other members of the audience. Naturally, the first category is analogous to what Hutcheon calls the "telling mode," and in what regards the written portion of these productions the focus will be on how these productions can be

understood as a contemporary rendering of epistolary novels. In the second category – related to the visual and audiovisual productions incorporated in these adaptations, corresponding to Hutcheon's "showing mode" – the discussion will center on how these media products were used to provide "evidence" for the events reported (even though these events are fictional in nature). Lastly, interaction will be of interest when focusing on the performative aspect and sense of copresence that characterize social media websites. I argue that, when the audience's engagement is considered, each of these three modes of engagement has an impact. In order words, according to Hucheon, "All three modes [of engagement] are arguably 'immersive', though to different degrees and in different ways" (22). Considering that the "sense of immersion" has been repeatedly brought into attention when discussing the ways in which contemporary audiences engage with new media cultural products, some discussion about the immersive aspect of media is necessary before entering the discussion of the plays.

4.1. Immersion: A Brief Overview

The "immersive" potential of fiction is a common interest in new media studies. The "sense of immersion," as described by Janet Murray in *Hamlet in the Holodeck,* is connected to the strict meaning of "immersion," as in having an object or body completely surrounded by a liquid:

> *Immersion* is a metaphorical term derived from the physical experience of being submerged in water. We seek the same feeling from a psychologically immersive experience that we do from a plunge in the ocean or swimming pool: the sensation of being surrounded by a completely other reality, as different as water is from air, that takes over all of our attention, our whole perceptual apparatus. (98)

When it comes to storytelling media, to feel immersed is to feel completely surrounded by the narrative world.

The notion of "immersion" is comparable to the experience of "immediacy", proposed by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin in *Remediation,* as they all posit that transparency is a medium's ultimate goal (Murray 26; Bolter and Grusin 24). In their influential book, Bolter and Grusin present a diachronic approach to both the concepts they call "the two logics of remediation": "hypermediacy" and "immediacy" are two "styles of visual representation" (272). On the one hand, "hypermediacy" is a specific use of media that calls attention to the medium itself, aiming at making that medium seem opaque. On the other hand, "immediacy" would be a certain use of media whose purpose is to make the medium "disappear" from the audience's consciousness. The "disappearance" of the medium would result in the storytelling being the only interest of the audience, thus creating a sense of transparency and immediacy. As the authors put it, "in this sense, a transparent interface would be one that erases itself, so that the user is no longer aware of confronting a medium, but instead stands in an immediate relationship to the contents of that medium" (24). However, by being eager to achieve "immediacy", media happen to call attention to their own mediacy, which results in "hypermediacy". Bolter and Grusin state, "Although each medium promises to reform its predecessors by offering a more immediate or authentic experience, the promise of reform inevitably leads us to become aware of the new medium as a medium. Thus, immediacy leads to hypermediacy" (18). Therefore, it is usual that new technologies would call attention to their use of media, especially while the aspect of novelty of a certain medium lasts. The goal of "immediacy" can be achieved only once the audience feels familiarity toward a medium. The possibility of having the audience's "apparently insatiable desire for immediacy" (Bolter

and Grusin 5) quenched only exists if the technological innovations of the medium are no longer in evidence.

As Bolter writes in "Transference and Transparency: Digital Technology and the Remediation of Cinema", "[a]s a medium, the *holodeck* [as discussed by Murray] is transparent to its experienced content; the user cannot tell the difference between the *holodeck* and the physical world" (18). However, strategies of immediacy – a style of transparent visual representation – are neither specific of narratives, nor an exclusivity of new digital media, as Bolter and Grusin put it,

> We can identify the same process throughout the last several hundred years of Western visual representation. A painting by the seventeenth-century artist Pieter Saenredam, a photograph by Edward Weston, and a computer system for virtual reality are different in many important ways, but they are all attempts to achieve immediacy by ignoring or denying the presence of the medium and the act of mediation. All of them seek to put the viewer in the same space as the objects viewed. (11)

In relation to immediacy and transparency, different media provide different experiences. Analyzing how the members of the audience engaged with *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *#dream40* unfolds into a discussion of the potential of social media websites to "disappear" when used as stages. It is fundamental to clarify that while transparency and immersion constitute an alternative to discuss the experience specific media provide, as suggested by Murray, and Bolter and Grusin, in this discussion the goal is not one of ranking media, or measuring how immersive these products are.

Concerning the treatment of immersion as a quantitative concept, Pierre Gander, a researcher of cognitive science, raises an important point:

> Measures of immersion or degree of immersion in storytelling contexts have not been made, nor are there any measurements available. We only know that both traditional media and new media can be immersive. But we do not know whether one produces more immersion than the other. We do not even know what it means to say so, since we lack a theoretical explanation of immersion. (4)

The purpose of this thesis is not to assert that adaptations to social media are more immersive than those in any other medium. Therefore, without making a value judgment, this thesis aiming at a description of the experience social media can provide when used for this sort of dramatic impersonation. In fact, I argue that if there is a potential for immersion in social media adaptations, it derives directly from the media they encompass, such as epistolary novels, photographs, and audiovisual media. The focus of the following sections is to discuss how each mode of engagement is afforded by these sites, and how they can add to the goal supposedly shared by all media forms, that is, being able to render themselves invisible (Murray 26; Bolter and Grusin 24). Thus, in the following sections, I argue that social media websites are "capable of transparent representation and supporting copresence" (Bolter 23), being suitable stages when the desired outcome is to make the audience feel as if it shares the same space with the media product they experience.

4.2. Reading the Written Text: The Epistolarity of Social Media Websites

First, not every mode of engagement these productions allow for are innovative or unique. In fact, when it comes to their use of written text, these productions bear some striking similarities to a canonized storytelling paradigm: the epistolary novel. In this section, the similarities and differences between these productions – in relation to their text-based

social media publications – and the canonical genre of epistolary novels will be examined. The role of messages shared on social media platforms is similar to the role letters once performed. In relation to that, social media adaptation introduces two new possibilities, the first being a non-contiguous reception, and the second being the possibility of writing back to the messages that are sent by the characters of these productions. This chapter proposes that adaptations to social media websites are, as a refashioning of the epistolary novels, a remediation of literature; not only because they represent an update of the correspondence system, but also because these adaptations allow for a more authentic experience.

The productions under discussion do not feature letters in the traditional sense, but publications on Twitter and Google+ are some of the popular modalities of written communication of the contemporaneity, from which no aesthetic value is usually expected or attributed. One could place them along with the letter, diary and the casual conversation, a group of "less mediated" (Bakhtin 396) language productions, that M. M. Bakhtin characterizes as "purely everyday genres" (396). Thus, one could argue that, through the use social media, an author would also be able to provide an insight into the "intimate relations between people and into the internal life of the individual person", as Bakhtin stated in relation to the use of letters, diaries, and casual conversations in novels (396). Social media, thus, would also allow a more immediate simulation of a character's consciousness, which has been considered an achievement of the epistolary novel. It has also been believed that the epistolary method would enhance the sense of veracity of a story, as it "makes us feel that we are in contact not with literature but with the raw materials of life itself as they are momentarily reflected in the minds of the protagonists" (Watt 192). Furthermore, as Samuel Richardson himself puts it, epistolary novels would be better at preserving the emotions conveyed:

> The method which the Author has pursued in the History of Clarissa, is the same as in the Life of Pamela: Both are related in familiar Letters by the parties themselves, at the very time in which the events happened: And this method has given the author great advantages, which he could not have drawn from any other species of narration. The minute particulars of events, the sentiments and conversation of the parties, are, upon this plan, exhibited with all the warmth and spirit, that the passion supposed to be predominant at the very time, could produce, and with all the distinguishing characteristics which memory can supply in a History of recent transactions. (366)

It was believed that through an epistolary account of events the reader would achieve a more immediate experience. For specific audiences, however, in a world where communicating via e-mail is largely common, to read the development of a relationship happening through letters may feel outdated, diminishing the verisimilitude this structure once conveyed. According to Bolter and Grusin, "remediation" is "a defining characteristic of the new digital media" (45), which they consider "the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms" (273) and promise to offer "a more immediate or authentic experience" (19). In the same way that one could state that Internet communication is a remediation of the letter, for example, it seems suitable to consider that stories mediated through social media publications work as a refashioning of the traditional epistolary novels.

In *Remediation,* however, more than one meaning is attributed to the word that titles the book. For this reason, if one argues that a certain medium works as a remediation of another, it is essential to scrutinize this terminology. One definition that appears in this book is that remediation means the usage of different media as a support for exactly the same content,

> At one extreme, an older medium is highlighted and represented in digital form without apparent irony or critique. Examples include CD-ROM (or DVD) picture galleries (digitized paintings or photographs) and collections of literary texts. There are also numerous web sites that offer pictures or texts for users to download. In these cases, the electronic medium is not set in opposition to painting, photography, or printing; instead, the computer is offered as a new means of gaining access to these older materials, as if the content of the older media could simply be poured into the new one. (Bolter and Grusin 45)

An updated example for this specific sort of remediation would be the use of an e-reader to read a nineteenth-century novel. It is not in this sense, however, that one may think of adaptations of literary texts to social media websites as an updating of the epistolary genre and remediation of literature. For this purpose, remediation is the process through which a new medium proposes a refashioning of media, offering a supposedly more authentic experience than the medium it remediates. The definition that appears on *Remediation*'s glossary also suits this intent, that is, the use of the term "to mean the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms" (Bolter and Grusin 273). Rajewsky further elaborates on these authors' ideas:

> "Remediation," as conceived by Bolter and Grusin, denotes a particular kind of intermedial relationships in which, through processes of medial refashioning, "both newer and older [media] forms are involved in a struggle for culture recognition". Focusing on digital media, Bolter and Grusin argue that "all current media remediate," (rem, p. 55) and thus pay homage to as well as rival, earlier media by "appropriating and refashioning the representational practices of these older forms." Similarly, also earlier media, such as painting, (literary)

> texts, photography, film, etc., have frequently remediated (and continue to remediate) both the respective newer media as well as one another. (60)

"Remediation" as the remodeling of older media by new media, thus, is a widespread definition of this term, which is also how, henceforth, it will be used in this chapter.

Epistolary novels, however, are traditionally published in book form. Thus, even though epistolary novels such as Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa,* or Bram Stoker's *Dracula,* may simulate, through an inclusion of the letters' date of writing, a sense of spacing out between the correspondences, these books constitute unified volumes, and the letters' fictional date of production does not affect the contiguity of the experience of reception. In that regard, while traditional epistolary novels are usually presented either in bound printed pages or e-readers, for *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *#dream40* the stories are accessed through a mobile device, computer, or any gadget that can be used to access social media platforms — whose particularities shape the experience of reception. The difference of the media employed is responsible for a twist in this contemporary take on the epistolary genre. The interface of social media networks imposes the fragmentation of the literary "content" being adapted due to size restrictions and the limited attention span of users browsing social media websites. Twitter and its 140-character restriction is exemplary of the necessary brevity in social media publications. When it comes to social media usage, it seems that brevity is indeed the soul of wit, considering that even in platforms such as Facebook, which allow the publication of long textual productions, shorter publications do much better in terms of engagement. According to a research by BlitzMetrics, which analyzed one hundred and twenty billion times in which publications were displayed to people within Facebook – also called "Facebook impressions"– "the ideal post length is between 120 and 129 characters." The environment of social media favors short textual productions, and cultural productions that used these sites as

stage must consider this particularity. Moreover, it is necessary for each publication to be separated from the following by a time gap, as it is not possible to make two simultaneous publications within the same social media account. Thus, the non-contiguous aspect of this performance is related to the use of social media websites. Social media productions can last longer than a week, but the moments of reception are small, scattered, and blended with news stories, personal messages, selfies, and miscellaneous content. During the time of their performances, everyone who followed these literary characters on Twitter and Google+ was likely to receive bits of narrative at all times. Even though the reception of these products is continuous, it happens in a non-contiguous manner. The non-contiguity is enhanced by the use of different social media pages for each character, and is reinforced even further in productions like *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *#dream40,* which choose to have their content spread on more than one social media platform. As a remediation of literature, and a refashioning of the epistolary genre, these adaptations capitalize on characteristics of social media, which enable the audience to read the characters' correspondences in real time, interspersed among other online activities. Thus, when considering the real-time aspect of social media publications, adaptations from literary texts to social media networks reproduce the communication time delays that are proper of written verbal communication.

Through the written fraction of these productions published in the social media pages created for each character, the audience reads an epistolary account of events – regular reports on how the production is unfolding. If one accepts that social media messages are a kind of contemporary epistolary textual production, one must also accept that there is an epistolary element in adaptations to social media. One can also argue that besides presenting remarkable similarities to the epistolary novels, considered by some as one of the most immediate forms of telling, the use of social media websites provides a non-contiguous reception for this

canonical structure. If real-life communication through correspondence is usually spaced in time – in the sense that the addressee receives the messages separately – thus publications in social media websites can be considered more authentic than the bound printed fictional letters. When it comes to that, social media as stage for dramatic impersonations enables the audience to write back to the correspondence they read, and these websites even allow the characters to answer the messages sent by members from the audience. The following section will focus on another mode of engagement, that is, looking at the photographs and watching the videos shared during these performances.

4.3. Looking at Photographs and Watching Videos: Visual Media as Instances of Authentication

The use of photographs and videos is also directly related to having social media as stage for these productions. In this environment, pictures are more than a possibility; in fact, Facebook, for example, gives more visibility to the publications that combine images with texts (BlitzMetrics 22). This section proposes that adaptations to social media, by having at their disposal tools for incorporating photographs, can exploit photography's value of evidence – which was strengthened within the internet culture – to make their overall performance more authentic.

Even though the use of pictures is almost mandatory for achieving a wider outreach, using photographs of the actors that play each character during the performance is an option made by the producers of *Such Tweet Sorrow*, but not by the team behind *#dream40*. When photographs and videos were used in these productions, they raised the reliability of these performances, for seeing an actual person doing the things the characters claim to be doing can strengthen the feeling of verisimilitude conveyed by these adaptations. Providing pictures

to give credibility to an account of events is directly related to Internet culture, as evidenced by the expression "Pics or it didn't happen," which became an Internet meme.

The word "meme" was coined by Richard Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene*:

> We need a name for the new replicator, a noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit *of imitation. "*Mimeme" comes from a suitable Greek root, but I want a monosyllable that sounds a bit like "gene". I hope my classicist friends will forgive me if I abbreviate mimeme to *meme.* If it is any consolation, it could alternatively be thought of as being related to "memory", or to the French word *même.* It should be pronounced to rhyme with "cream".
>
> Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches. Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation. If a scientist hears, or reads about, a good idea, he passes it on to his colleagues and students. He mentions it in his articles and his lectures. If the idea catchs [*sic*] on, it can be said to propagate itself, spreading from brain to brain. (192)

The word "meme," however, was later appropriated and used in the Internet environment to designate the "internet memes," a specific phenomenon of reproduction and propagation of ideas, typical of the online environment. Internet memes, according to Limor Shifman, a scholar in the field of memetics – the theoretical and empirical science that studies the replication, spread and evolution of memes (Heylighen and Chielens) – are "(a) a group of digital items sharing common characteristics . . . which (b) were created with awareness of

each other, and (c) were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the Internet by many users" (41). Internet memes, thus, are similar to the process Dawkins first characterized as "meme," the main difference being that this particular sort of meme are not ideas, but digital items.

According to an article published on *Know Your Meme* – a site devoted to researching and documenting the emergence of Internet memes – "Pics or it didn't happen" is "a phrase often used on message boards or in comments to challenge an unbelievable or outlandish claim by inquiring photographic evidence" (Menning). The fact that there is an Internet meme directly related to the use of photographs as proofs tells much about how people on the Internet collectively feel towards photographs. After all, as Dawkins puts it, only "good ideas" can leap from brain to brain and become a meme. "Pics or it didn't happen" is a meme not because one person considered it a "good idea," but because this idea was repeatedly endorsed and replicated. Consequently, illustrating the performance with pictures is a proper way of making them more believable for the Internet audience, as this audience had already signaled, in the form of a meme, its desire for photographic evidence.

The role of photography on the Internet, therefore, brings back the value of photography as evidence discussed by Susan Sontag, in *On Photography*,

> A photograph passes for incontrovertible proof that a given thing happened. The picture may distort; but there is always a presumption that something exists, or did exist, which is like what's in the picture. Whatever the limitations (through amateurism) or pretensions (through artistry) of the individual photographer, a photograph – any photograph – seems to have a more innocent and therefore more accurate, relation to visible reality than do other mimetic objects. (Sontag 6)

Incorporating photographs makes the profiles more authentic, and as a result, the whole production is legitimized, as the existence of such visual aid presupposes an actuality of the people and places photographed. One can state that using the actors in photos and videos is a style of visual representation that aims at media transparency, making the audience believe that these profiles do represent actual living people, forgetting that these pages are, in fact, being used as media for storytelling.

If the pictures used by each character in *Such Tweet Sorrow* enhance transparency, on the other hand, the drawings used to represent *#dream40*'s characters are a less realistic style of visual representation. The relevance of a profile picture in social media is due to the way information is disposed in this environment: generally, each publication contains this image, resulting in multitudinous displays of it to each single person accompanying these productions. Each *Such Tweet Sorrow* publication features a photograph of the actor who plays each character, whereas in *#dream40* publications are matched with cartoon-like drawings of the characters, which has an impact on the reception of these productions. As Sontag states, "What is written about a person or an event is frankly an interpretation, as are handmade visual statements, like paintings and drawings. Photographed images do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it" (Sontag 4). Thus, whereas drawings are created by artists, and a level of abstraction is expected from them, portrait photography holds a direct relation to living people. As Charles Sanders Peirce argues,

> Photographs, especially instantaneous photographs, are very instructive, because we know that they are in certain respects exactly like the objects they represent. But this resemblance is due to the photographs having been produced under such circumstances that they were physically forced to

> correspond point by point to nature. In that aspect, then, they belong to the second class of signs, those by physical connection. (par. 281)

Therefore, according to both Sontag and Peirce, a photo suggests that the people and events depicted correspond to real-life occurrences. Photographs can be seen as copies of existing entities of the world, as opposed to representations; the statute of photography itself presupposes a physical connection between the photograph and the represented object. Unlike the images used in *#dream40*, which are drawings that have a remarkably similar style, in *Such Tweet Sorrow* the photos used as profile images have different styles and settings, which contributes to create a sense of individuality. Due to this setting up of a visual identity, if someone follows more than one character, *#dream40*'s publications would stand out among the other social media publications. For this reason, the use of drawings or photographs as media for visually showing the characters to the audience results from the choice of different styles of representation – either immediacy/transparency, or hypermediacy/opacity, according to Bolter and Grusin. The adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* prefers a transparent style of visual representation by means of photographs, which, as Peirce puts it, are "exactly like the objects they represent" (par. 281). In contrast the producers of the adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* opted for non-realistic drawings, a technique that usually does not depend on the material existence of the represented objects.

Some key events of *Such Tweet Sorrow* were communicated to the audience both through written words and through static or moving images. Sometimes, the production would offer two different versions of the same occurrence. An example is the fight that resulted in Mercutio and Tybalt's deaths. Before dying, Mercutio tweeted his account of the events. In his characteristic style he affirms, "Tybalt bit me so I bit back" – that is, he claims that he was the one who killed Tybalt, and that he did it self-defense. Jago Mosca, on the other hand,

claimed that Romeo was the one who killed Tybalt, and that it was not self-defense. Jago shared a short video from what he affirms to be the fight that led to their deaths, even though it would be hard to assert who is being shown on the video, due to motion, low resolution, and the angle from which the video was recorded. Had the video, the evidence offered by Jago, been clearly discernible, the matter of Tybalt's killing would probably have been settled, as it would be if Jago provided a photo of Romeo hurting Tybalt with a knife. As it was not the case, it was upon the other characters – and the audience – to decide if they would believe in Romeo's innocence. We usually consider true what we perceive through our eyes. As Hutcheon argues, to move from written-text to visual media is to move "from the imagination to the realm of direct perception" (23), which seems a particularly widespread assumption in relation to Internet culture. It was not the case of that video, however, as it is not clear enough to allow a direct perception. First, it is necessary to believe that Jago told the truth about that video, and it requires some imagination to see Romeo being featured there.

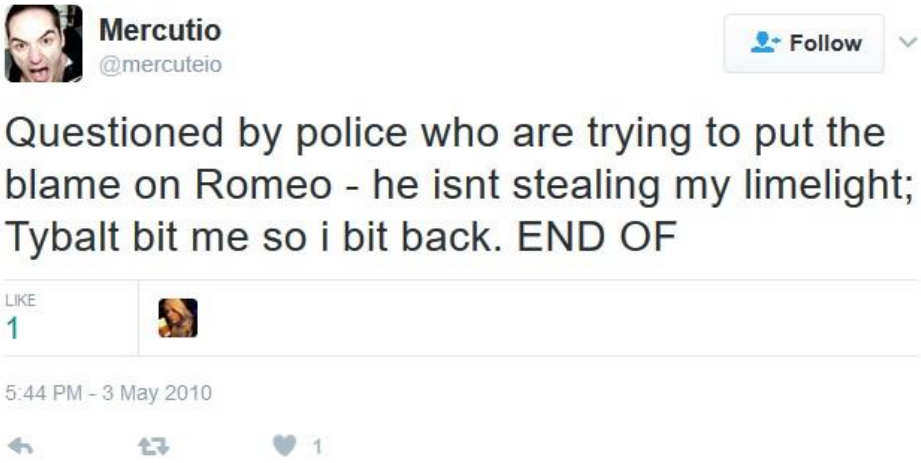

Fig. 17. "Mercutio telling his version of the fight".

https://twitter.com/mercuteio/status/13325028199. Accessed 8 Jan. 2017. Author's screenshot.

Videos, which also presuppose the factual existence of the objects they represent, seem to have inherited from photography their evidentiary value in what concerns social media.

The characters from *Such Tweet Sorrow* posted videos sporadically, not only when communicating how some events of these performances unfolded, but also to build up the characters' personalities, and to provide comic relief. Romeo, Juliet, and Mercutio had their own YouTube channels, and the uses made by Juliet and Mercutio are exemplary of the sort of audiovisual products created during this adaptation. Five videos were posted on "94Juliet," Juliet's personal YouTube account: two are videos of her singing; one is a posthumous tribute to her mother; one is a "room tour" – a video in which she shows her room; and lastly, described as "JUICY DETAILSSSS :)," is a report of the night she spent with Romeo after her birthday party. On Mercutio's channel, "Merc Utio," eleven videos were posted during the performance: four of them are about the rivalry between the Montagues and the Capulets – as one could expect, they show Mercutio supporting the Montagues; three videos were recorded at parties; one shows Romeo playing a video game; two are comic videos – one features Mercutio himself dubbing the song "All by Myself," by Eric Carmen, and the other is called "Mercutio needs you," in which he uses a mask and asks people for support in his "FreeRomeo" campaign, to "save" Romeo from his video game addiction; the last one shows a group of teenagers chanting "Free Romeo". These videos emulate the use teenagers regularly make of YouTube and do not call attention to their fictional aspect, as there are no openings, credits, or anything that discloses that those videos are part of a fictional performance. After watching one of these videos, YouTube suggests "similar" videos, of girls doing "bedroom tours," boys partying or playing games – not even YouTube's algorithm seems to realize that the videos posted on "94Juliet" and "Merc Utio" are fictitious and part of a social media adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* – unlike the majority of videos on this platform.

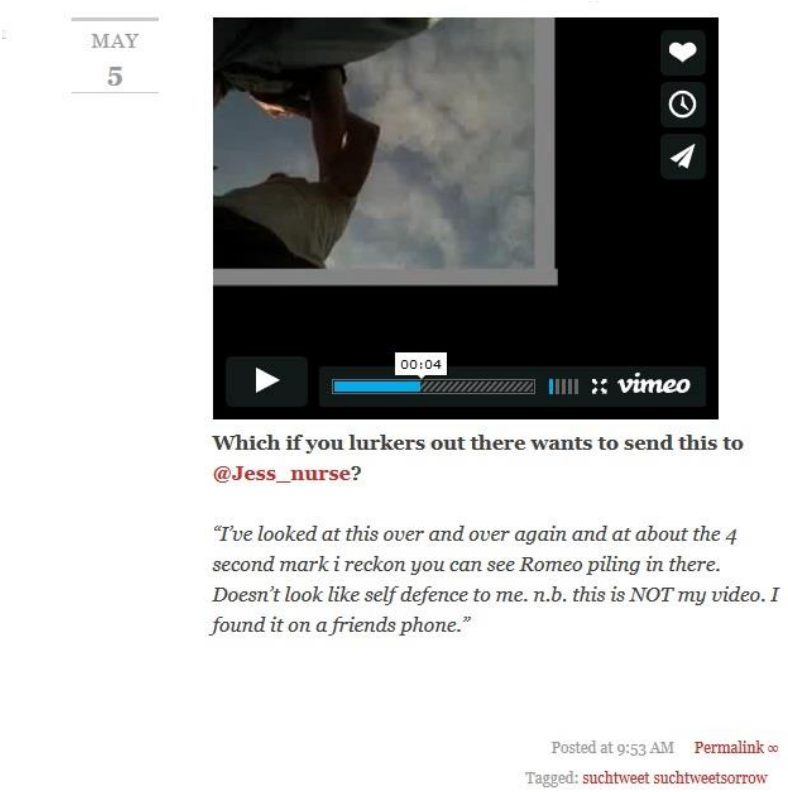

Fig. 18. "Fight video posted by Jago Mosca's on Tumblr" *http://kleptojago.tumblr.com/page/3* Accessed 8 Jan. 2017. Author's screenshot.

Differently, the producers of *#dream40* used the authority conferred on visual media in social-networking websites to address an aspect of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that could make this play seem misplaced in the environment of social media. When it comes to contrasting *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *#dream40* it is certainly worth considering that they are adaptations of different source-texts, characterized by opposing approaches to reality: whereas elements of fantasy lie at the core of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the story of *Romeo and Juliet* is told a basically realistic style. Supernatural elements such as fairies, enchantments, and even Puck – who could be appointed as the protagonist of *#dream40* – are not regularly featured on social media websites; teenagers, on the other hand, are common users of these

platforms. The fictional aspect of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a play that features fairies and enchantments, is more evident than in *Romeo and Juliet*, a play about teenagers and their infatuation with each other.

The production of *Fairy Flying School*, a series of videos shot in Stratford-upon-Avon and published in the Royal Shakespeare Company's YouTube channel, was not only a promotion strategy, making the audience anticipate *#dream40*, but also introduced the fairies to the environment of social media websites, and worked as commentary of the experimental nature of *#dream40*. These videos show the first flying attempts of the fairy 1325, and were shot in first-person point-of-view and show neither apprentice nor the tutor. Accompanied by a flying tutor, the fairy sounds nervous and fearful, and in the first video, "Flight 1.0," all that she can do is to timidly jump. In the third and last, "Flight 1.23," fairy 1325 takes flight, but rapidly bumps into a tree, showing little improvement, and giving away her clumsiness. These videos set the mood of the production by introducing fairies to the digital world, without really showing them. Once more, the choice of a visual medium is linked to a desire of conferring a degree of authenticity to this element of Shakespeare's comedy. The fairies are particularly estranged from social media – the stage in which *#dream40* was performed. Thus, the magical creatures' appearances depend on the audience's imagination. The fact that these videos are centered on training sessions and have the first (flawed) attempts at something new as a theme, may be read as a metalinguistic comment on this production, which was one of the first attempts at using social media as a stage: due to its highly experimental nature, it was quite susceptible to flaws. The Royal Shakespeare Company was as inexperienced in this sort of adaptation as fairy 1325 was in flying.

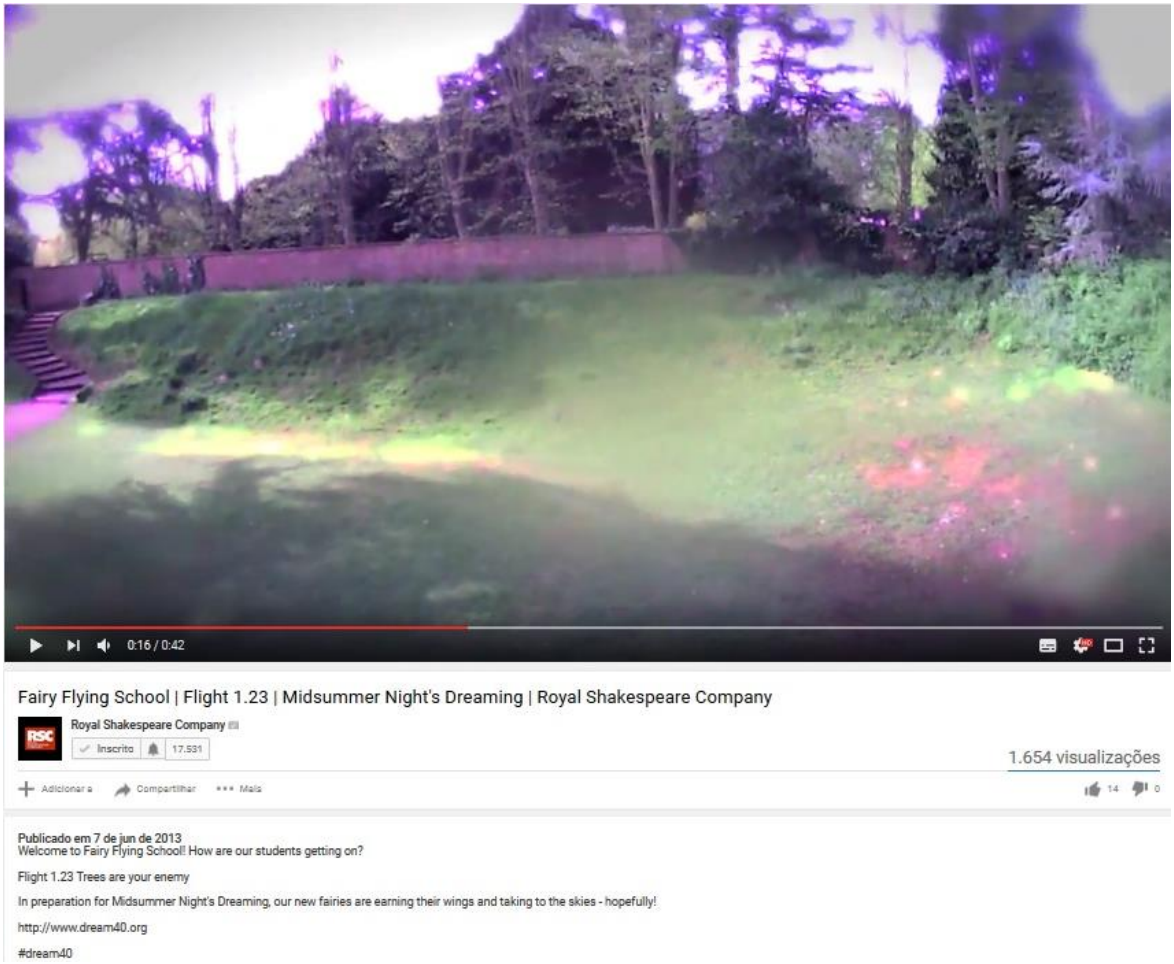

Fig. 19. "Video from the Fairy Flying School series".

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1fOz5Kt4Xzw. Accessed 8 Jan. 2017. Author's screenshot.

Whereas *Such Tweet Sorrow* constantly used the bodies and voices of the actors who played the characters on social media websites, *#dream40* hired artists to draw its characters. These are adaptations of different source-texts, and the way they used visual media indicate different purposes. However, considering the *Fairy Flying School* videos, for example, it becomes evident that both productions capitalized on the aspect of evidence that was attributed to photos and videos on the environment of social media websites. It is no coincidence that the fairies were introduced by means of a first-person point-of-view video, in which their voices can be heard and the environment where they live is shown, without

risking to compromise the aspect of evidence videos have, by showing a fairy that does not look real. Even though *#dream40* embraces the dream-like feeling of its source text and does not aim at transparency, their *Fairy Flying School* videos show that audiovisual media can be employed to introduce non-realistic elements to the environment of social media.

Overall, photographs and videos have the power of inspiring belief within the social media culture, as they are considered proper ways of providing evidence within that specific tradition. Adaptations to social media websites use the strategy of incorporating visual media to provide a feeling of actuality, and photos and videos have proved powerful allies. In the next section, the discussion will center on how the interacting mode of engagement characterizing social media websites affects the audience's immersion, which prompts a discussion about these media's live aspect and capacity of supporting "copresence".

4.4. Interacting: Immersion, the Use of Avatars and the Live Aspect of Social Media

Two characteristics of social media websites directly related to the interacting mode of engagement greatly affected the outcome of these adaptations. The first is related to an obligatory condition of these environments, that is, every agent within these sites is an avatar – a persona one creates in order to represent herself within a virtual environment. The obligatory presence of avatars is a game-changer, because they modify the placement of the audience, which shifts from their usual position outside the performance and is brought to the stage itself. The second is the live aspect of these adaptations. In relation to *Such Tweet Sorrow*, Geoffrey Way argues that performances within social media are both live and mediatized performances, because tweets are simultaneously live and recorded. The presence of a live aspect in social media makes it appropriate to discuss whether social media allow for copresence – that is, work as devices "that would enable viewers in their drawing rooms to

experience distant events (sports, concerts, etc.) and to communicate with others at a distance" (Bolter 22). Finally, such possibility of intersubjective communication prompts an argument concerning how the social aspect of traditional theater is carried through on adaptations to social media websites.

In regard to "avatar," anthropologist Tom Boellstorff, in his research on *Second Life* – an online virtual world, popular during the first decade of the twenty-first century – provides a brief genealogy of this word,

> This Sanskrit word originally referred to the incarnation of a Hindu god (particularly Vishnu). With reference to cybersociality, the term was probably first used in the virtual worlds Habitat and Ultima IV in the mid-1980s, as well as in Neal Stephenson's 1993 science fiction novel *Snow Crash* (Morningstar and Farmer 1991; Stephenson 1993:470). While "avatar" ("avie" or "av" for short) historically referred to incarnation—a movement from virtual to actual—with respect to online worlds it connotes the opposite movement from actual to virtual, a decarnation or invirtualization. (128)

Thus, "avatar" is used to encompass the whole of the online personality one constructs while interacting with others in social media. As Boellstorff puts it, "Avatars, however, were not just abstract anchors of virtual perspective; they were the modality through which residents [those playing the game] experienced virtual selfhood" (129), and even though the author is describing the experience of *Second Life*, social media websites similarly constitute an alternative way of performing a virtual selfhood.

When it comes to that, the performative quality of the social media environment stands out as a prominent specificity of these media. In his article on performances of *Romeo and Juliet* to social media websites, Geoffrey Way states that "participation on a social network

site constitutes a type of social performance, as a user determines how to present him or herself in an online space through an understanding of the technology and accepted user practices" (403). Thus, not only by electing what kind of information to share, but also by adapting oneself to the specific rules of that environment – assimilating some practices to his behavior – one is socially (and virtually) performing. It is safe to state that while feeding his profile on social media a user actively creates his social media persona.

Regarding the particularities of the reception in new digital media's cultural products, Murray's report on the "sense of immersion" shed an important light and paved the way for the following discussions. When it comes to the experience offered by the RSC productions, it seems that it is necessary to go beyond her account, especially when the use of avatars in relation to the interacting mode of engagement is considered.

In relation to the written-text publications and the visual and audiovisual media products created during the performance of *Such Tweet Sorrow*, there are two reasons someone would "believe" in the events reported by the characters – the same does not apply to *#dream40*, because it does not use a transparent style of representation. First, someone may choose to believe, which may result in a deliberate "sense of immersion," which Murray considers an instance of "active creation of belief". The author considers Coleridge's influential phrase "the willing suspension of disbelief" too passive (110). According to Murray:

> When we enter a fictional world, we do not merely "suspend" a critical faculty; we also exercise a creative faculty. We do not suspend disbelief, so much as we actively *create belief.* Because of our desire to experience immersion, we focus our attention on the enveloping world and we use our intelligence to reinforce rather than to question the reality of the experience (110).

The second reason that may have led the audience to believe in the events reported in *Such Tweet Sorrow* is related to people who are not acquainted with social media, or are not knowledgeable about the existence of adaptations of literary texts to social media, or even people who stumbled on an isolated media product resulting from these performances, such as Juliet's YouTube videos or Facebook event. This second sort of "belief" can be attributed to unawareness, and is definitely not deliberate. An anecdotal example related to this credulous judgment are the first times a child attends a theatrical performance, and due to her faulty comprehension of the conventions of theater, she may be led to believe that when a clown cries, for example, he really hurt himself.

When it comes to Murray's metaphorical approach to the notion of "immersion," her accounts in relation to the holodeck do not translate well to the discussion about social media websites, especially in what regards the use of avatars, which allows for the interacting mode of engagement. The audience's online selves share the space of social media with the literary characters they follow and with which they interact. When arguing that the audience is immersed in these adaptations, what is being argued is not that the audience have a "sense" of being present. It is not that, as Murray puts it, the audience "have a sensation of being surrounded by a completely other reality, as different as water is from air, that takes over all of our attention, our whole perceptual apparatus" (98), as it would be with an immersive literary book, film, or game of virtual reality. What is implied here is that the audience of a production staged on social media is composed by social media users that do not perform a temporary role, usually scripted by a company, as it would likely be the case of an immersive video game, for example. One may argue that the members of these audiences were actually surrounded by narrative during the time of these performances, their online embodiment was word for word circumscribed by these narratives. Specifically, if the mandatory representation

of the audience through avatars is considered, the "immersion" of the audience is no longer restricted to how the audience feel, but is an accurate description of how those users were located within different social media websites during the time of performance. Because, as it is being argued, the online selves of the audience are the immediate audience of these productions. These online selves – here called avatars – are self-constructed representations, which means that, when it comes to engagement, it is not the same as to perform a scripted part in role playing video games.

Actually, by stating that the audiences of these adaptations are necessarily constituted by social media accounts, I emphasize that the audience is, prior to the beginning of these productions, involved in a specific sort of social performance, and it is only through these self-made personas that any interaction with the fictional performance can take place. In that way, the process in which a living person constructs a representation of herself on a social network is similar to the process necessary to turn a dramatic character to an online social media page, as both constitute the process of creation of an avatar.

In an adaptation to social media like *Such Tweet Sorrow*, in which the actors lend their bodies to the narrative, the characters' profiles feature everything the regular users have to assert their flesh-and-blood existence. Considering that in the environment of social media websites every individual is solely constructed by media, whether in the form of written words, photographs or videos, it is through media products that an individual constitutes his presence in these platforms. Definitely, the borders between reality and fiction become blurred in a performance mediated through avatars. One can argue that, because the audience members – who share the virtual stage with the fictional characters – also represent their factual existence by means of text-based publications, photos and videos, their relationship to their avatars is quite similar to the relationship established between the actors and the avatars

of the fictional characters they represent. When it comes to social media productions, one can argue that the immediate audience of a narrative told on social media is not the flesh-and-blood person who is sitting in front of the computer, but a media-powered avatar created in order to make that person present on that online environment through an online representation. Whenever someone interacts with a play on social media, what actually happens is an interaction performed by two avatars who share an online space.

Therefore, in an adaptation to a social media website, the persona created by each member of the audience, their avatar, is factually surrounded by narrative. The actual living person's existence in that environment manifests itself in the same way as the characters' existence. When the content was disposed within Twitter's timeline layout, for example, the characters appeared surrounded by "real life storytelling," and vice-versa:

> In *Such Tweet Sorrow*, one could surmise, the "Shakespearean" tweet is just as significant – or just as insignificant – as the vernacular tweet, or a picture on Twitpics, or a video on YouTube, or an audio file on Audioboo. They all function as post-hermeneutic "tokens" in a conversation – a dramatic conversation, in this case – that takes place not only among characters but also between each character and his/her followers as well as among the followers themselves. This is a conversation that continually crosses the boundaries between "fiction" and "real life": a character's tweets mix with a follower's "real" daily feeds; a follower who tweets a character becomes to an extent himself/herself a character; a character who retweets a follower's tweet is simultaneously a character and a member of the audience. (Calbi 152)

In this situation, the users are not only surrounded by Twitter's microenvironment, but by the social media's environment as a whole, because these performances are usually not performed within a single social medium, but are present in many of the popular social media websites. Thus, different manifestations of the user within different platforms would be surrounded by excerpts of these characters and their narrative. The narrative absorbs the social media experience of someone who accompanies a production of this sort. In *Such Tweet Sorrow,* for example, Juliet created a Facebook event for her birthday party, while Puck, from *#dream40*, was also a Twitter user.

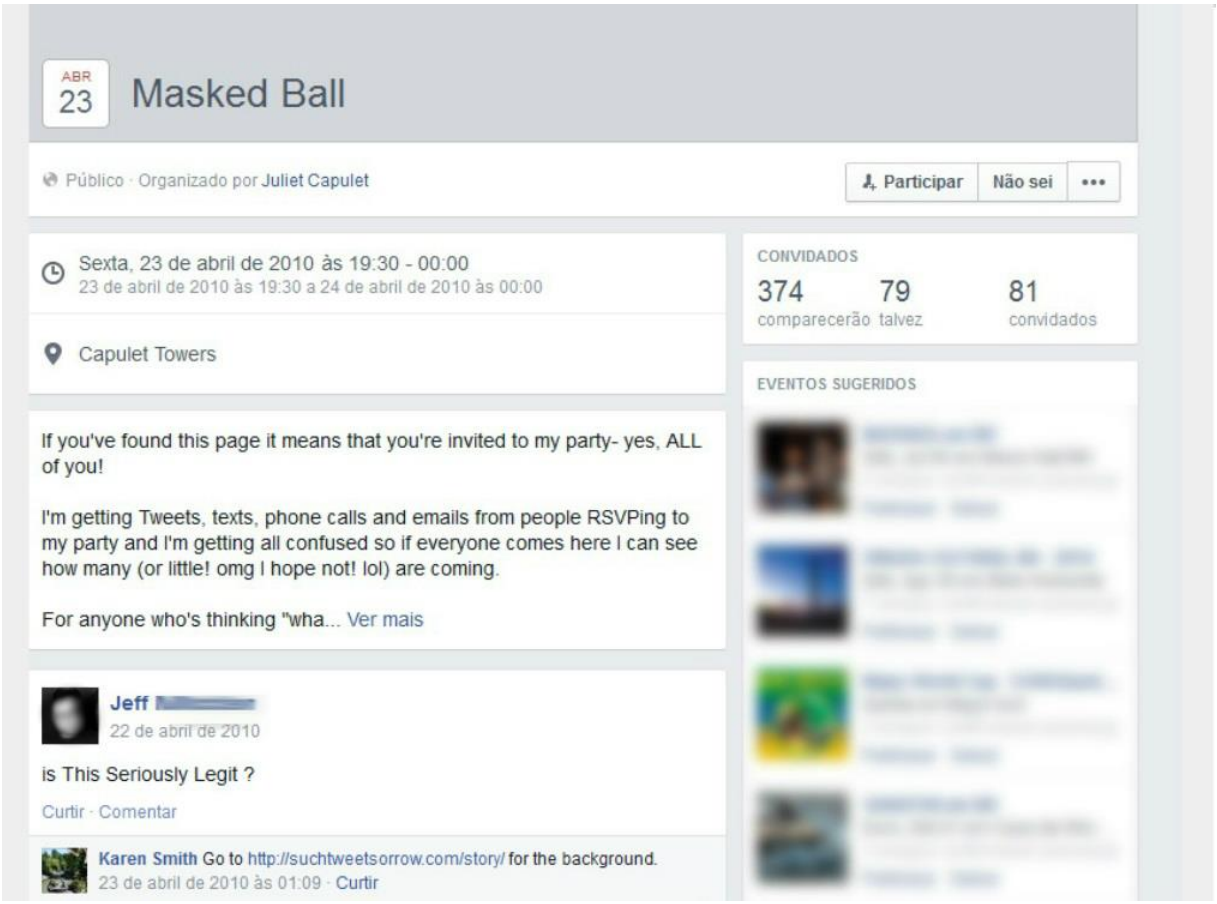

Fig. 20. "Juliet's Facebook Event" *facebook.com/events/110538055652789/*. Accessed 8 May 2014. Author's screenshot.

In a social media performance, if the publications do not stand out as different from the other publications on the audience's timeline, the border between fiction and reality becomes blurred. Bolter and Grusin state that "in such cases [in which computer graphics strive to achieve "photorealism"] the computer is imitating not an external reality but rather another medium" (28), a statement that is an excellent departure point to understand what the actors did in social media during the performance of *Such Tweet Sorrow*. The imitation they performed was certainly not related to a sense of fidelity toward any sort of external reality, as may be the case when a regular social media user wants to communicate an experience in the way he believes to be realistic. Besides, "the actors (as the characters) had to adapt to the technological and user conventions of the site, and in essence they employed aspects of Twitter's social performance as elements in their dramatic performance of an updated *Romeo and Juliet*" (Way 410). The actors were imitating a sort of social performance typical of Twitter, they "tweeted as normal people would do". Therefore, one can argue that *Such Tweet Sorrow* had the goal of achieving "twitterrealism". This performance was, thus, clearly aimed at a combination between each character's personality and an imitation of the way frequent users post on Twitter: "[t]here was no direct use of Shakespeare's words. No 'wherefore art thou @romeo.' . . . Juliet's tweets were quick and often, her elder sister "Nurse" Jess' more mature and reflective" (Mudlark, quoted in Way 410). If the "direct use of Shakespeare's words" would stand out in the followers' timelines, the opposite happens when the adaptation chooses to conform to users' conventions: there is not an obvious difference from the actors Twitter performances when compared to the users' social performances, making it more difficult to distinguish between the fictional and the legitimate publications. Especially because this production does not use "adornments" in their adaptation of Shakespeare,

> Roxana Silbert describes *Such Tweet Sorrow* as "not very reverential." Yet when asked what Shakespeare would make of it, she replies, rather predictably: "I think he would've loved it," and continues as follows: "All you've got on Twitter is the actor, the story and the audience. I've directed at the Globe where there aren't lights, sound effects or much staging so in fact there's something rather pure about this" (qtd. in Kennedy n. pag.). Paradoxically, given Twitter's potential as a cross-media platform, which will be fully exploited in the course of the performance of *Such Tweet Sorrow*, she chooses to emphasize the latter's relatively "un-mediated" characteristics ("there is something rather pure about this"), which supposedly recall the "naked" style of productions of Shakespeare at the reconstructed Globe (and, by implication, the "original" unadorned staging of Shakespeare's plays in Elizabethan and Jacobean times). To adopt Bolter and Grusin's terms, in the interviews with Roxana Silbert hypermediacy becomes immediacy (5), or at least an almost total erasure of traces of mediation. (Calbi 145)

The "naked" style of the production, characterized by an absence of adornments contributes to the immediacy of *Such Tweet Sorrow*. The so-called transparency is achieved because the traces of mediation, "lights, sound effects or much staging," do not play a part in *Such Tweet Sorrow.* Through mimicry, the actors of *Such Tweet Sorrow* wrote in a similar way as the users of Twitter write; the audience received the fragments that composed this production without adornments, the same way that they receive the publications of many actual social media users.

The adaptation of plays by Shakespeare to cinema or television generally results in a traditionally public experience turning into a private experience, especially when these

audiovisual adaptations are watched on television screens. Such process was previously criticized,

> For example, when a well-known reviewer suggested that one could appreciate *Prospero's Books* (1991) only when scrutinizing it frame by frame (and, in fact, urged viewers to do so), he doubtless meant this as a compliment to the film's visual richness. But the experience this would suggest – a single person stopping and starting a film at will – is an intensively private, even fetishistic one, and closer to that provided by a casino's montage of attractions than to the communal experience of the Greek theatre. (Bruster 38)

The argument that the experience of watching a performance on social media websites is similar to Greek theater in terms of how the moment of the performance is shared by the audience members would be difficult to support. One can argue, however, that the experience proposed by these new media has restored some of the collective aspect of theater, which was lost in "watching drama on television at home, in virtual solitude" (Bruster 38). When it comes to films as mediatized performances, one of the fundamental conditions of this medium is the nonsimultaneous reception they promote, which, especially due to the usually highly private experience of watching films at home, ensures that these cultural products can be consumed many years after their production.

As Bolter states in "Transference and Transparency: Digital Technology and the Remediation of Cinema",

> Film technology was not suited to the goals of copresence and intersubjective communication, for the simple reason that film cannot be "live". Film could satisfy the desire for immediacy only in the sense of allowing the viewer a visual (and later auditory) experience of another place. This was the effect both

> of the earliest films (such as those of the Lumière brothers) with their recording of everyday events and of the films that Tom Gunning has called the "cinema of attractions." (22)

Even though productions on social media websites are not exemplary of what society considers "live", one can argue that such productions have both mediatized and live aspects, as Way puts it,

> While some might contend that because the performance was automatically recorded it cannot be considered a live performance, that argument ignores the specificities of the Twitter platform: tweets are live and recorded. One can access the tweets again and again, but this is a characteristic of the performance's stage, in which any sort of participation will remain after the moment of its initial posting. (414)

Way claims, "[t]he use of social media as a platform for dramatic performance constantly contests the boundaries between live and mediatized because of the nature of the technology" (415). In other words, one of the fundamental conditions of social media is that it is not clear-cut whether it can be considered a mediatized or live performance. If the use of still and moving images, such as photographs, drawings, and videos enhance the mediatized aspect of these productions, there is also the interaction between performers and audience, which is only possible because these productions are not present as a record of past events, but as a continuous recording of events as soon as they happen. It is its live aspect that – despite the obvious inconveniences related to the necessarily synchronous reception, such as its ephemerality – allows for a partial recovery of the social dimension of theater, characteristic not only of Greek but also of Elizabethan theater.

Social media networks are called “social” for a reason: these platforms encourage and promote social networking, and they need people to connect with each other in order to work properly. As mentioned in the previous chapters, these platforms stimulate the creation of communities, and support the use of hashtags, which, when embraced by producers of fictional performances in these environments, encourage the connections between audience members. In *#dream40*, a Google+ community was created before the beginning of the performance, which worked as a gathering place for the most participative share of the audience. In other cultural productions, such as *Such Tweet Sorrow,* however, even without an institutionalization of the virtual community through the creation of a virtual space, there was a spontaneous grouping of people around the adaptation. As Mike Kent, a scholar in the field of Internet Studies, states, “[v]rtual communities are brought together not from shared physical proximity but to places of shared interest” (247). Kent further elaborates on the differences between traditional and online communities,

> Traditional communities have many definitions and reflect a wide variety of ways in which and reasons why groups of people come together and share experiences. The idea of a community that shares a common interest, geographic location and lived experience is common to many theorists across different disciplines, although with different emphasis and focus. Online communities disrupt many of these understandings of traditional communities. This arises partly though their ability to circumvent the need for a shared physical location. Howard Rheingold wrote, in his seminal book *The Virtual Community* in 1993, “[p]eople in virtual communities do just about everything people do in real life, but we leave our bodies behind”. (245)

When it comes to online communities, the absence of a shared physical space is evident. For this reason, their social dimension and collective aspect is rooted in the simultaneous reception; even though spatially apart, these audiences are copresent, virtually together, witnessing the unfolding of events at the same time.

Finally, we can state that the interacting mode of engagement of social media websites plays a fundamental part in these adaptations. The audience participation was possible through the use of avatars – which were necessary not only in the process of transposing literary characters to social media websites, but also for those who wanted to interact with the characters – and due to the real-time aspect of these productions – which made it possible for the people in control of the characters' avatars to answer messages sent by members of the audience, and facilitated the creation of a community, which, despite not sharing the same physical space, would share the interest in these productions and partake of the moment of performance. Whereas the use of avatars brings change, as it makes possible for the audience to share the stage with the characters of the performance, the live aspect makes the audience members copresent in the environment of social media, bringing the social dimension of traditional dramatic performances to these adaptations. The following and last section of this chapter is a summary and a comparison of the modes of engagement of social media in relation to other media.

4.5. Engaging with Adaptations to Social Media Websites

When Linda Hutcheon categorizes media in terms of their modes of engagement, she does not discuss social media websites. However, social media "involve a blend of text, audio, photographs, and video" (Blascovich and Bailenson, ch. 11) and allow for interaction. Thus, social media can be considered plurimedial media. These sites bear similarities to all media

discussed by Hutcheon, which she separates into showing, telling, and interactive media. Furthermore, the media products involved in these productions cannot be analyzed individually – those who encountered the photographs and videos of *Such Tweet Sorrow* outside the productions' context completely misinterpreted them. The comments, posted on YouTube years after the end of the production, are exemplary: various people asked Juliet to cover songs, wished her a belated happy birthday, and compliment her on the quality of her voice – years after the death of this fictional character. For a comprehensive approach to these productions (and the individual media products derived from them) one must take into consideration that they have aspects which we usually associate with written literature, some with performance media, and some with interactive media.

To experience *Such Tweet Sorrow* is in ways similar to reading a dramatic text, in ways comparable to watching a live theatrical performance, or performing a role in an online virtual world. It is similar to reading the play script because it was mostly composed by written material, read by the audience in order to comprehend how the events unfolded, and it took the audience an engagement that lasted five weeks, some minutes each day – it was upon the audience to decide when it felt appropriate to login Twitter and engage with the performance. On the other hand, it was comparable to watching a live theatrical performance because social media live aspect does matter when the reception of these productions is considered, as argued by Way: "Thus, while the artifacts of the performance remain online, they are just that, artifacts. The live elements that marked the five-week performance are now gone, and in their place remains [*sic*] only the results of the performance that occurred, not the performance itself" (415). Besides that, there were, if fact, real living actors involved in this production, lending their bodies, sometimes even their voices, to show visually to the audience how the characters looked, and how some events progressed. Lastly, the experience

is analogous to playing a game because the production allowed the audience to interact with the story by means of a profile in social media, which entails in itself a specific sort of performance. This mode of engagement, however, was only available during the weeks *Such Tweet Sorrow* was being performed.

#dream40, for that matter, is also a manifold production. A considerable portion of the development of the characters happened by means of written verbal text, which was deployed in order to narrate the plot to the audience. Drawings and videos were used to demonstrate to the audience how the characters and the setting looked; and, finally, the audience was invited to create their own *A Midsummer Night's Dream* characters and interact, through social media, with the canonical personages, and with the characters the producers invented. These modes of engagement were also temporally restricted to the live performance of *#dream40*.

When it comes to *Such Tweet Sorrow*, there is no specific way of engaging with the production afterwards. If one opens the profiles used by the actors, one will find the tweets originally published in 2010, organized in reverse chronological order. Trying to watch this play after the end of its performance is like walking into a theater and finding the star-crossed lovers' dead bodies on the stage. Reading the tweets from top to bottom is similar to watching a movie being rewinded in a video cassette appliance: you can even grasp some sense, but it is an experience only vaguely similar to watching the movie from its start. Though revisiting *#dream40* is quite like reviewing *Such Tweet Sorrow*, there is a difference worth considering: the producers created a way of nonsimultaneous engagement by means of an interactive timeline that offered an experience analogous to listening to an illustrated audiobook with hyperlinks. During the time of the performance, engaging with *#dream40* was, for a fraction of its audience, a literal performative experience, as the spectators were invited to create characters and play their roles in the play, but this aspect of the production could not be

preserved. One may label this sort of production an unremarkable cultural product due to its transience, but one cannot forget that the ephemerality is also a fundamental condition of live performances; the remarkable traditional renderings of the play scripts they adapt are ephemeral as well.

The current chapter aimed at a concise description of the audiences' engagement in adaptations to social media websites. In the first section, the concept of "immersion" was presented. In the second section, I examined the similarities and differences between adaptations to social media websites and the literary genre of social media websites. In the third section, I focused on the "evidence" aspect of the audiovisual media in these productions. In the fourth section, I discussed the use of avatars and the live aspect of social media websites. Lastly, the chapter discussion was summed up in the fifth section. Overall, these adaptations from dramatic texts to social media websites inherited aspects from both literature and the performing arts. However, social-networking sites are plurimedial media, allowing for the many modes of engagement described by Hutcheon. Some characteristics, such as their prevalent use as online platforms for correspondence, are evocative of the traditional storytelling form of epistolary novels, whereas others, such as their performative aspect, are reminiscent of the contemporary media of virtual online worlds.

5. Final Remarks

A discussion of *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *#dream40*, followed by an analysis in which these productions were put side by side, helped elucidate the role played by social media websites as a stage for dramatic performances. *Such Tweet Sorrow* and *#dream40* were produced by the same company, but they are examples of how adaptations to social media websites can be produced differently, especially in what concerns their ways of engaging audiences. Among the difficulties faced, the ephemeralness of social media, which resulted in many fractions of these productions becoming unavailable along the years, and the lack of critical works addressing these media productions are particularly worth mentioning. Some questions raised by this research are worth further investigation. The notion that some stories suit this environment in a more appropriate way, that the way the audience participates in an adaptation of this sort cannot be fully controlled, and that adaptations to social media may put the performative aspect of social media websites in evidence seem capable of inspiring additional research.

Two were the biggest difficulties in relation to this research, and, at times, both seemed insurmountable. The first is related to this investigation happening years after the performance of both productions under analysis. The approximate seven years that separate *Such Tweet Sorrow* and the conclusion of this thesis are a significant length of time when social media websites are considered. In terms of audience interaction, much of the content produced by the audience in both productions is currently unavailable, which impairs the audience-focused approach these productions seem to require. Not only that, but the paratexts created by the producers are also no longer available online. *Such Tweet Sorrow*'s website has not been available since 2013, and *#dream40*'s interactive timeline became offline approximately one year before the conclusion of this research. The service provided by the

Wayback Machine, which makes it possible to access webpages as they were previously available, was essential for some ideas presented in these chapters. The second great difficulty faced is related to the small number of academic works about these productions. At the time of writing, in the journal databases Project Muse and JSTOR, the search results for "*Such Tweet Sorrow*" – which received significantly more scholarly attention than *#dream40* – add to eight. Therefore, if this thesis, at moments dialogues with the opinions of producers, directors, and actors of these productions, it is not because their opinions are considered authoritative. The fact the producers' views about these adaptations are taken very much into consideration can be attributed to the evident lack of critical pieces and scholarly perspectives on these productions.

Finally, confirming what the director of *Such Tweet Sorrow* commented, this research seems to indicate that not all stories suit well the environment of social media websites, "[y]ou can't do on Twitter what you wold [*sic*] have done in the theatre – and nor would you want to! So it is a matter of what stories you can tell and how you can tell them" (Silbert). If *#dream40* did not achieve the participative audience expected, it may be that the use of social media platforms amplified *A Midsummer Night's Dream* apparent confusion, resulting in a production that was difficult to approach, and possibly, in which it was even more difficult to participate. *#dream40*'s failure at convening a highly participative audience may indicate that, in relation to collaborative practices, the social media environment cannot be easily controlled. Asking people to take part in a theatrical production may not be enough, which seems especially true when *Such Tweet Sorrow* is considered, where the audience was not invited to create new parts, but decided by itself that bringing other characters from *Romeo and Juliet* to Twitter was an appropriate way to engage with this production. *#dream40* called for new characters, and did not receive the response they expected; *Such Tweet Sorrow,* on the

contrary, was surrounded by uninvited new characters. When put side by side, these productions seem to indicate that the rules of engagement in social media websites cannot be established by the companies that decide to use these sites as stages. Social media audiences may not be entirely unpredictable, but it seems that telling the audience how to behave is not particularly effective in these environments.

A possible future approach of these performances may focus on how dramatic performances on social media websites call attention to the performativity present in these environments. If a character such as Juliet can have a profile on Twitter and interact with people, and through this medium tell about her fictional life and routine, should the other users be trusted? What is it that makes social media a reliable source of information? It may even be that performances on that environment work as a kickoff for critical thinking about possible manipulations in the use of social media. Further studies may reflect on how these productions shake the borders between the real, the virtual, and the fictional.

I hope this research will be of help to scholars who eventually desire to investigate these productions. On the present days, it is possible to stroll among the remaining artifacts of these performances. It is likely that, in a near future, even less information regarding these plays will be available online.

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