Lost (ABC, 2004-2010): a Shakespearean romance for the twenty-first century?

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a Shakespearean romance for the twenty-first century?

Sarah Hatchuel and Randy Laist

Early in the television series *Lost* (created by J. J. Abrams, Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse and aired on ABC from 2004 to 2010), Oceanic Airlines flight 815 (Sydney-Los Angeles) crashes on a Pacific island. Forty passengers narrowly escape death. Lost in an unknown area of the world, they discover that the island is not uninhabited and that strange phenomena occur there. The survivors clash with various bands of 'others,' learn to live together and press a computer button to avoid a major electromagnetic meltdown, but they also decipher the island's mysterious coincidences and magic numbers, travel in time, confront their own disorientation and troubled past and face forward into the future, even into another world.[1] Why and how can Shakespearean romances help us to better understand this series and audiences' reactions to it? This analysis will highlight the 'reading effect' described by Michel Riffaterre as the perception by readers of the relationship between a given text and other texts which may have been written previously or afterward, since the order in which readers encounter works of literature does not always correspond to the chronological order of their composition.[2] One can, for example, discover *Lost* after reading Shakespeare or (re)read Shakespeare after watching *Lost*. While in the traditional study of sources and influences, the intertextual dialogue works from the past to the present, Riffaterre argues that this dialogue can also operate from the present to

[1] S. Hatchuel, *Lost: Fiction vitale* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2013).
[2] M. Riffaterre, *La Production du texte* (Paris: Seuil, 1979), 9.

the past. It is possible to illuminate a text using works that were created centuries afterward. How does one read *Lost* in the light of Shakespeare? How, in turn, can we read Shakespeare in light of *Lost*? Reading *Lost* as a Shakespearean romance can in fact help us to understand the passionate reactions that accompanied the end of the series, reassess this conclusion and understand the possibilities that this fiction provides for a community living in the twenty-first century.

Four plays belonging to Shakespeare's late-phase work[3] – *Pericles* (1607–8), *Cymbeline* (1609–11), *The Winter's Tale* (1609–10) and *The Tempest* (1610–11) – blur the line between genres: they include tragic episodes but conclude with a sense of harmony. While tragedies insist upon the presence of evil and comedies minimize it, romances recognize the reality of human suffering while miraculously ending happily, thereby defying the narrative logic that seems to have triggered the events in the plot. These plays challenge conventional dramatic categories and escape simple definitions.[4] As Lawrence Danson wonders, 'why bother with distinctions in genre when Shakespeare's goal is, so often, to diminish or conflate those distinctions?' In the romances, generic conventions are blended, mixed and clashed, eventually 'undermin[ing] any discursive summary of stable meaning'.[5]

Originally labelled as 'tragicomedies' (a term coined by playwright John Fletcher in his foreword to *The Faithful Shepherdess* in 1608), the plays were re-categorized as

[3] For a discussion on the constructed excavation of a classic 'late period' from the Shakespeare canon and the need to take into account not only the playwright's life but also his writing collaborations, the acting company's repertory and the literary, social and economic environment, see G. McMullan, 'What is a "late play"?', in C. M. S. Alexander (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's Last Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 5–28.
[4] See L. Danson, 'The Shakespeare Remix: Romance, Tragicomedy, and Shakespeare's "distinct kind"', in A. R. Guneratne (ed.), *Shakespeare and Genre: From Early Modern Inheritances to Postmodern Legacies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 102.
[5] *Ibid.*, 103.

'romances' in 1875 by Irish poet and critic Edward Dowden. Unknown or remote locations, geographical and time wanderings, shipwrecks, supposedly dead characters who are actually alive, past conflicts that resurface in the present, lost children, scams, disguises, magical or supernatural interventions, dreams, coincidences, reversals, reunions and redemptions – this is a catalogue of the qualities that define Shakespeare's romances, but it also describes the components of *Lost*. Beyond these thematic parallels, the series seems to raise many of the same narratological and philosophical issues as Shakespeare's late plays. Moreover, *Lost* explicitly includes a reference to Shakespeare in the name of two Dharma[6] stations: 'The Tempest' and 'The Swan'. Like the Shakespearean romances, *Lost* escapes labels and simple definitions: is the series a story of survival, an adventure, a work of science fiction, a fantasy? For all of these reasons, *Lost* invites us to enter into a dialogue with the late plays of Shakespeare.

MOTIFS OF *THE TEMPEST*

Much has been written about the relationship between *Lost* and *The Tempest*, the last of the romances. For example, an entry in the online encyclopaedia *Lostpedia*,[7] a short chapter of the book *Literary Lost*,[8] two academic articles[9] and a BA dissertation in the

[6] Almost an anagram for 'drama'.
[7] See http://lostpedia.wikia.com/wiki/The_Tempest/Theories
[8] S. C. Stuart, *Literary* Lost*: Viewing Television Through the Lens of Literatur*e (New York: Continuum, 2011).
[9] R. Howe, 'New Space, New Time, and Newly Told Tales: *Lost* and *The Tempest*', in R. Laist (ed.), *Looking for* Lost: *Critical Essays on the Enigmatic Series* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2011), 59–71; T. L. Barnes, '*The Tempest*'s "Standing Water": Echoes of Early Modern Cosmographies in *Lost*', in K. J. Wetmore Jr (ed.), *Shakespearean Echoes* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 168–85.

United States all focus on that issue.[10] The links between *Lost* and *The Tempest* are, indeed, most obvious as both works take place on a strange island cut off from the world, a place both utopian and dystopian. The fact that the Dharma station 'The Tempest' is an electric generator suggests a significant metaphor to Kara Zimmerman: *The Tempest* is a source of energy that fuels the fiction of *Lost*.[11]

Lost does not mimic the story of *The Tempest* itself but can be read as a deconstruction and reconfiguration of the play, appropriating themes, figures and references that construct a palimpsest where traces of Shakespeare's play are repeatedly legible. This reconfiguration is particularly marked by a porosity between the figures of Prospero, Caliban and Ariel. Critics and audiences have recognized the powerful magician Prospero (who, driven from his duchy of Milan, causes the storm and brings his old enemies to the island) in Jacob (who similarly acts as the director-demiurge by bringing to the island candidates to succeed him), but also in Rousseau (who sets traps and knows all the corners of the island), as well as in the Man in Black and Ben Linus, the leader of the 'Others' (both of whom manipulate the castaways with illusions and lies). A variation of Ariel, the spirit that is obliged to serve Prospero after being freed from the clutches of the witch Sycorax and who continually asks for his freedom, has been perceived by turns in the characters of the former slave Richard Alpert, Ben, the Man in Black, the smoke monster, and even in the strange voices the series' castaways hear in the jungle. These voices are reminiscent of the murmurs that Ariel speaks into the ears of the play's castaways while he is invisible. Caliban, son of the monstrous witch Sycorax, the rebellious slave who claims

[10] K. M. Zimmerman, 'Hermeneutics and Heterotopias in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and the Cult TV Series *LOST*', April 2010, Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences of Emory University, https://etd.library.emory.edu/view/record/pid/emory:7tm8v (accessed 23 July 2015).
[11] *Ibid.*, 63.

power over the island, is reflected in the characters of Richard Alpert, Ben or the Man in Black.[12] Antonio, who tries, in *The Tempest*, to persuade Sebastian to kill his brother Alonso in order to become king of Naples, recalls the master-manipulator Ben or the Fake Locke, who convinces Ben to kill Jacob.

In *Lost*, elements of *The Tempest* are diffracted and resonate in parallel and varied echoes. From the beginning, the series multiplies incarnations of Prospero, Caliban and Ariel, while producing characters whose roles fluctuate; Ben can in turn evoke both Prospero and Caliban. To adapt the idea of Douglas Lanier in his analysis of the presence of *Othello* in the film *Children of Paradise* (dir. Marcel Carné, 1945), it is as if the plot and structure of Shakespeare's play had been dismantled to become a network of freely flowing themes and motifs.[13] In some ways, *Lost* is a version of *The Tempest* in which one does not discover the existence of the demiurgic magician until the final act.

In Shakespeare's play, the castaways wind up on different parts of the island, stranded by Prospero's storm. Similarly, *Lost*'s Oceanic passengers are brought to the island by the grace of Jacob, or by an electromagnetic incident which caused the plane crash. Castaways on both islands initially believe that they are the only survivors before they meet their fellow passengers and both sets of castaways undergo several tests to redeem their past sins. The separation of the survivors in *The Tempest*[14] parallels the disintegration of the aircraft in *Lost*: the cockpit, the tail and the front of the unit do not

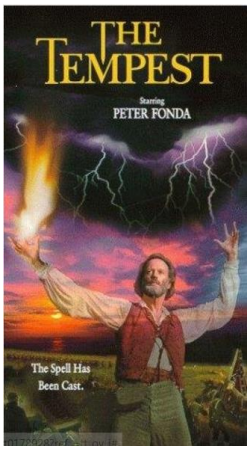
[12] Eziegler, 10 November 2010, http://shakespeare.about.com/b/2010/11/02/is-lost-based-on-the-tempest.htm (accessed 20 June 2014).
[13] D. M. Lanier, '*L'Homme blanc et l'homme noir*: *Othello* in *Les Enfants du paradis*', *Shakespeare on Screen in Francophonia*, ed. Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin and Patricia Dorval, université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3, Institut de Recherche sur la Renaissance, l'âge Classique et les Lumières (IRCL), 2013, http://shakscreen.org/analysis/analysis_homme_blanc/ (accessed 21 June 2015).
[14] '*A confused noise within*. Mercy on us!/ [Voices off stage] "We split, we split!"/ – "Farewell, my wife and children!" – / Farewell, brother!" – "We split, we split, we split!"' (*The Tempest*, 1.1.52–4).

crash in one place. Rose and her husband Bernard will not meet until episode 2.8. In the same way that Act 2 of *The Tempest* begins on the other side of the island, season 2 of *Lost* shows us what has been endured by the survivors of the tail section of the aircraft (episode 2.7 entitled 'The Other 48 Days'), a perspectival shift that provokes a change in the way the audience perceives events in the narrative.

Similarly, the play and the series both raise issues of affiliation and power. Prospero's protective bond with his daughter Miranda is reflected in that of Ben with his daughter, Alex. Ben prohibits love between Alex and her boyfriend just as Prospero initially objects to Miranda's relationship with Ferdinand. If, in *The Tempest*, Miranda and Ferdinand play chess to pass the time before being allowed to marry, backgammon is played by Jacob and the Man in Black, thus equally drawing attention to strategies of obstruction and domination. In the series, the rivalry between Jacob and his brother, or between Ben Linus and Charles Widmore for control of the island recall conflicts between Prospero and his brother Antonio over control of the Duchy of Milan, as well as between Alonso and his brother Sebastian over the throne of Naples. The oppositions between the survivors and the Others and between the Dharma Initiative and its enemies ('the Hostiles') also reflect the conflict between Prospero and Caliban regarding the right to rule on the island: 'This is our island,' claim the Others in *Lost*; 'This island's mine!' (1.2.332) asserts Caliban. Who deserves it most? Whomever was there first or the one whose arrival has been forced by events? The series, like the play, makes us think about the issue of colonialism and what it means to claim rights over land.[15]

[15] K. Gaffney, 'Ideology and Otherness in *Lost*: "Stuck in a bloody Snow Globe"', in S. Kaye (ed.), *The Ultimate* Lost *and Philosophy* (Hoboken: John Wylez & Sons, 2011), 187–204.

The closer we look, the more correspondences we discover between these two texts. In the series as in the play, parents are separated from their children. On the island of *The Tempest*, Alonso searches for his son Ferdinand; on the island of *Lost*, Rousseau seeks her daughter Alex; Claire seeks her baby Aaron; Michael seeks his son Walt. The feast that seems to fall from heaven in *The Tempest* (and which is in fact an illusion staged by Prospero) is echoed in *Lost* by the food boxes parachuted by the Dharma Initiative, as well as by the various visions encountered by the survivors (such as the black horse seen by Kate in the jungle). The magic of Prospero's tomes are reflected in the many books read by the characters of *Lost*, books that were then perceived by viewers as a miraculous source of clues about the meaning of the show. Director Jack Bender, who filmed thirty-eight of *Lost*'s one hundred and twenty-one episodes (including major episodes such as 'Exodus,' 'Dave,' 'The Beginning of the End,' 'The Constant' and 'the End') is also the author of a film of *The Tempest* released in 1998, an adaptation set in a bayou of the Mississippi during the Civil war, in which Harold Perrineau – the actor who plays Michael in *Lost* – performs the part of Ariel.[16]



The Tempest, dir. Jack Bender, 1998

[16] http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0178928/?ref_=nm_knf_i3 (accessed 25 June 2015).

To borrow a question dear to the series: is this a sign of fate or a coincidence? In any case, some viewers of *Lost* do not doubt the affiliation between Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and the television show. One can thus read on a forum, 'airplanes were before Shakespeare's time, but I'm sure that the Bard would have crashed Oceanic Flight 815 on the island if he were writing today.'[17] A mode of conveyance that would have been more familiar to Shakespeare's original audience is in fact included in the show in the form of the Black Rock, an old slave ship which is found incongruously stranded in the jungle.

The Black Rock ship in *Lost*

Shakespeare's *The Tempest* has often been adapted or quoted in science fiction – it provides a literary subtext for influential sci-fi classics such as the film *Forbidden Planet* (dir. Fred McLeod Wilcox, 1956) and the television series *Star Trek* (NBC, 1966–1969). Referring to Shakespeare and appropriating the immense cultural capital he represents

[17] http://shakespeare.about.com/b/2010/11/02/is-lost-based-on-the-tempest.htm (accessed June 2014).

lends a production a gravitas that distinguishes it from other works of popular culture.[18] In the case of *Lost*, however, the relation between 'elite' culture and popular culture seems to be reversing. In 2010, Sky1, the channel on which *Lost* aired in the UK, chose to launch the sixth season with a media and theatrical event. In partnership with the American company The Reduced Shakespeare Company, famous for enacting humorously truncated renditions of Shakespeare's plays, the publicity event offered fans a theatrical production that summarized the first five seasons in only ten minutes.[19] The piece, entitled *LOST Reduced*, was performed on 28 January 2010 at Covent Garden in front of spectators who had won competitions on the radio and on the Internet; it was then broadcast on YouTube.[20] The performance can be viewed as a burlesque and crazy parody of the 'Previously on *Lost*' segment that introduces each episode of the series but it also represents a compelling dramatization of the show's plot and themes. A Chorus presents the action and ultimately reveals that the series was inspired by *The Tempest*. The representation mimics Elizabethan theatrical devices: each actor plays several characters, the female roles are played by men and actors repeatedly address the audience. These self-reflexive interactions with the public recall the kind of meta-narrative remarks expressed by Hurley throughout the show, such as 'I didn't expect this' (1.17, 2.9) or 'Now I want answers!' (1.18). *Lost* might be particularly suitable to this kind of theatrical adaptation because its roots are *already* dramatic.

[18] B. Hodgdon, *The Shakespeare Trade: Performances and Appropriations* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); A. Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); D. M. Lanier, *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), esp. 112.

[19] http://www.televisionaryblog.com/2010/01/lost-reduced-in-london-five-season-of.html (accessed 25 June 2015).

[20] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0eJ3IC0Rkw0 (accessed 25 June 2015).

Just before the performance of *LOST Reduced*, an introductory video, recorded by showrunners Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse, was broadcast to the audience. The designers of the show played roles for fun: Lindelof pretended to believe that the play would be performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company, an arrangement which would canonize *Lost* by associating it with British nobility and the elite tradition of Shakespearean theatre; Cuse brought Lindelof back to earth, reasserting the popular American context in which the show is embedded: he explained to his sidekick that the Reduced Shakespeare Company is not the famous Royal Shakespeare Company, although both troupes share the same initials, and that this is a company based in the United States and not in England. This exchange is significant. *Lost* appears, in fact, torn between a desire to be anchored in a Shakespearean heritage perceived as high-brow and a parallel desire to be rooted in American popular culture, as manifested by the many winks made throughout the series to American pop cultural phenomena such as *Star Wars* and Stephen King's novels. But there is no doubt that *Lost* helps to revitalize and re-popularize Shakespeare, whose cultural capital would falter if his plays were not continually adapted, renewed and reappropriated by/in productions that attract a younger audience.

The perceived linkages between the series and *The Tempest* have had an impact on the world of theatre. In March 2012, English director Jonathan Kaufman planned to produce an open-air version of *The Tempest* in London using *Lost* as inspiration for the decor, costumes, props and music.[21] The production has apparently not (yet) been

[21] Jonathan Kaufman, 12 March 2012: 'I'm considering producing an open-air version of *The Tempest* in London, UK this spring, and would like to use LOST as an inspiration for its design (costumes, music, props etc.). I'd be very interested in reading any comparisons between the Shakespeare original and the ABC TV masterwork.' http://shakespeare.about.com/b/2010/11/02/is-lost-based-on-the-tempest.htm (Accessed 28 June 2014).

assembled but, in the US, the influence of *Lost* on the theatrical community is already explicit. A production of *The Tempest* put on by the Lawn Chair Theater company, directed by Tal Aviezer and performed at Lyon Park in Portchester (New York) from 12 to 14 August 2010, took over the diegetic motifs of the series: the shipwreck was replaced by the crash of a plane and the stories of the past were represented as flashback scenes played before the spectators. The production programme cited the many remote reappropriations of the play, such as *Forbidden Planet* and *Star Trek*, and claimed the desire to 'borrow back' the ideas of these modernized versions into its *mise-en-scène* of Shakespeare's original play.[22] This notion of 'borrowing back' reflects the kind of intertextual traffic and bi-directional exchanges of cultural capital that Shakespearean appropriations have themselves fostered and popularized. Similarly, from 29 March to 13 April 2013, the Patio Playhouse Theatre Company[23] presented a version of *The Tempest* (directed by Spencer Farmer) whose poster reproduces in its colours and layout the publicity materials for *Lost*. Therefore, it is not only the case that *Lost* seems to be an adaptation of *The Tempest*, but it also appears that *The Tempest* seems to derive elements from *Lost* and to enjoy the cultural capital of the series – as well as the show's cultural affiliation with younger audiences.

[22] The programme notes include: '*The Tempest* has been freely adapted and re-adapted by authors and productions over the centuries; science fiction fans, in particular, will recognize that the plot of the 1956 MGM pulp classic *Forbidden Planet* was lifted wholesale from *The Tempest*, and that the recent hit television series *Lost* also counts the play among its many inspirations. In this production, we have taken the liberty of "borrowing back" a few ideas from those modern variations', http://nickleshi.blogspot.fr/2010/08/tempest-when-shakespeare-meets-lost.html (accessed 25 June 2015).

[23] See http://www.patioplayhouse.org/

The poster for the Patio Playhouse production and its *Lost* influence

It is also pertinent to ask whether, in 2010, director Julie Taymor did not choose to locate her film adaptation *The Tempest* – which uses the Shakespearean text – in Hawaii because *Lost* had already been filmed there for the previous six years. Before 2010, Prospero's island had been depicted in a number of metaphorical variations – the island is represented as a mansion in Derek Jarman's version (1979), a library in Peter Greenaway's (1991), an island in the Mediterranean in Mazursky's (1982) and a distant planet in *Forbidden Planet* (1956). By being filmed in Hawaii in 2010, Taymor's new film adaptation seems to prolong *Lost*, the final season of which aired in the same year that Taymor's film was released, as if *Lost* was giving back to the play the impetus Shakespeare had given the series in the first place. These stage and film productions inspired by the series also invite us to read Shakespeare in the light of *Lost*: they make us notice how the play is based on the idea of loss, wandering and reunions – the adjective 'lost' appears eleven times in the play, the noun 'loss' nine times, the verb 'lose' six times.

The Tempest (dir. Julie Taymor, 2010), shot in Hawaii

MOTIFS FROM THE OTHER ROMANCES

If critics and fans have made much of the correspondences between *Lost* and *The Tempest*, they have largely neglected the links between the series and the other Shakespearean romances, as if the focus on *The Tempest* had acted as a kind of screen hiding the connections that *Lost* also suggests with *Pericles*, *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale*. *Lost* has so far been seen as adaptation of *The Winter's Tale* only once: in the book *Shakesqueer* (2011), Kathryn Bond Stockton sees Perdita (the daughter whom Leontes abandons because he thinks she is the fruit of an affair between his wife and his best friend) as a symbol of the *loss* of a homoerotic relationship between Leontes and Polixenes. Stockton observes that the centrality of the theme of loss in *The Winter's Tale* seems to correspond with other themes and images reminiscent of *Lost*:

> Shakespeare knew that his drama in the future would be written from its middle, focusing on the story's outcasts, and that its name could only be *Lost*. (There would be seacoasts, survivors, bears… It would play primetime on ABC...).[24]

The Winter's Tale is, indeed, the only Shakespearean play which includes the following stage direction: '*Exit pursued by a bear*' (3.3.57). In a humorous but meaningful way, Stockton revisits Shakespeare in light of *Lost* as if *The Winter's Tale* had anticipated the TV show's salient motifs – a shore, castaways and characters pursued by (polar) bears.

Howard Felperin situated Shakespeare's plays in the tradition of ancient Greek epics (Homer's *Odyssey*, for example), medieval romances and other works of the Renaissance (such as Spenser's epic poem, *The Faerie Queene*, 1590, 1596).[25] These plays are adventures in which the quest is strewn with perils much greater than in conventional comedies; twists abound until the outcome is not only happy but epiphanic. The marriages and final reunions that take place in Shakespeare's romances do not nullify their emphasis on death and loss. Personal happiness is less important than the appeasement of dissension within the community. While tragedy leads inexorably to death, romance depicts the collective cycle of life and death. In *Lost*, where Jack keeps warning the castaways that they must 'Live together or die alone,' one of the main themes is redemption through a community formed by shared suffering, joy, grief, solidarity, friendship and love. Furthermore, if Shakespeare's comedies generally feature young heroes, romances involve older protagonists. This is also what we see in the plot of *Lost* where Jack, Sayid, Sawyer,

[24] K. B. Stockton, '*Lost*, or "Exit, Pursued by a Bear": Causing Queer children on Shakespeare's TV', in M. Menon (ed.), *Shakesqueer: A Queer Companion to the Complete Works of Shakespeare* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 427.
[25] H. Felperin, *Shakespearean Romance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972).

Juliet, Hurley, Desmond, Penny, Jin, Sun and Jacob are all played by actors who were over thirty years old when the series started shooting; Ben Linus, John Locke, and Charles Widmore were played by men in their fifties.

Romances combine despair and joy, disasters and miracles. Astonishing reversals flip tragic situations into harmonious resolutions through the agency of divine intervention or an immortal force, which can be embodied in many ways. In *Cymbeline*, the god Jupiter appears in a dream to Posthumus, while a soothsayer decodes a prophecy to reveal that England and Posthumus will be ensured of happiness. The goddess Diana dispatches Pericles to Ephesus where he will find his wife. Apollo confirms the fidelity of Leontes' wife in *The Winter's Tale*, a revelation which the enraged king initially refuses to believe. Prophetic revelations also play an important role in *Lost*, in which Charlie, Boone, Locke, Desmond and Mr. Eko all have prophetic dreams. Like Shakespeare's romances, the world of *Lost* is marked by visions, religious epiphanies, spiritual intimations and the decoding of signs.

Although *The Tempest* includes flashbacks that reveal the characters' backstories (for example when Prospero tells his daughter Miranda how Antonio drove him from the court of Milan twelve years earlier), the play respects the dramatic unities of time, place and action. This is not the case with the other romances, which play with geographical shifts and time differences. *Pericles* covers at least a generation with important ellipses. *The Winter's Tale* spans a period of sixteen years: to mark the leap in time at the end of Act 3, Act 4 begins with the intervention of a Chorus called Time.[26] Pericles wanders throughout the Mediterranean and is shipwrecked; *Cymbeline* is set in Britain, Wales and ancient

[26] 'Impute it not a crime/ To me or my swift passage that I slide/ O'er sixteen years and leave the growth untried/ Of that wide gap' (*The Winter's Tale*, 4.1.4–7).

Rome; *The Winter's Tale* oscillates between Sicily, Bohemia and distant, unknown shores. All these geographical journeys paradoxically take place in a unique location – the Globe Theatre itself. Similarly, in its flashbacks and flash-forwards, *Lost* takes us to Germany, Australia, South Korea, the United States, France, Iraq, Nigeria, the Dominican Republic, the United Kingdom, Thailand and Tunisia, but all the sequences are shot in Hawaii, the anchor locale where all of these different parts of the world have been recreated. In both cases, the wide geographical diversity is an artistic illusion that asks the audience to suspend their disbelief.

Another theme of the romances is a focus on the abuse and paranoia associated with patriarchy. Cymbeline rejects the marriage of his daughter Imogen with Posthumus, the man she loves. In *Pericles*, King Antioch is an incestuous father who wants to keep his daughter for himself and imposes a riddle to the suitors in order to murder or control them. In *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes first wants to kill the child he believes to be the fruit of adultery and the baby girl is finally exiled in a remote and desolate place. *Lost* is likewise obsessed with the origin of birth ('who is the father of Sun's baby?' is a crucial issue in season 3) and with undermining patriarchal figures. Ben was abused by his father, whom he will eventually kill during the purge of the Dharma Project; Ben sacrifices his own adopted daughter, Alex, rather than yield to the blackmail of Widmore's mercenaries; Hurley is abandoned by his father, who resurfaces only when his son wins the lottery; Kate killed her father, who brutalized his mother; Sun and Penny both suffer from a tyrannical father; Christian Shephard, the authoritarian and manipulative father of Jack and Claire, never valued his son and was not present for his daughter; Anthony Cooper, Locke's father, scammed his son into donating him a kidney, then abandoned him, threw him through a

window and paralyzed him; Cooper is also indirectly responsible for the death of Sawyer's parents, the same Sawyer who refuses to see his daughter Clementine.

Sawyer appears to be a descendant of Autolycus, the scammer-thief desperate to make money in *The Winter's Tale*. Autolycus claims to have been robbed of his possessions and uses this story as part of a ruse to rob the pockets of passers-by. He sells all kinds of objects (watches, perfumes, gloves, necklaces) and attracts many customers, in the same way that Sawyer coordinates a small traffic in watches before organizing a larger scam. Autolycus and Sawyer both represent a *mise-en-abyme* of the performer, where the actor plays a character who plays at being someone else. If Shakespeare's plays present the world as a stage where we all play parts, *Lost* is also part of this reflection. As soon as the second episode of the series, Sawyer tells Sayid: 'I'm the criminal. You're the terrorist. We can all play a role,' then asks Shannon, 'Who will you be?' The role of the actor is also often emphasized elsewhere throughout the series: the Others wear makeup and costumes to disguise themselves as 'savages'; Kate, on the run, marries under the name Monica; Michael takes the name of Kevin Johnson to embark on Widmore's boat; the Oceanic Six perform an elaborate ruse before the media to protect those who stayed on the island.

Like all Shakespeare's plays, romances are themselves a *mise-en-abyme* of fiction. When he interrupts the entertainment organized for the wedding of his daughter, Prospero announces that the show was played by actors and he ends his address with the famous lines, 'We are such stuff/ As dreams are made on; and our little life/ Is rounded with a sleep' (*The Tempest*, 4.1.156–8). Prospero indicates that the *mise-en-abyme* may well apply to *The Tempest* itself. The fiction may be an illusion, but life itself may be a dream. *Lost* takes up this idea toward the end of the series.

In season 5, thanks to time travel, the characters try to avoid the crash of their aircraft in order to change their fate. The idea is this: if they manage to blow up the island with a hydrogen bomb in the 1970s, the island will no longer exist in 2004 and its magnetic disturbances can no longer affect their aircraft; another timeline will open from the disappearance of the island and their lives may take another course. This possible timeline appears to be represented by the flash-sideways of season 6, a timeline in which Oceanic Flight 815 does not crash on the island. These sequences expose how the characters' lives would play out if the island had stopped existing in 1977. The flash-sideways transform reality into one of many possible worlds, creating the spectre of a world that could have been and which continues to haunt all others. The characters have lived other experiences and have followed a different path: Jack is still a surgeon but has a son, David; Sawyer is not a scammer but a police officer; Ben became a history teacher in a secondary school where he takes a special interest in the future of a young student, Alex, his adopted daughter in his 'first' life. The flash-sideways sequences punctuating season 6 reveal what the characters' lives might have been like, as if the series would begin to operate in the mode of a palimpsest, a self-reflexive text that starts to rewrite itself, showing us a new way to arrange relations and meetings between the characters. It is only in the last episode that the nature of this new timeline is unveiled: we discover that the course of time has not been altered but extended. The flash-sideways are, in fact, flash-aheads (or extreme flash-forwards); they represent a timeless life imagined by the characters to allow them to reunite before 'moving on' to the afterlife. The flash-sideways are revealed as a *post-mortem* dream, a timeless fantasy life that acts as a kind of rendezvous point from which

the characters can embark toward horizons from which there is no return. This life in the hereafter is dreamed collectively by the castaways after they have all passed away.

In Shakespearean romances, the dead are not dead. In *The Winter's Tale*, Hermione, believed to be dead by Leontes, comes back to life when her 'statue' starts to move and speak. In *Cymbeline*, Imogen awakens beside the headless body of Cloten, the man she does not love, dressed in the clothes of Posthumus, whom she loves. Imogen then believes that his beloved is dead. For his part, Posthumus believes Imogen was killed by his servant Pisano. In *Pericles*, Thaisa seems to die while giving birth to her daughter; her body is placed in a coffin and thrown into the sea, eventually washing ashore on the coast of Ephesus, where a healer awakens her. Thinking that she will never see Pericles again, she decides to live chaste in a temple dedicated to Diana. These instances of miraculous resurrections are also found in *Lost*: young Ben and Sayid are brought back to life in the water of the Temple; Christian Shephard and John Locke emerge out of their own coffins; and Penny remains constant for many years, waiting for Desmond, the love of her life, to return from his voyage around the world on a sailboat.

In the romances, characters tend to be reunited, often in a preposterous manner, with their loved ones who had seemed lost forever: the husband meets the wife he thought was dead (Leontes Hermione; Pericles Thaisa); lost or abandoned children (such as Perdita in *The Winter's Tale* and Marina in *Pericles*) are found; wishes are fulfilled. In *Lost*, Sun believes that her husband died in the explosion on the boat, only to find him on the island a few years later. At the end of season 6, the flash-sideways timeline (where everyone remembers what they have experienced, recalls who they are and recognizes the people they have loved) presents a series of unexpected reunions. Imogen and her father meet and

reconcile in *Cymbeline*, paralleling the manner in which Jack and Christian forgive each other in the *post-mortem* dream. Jack, who finds a father and a sister, Claire, may also be read as an Imogen-like figure who finds her father and two brothers, who had been kidnapped in childhood. Her brothers were taken by Belarius, a Roman soldier considered a traitor and banished by King Cymbeline – recalling the manner in which Widmore was banished and exiled from the island in *Lost*. Belarius raises the two children in a wild place away from the society that he considered to be corrupt; but, growing up, the brothers want to know the rest of the world. This subplot of *Cymbeline* reminds one of the upbringing of Jacob and the Man in Black, who were stolen from their birthmother by the character known only as The Mother. She raises them in isolation on the island, but the Man in Black, like Imogen's brothers, commits himself to escaping the island.

Providential coincidences, an essential feature of the romances, are also at the heart of *Lost*: the flashbacks reveal the links between the survivors before they met on the island, as if fate, or the providence represented by Jacob's hand, has been at work the whole time to bring them together. Sawyer had thus already crossed paths with Boone in an Australian police station (1.13) and talked with Christian, Jack's father, in a Sydney bar (1.16) shortly before Christian's death. Jack, likewise, had met Desmond at a stadium in Los Angeles (2.1) before encountering him in the island's hatch; Locke had inspected a house for Nadia, the love of Sayid (2.17); Charlie had saved the same Nadia from street thugs (3.21); Christian and Ana Lucia had met each other in Sydney (2.20); Libby had given a sailboat to Desmond (2.23) for use in a race sponsored by Widmore's foundation; and Kate had met Cassidy, the mother of Sawyer's daughter (3.15).

In Shakespeare's tragedies, the causal chain runs continuously, inexorably, to the final tragedy, leaving no possibility of escape. In the romances, as in *Lost*, time seems, on the contrary, 'reversible': the 'dead' are raised; there is always a possibility of redemption and a second chance to make a fresh start. In *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes, believing his wife to be dead and his daughter lost, languishes and eventually repents. In *Cymbeline*, Iachimo, the traitor who manipulates the lovers with false evidence (convincing each that the other has been unfaithful), finally makes amends. This is a similar kind of redemption achieved by Ben at the end of *Lost*. Destruction gives way to restoration, revenge to reconciliation. Both *Lost* and the Shakespearean romances thus end with a mood of forgiveness and love rather than murder, revenge and bloodshed. These endings challenge audience's generic expectations, challenging what it means for a narrative to come to a 'satisfactory' conclusion and offering a new vision of the world in which conflicts can be resolved. For this reason, reading *Lost* as a Shakespearean romance suggests a compelling model for thinking about narrative and conflict in the twenty-first century.

RECEPTION: FROM SHAKESPEARE TO *LOST*

It may be precisely because of the close resemblances between the ending of *Lost* and the characteristic endings of Shakespeare's romances that the last episode, 'The End,' became the target of so much criticism among fans of the show. The late romances, after all, are the most poorly understood of all of Shakespeare's plays. Howard Felperin speculates that the late romances

> have received less than justice in this century, not so much because they have lacked sensitive readers as because those readers have lacked a working theory of romance … Coming to terms with romance is a difficult task, precisely because romance, of all the imaginative modes, is the most fundamental, universal, and heterogenous.[27]

While Shakespeare's comedies and tragedies are staple texts of English-speaking classrooms, most Anglophones would be hard-pressed to differentiate *Cymbeline* from *Pericles*. Even *The Tempest*, the most widely performed of Shakespeare's late romances, has the status of a kind of footnote to the works that are considered Shakespeare's highest masterpieces, *Hamlet*, *Othello* and *King Lear*. Shakespeare's tragedies and comedies have resonated with audiences in a way that the late romances have not. As Felperin might say, we do have a working theory of tragedy and comedy. The tragic and comic modes have resonated intuitively with the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth-century critics, scholars and performers, who have elevated these works to their lofty cultural status.

The writers of *Lost* side-stepped the question of whether to end their narrative in either the comic or the tragic mode by emulating the spirit of the romances. Eschewing the narrative conventions of 'everybody dies' or 'everybody lives happily ever after,' the ending of *Lost* avoided the easy narrative pay-off that mass audiences tend to expect. Fans of *Lost* who deride the show's final season or final episode resemble fans of Shakespeare who can quote *Hamlet* at length but who demonstrate less affinity for the playwright's late-phase work. In fact, fans' consternation regarding the ending of *Lost* echoes some of the same points of critical bafflement aroused by Shakespeare's late romances. Edward Dowden

[27] Felperin, *Shakespearean Romance*, vii.

articulated the prevailing opinion that *Pericles* 'as a whole is singularly undramatic' and 'entirely lacks unity of action'.[28] Dowden's critique of *Pericles* as a play in which the author fails to bring together the various narrative strands into a complete whole is reminiscent of *Lost* fans' critique of the number of 'loose ends' that remain dangling at the end of the show.

Shakespeare's late romances have also been accused of concluding with tedious scenes of lengthy dialogue in which characters recognize each other and become reconciled to one another. The most famous such critique of Shakespeare's dramaturgy came from George Bernard Shaw, who considered *Cymbeline* a good play that 'goes to pieces in the last act'[29] and who rewrote the play's ending as *Cymbeline Refinished*. Shaw's critique of *Cymbeline* has its contemporary echo in David Zurawik's complaint about *Lost* in the *Baltimore Sun* that 'Once Jack stepped into the church it looked like he was walking into a Hollywood wrap party without food or music – just a bunch of actors grinning idiotically for 10 minutes and hugging one another.'[30]

Samuel Johnson famously wrote of *Cymbeline*, 'To remark the folly of the fiction, the absurdity of the conduct, the confusion of the names … and the impossibility of the events in any system of life, were to waste criticism upon unresisting imbecility, upon faults too evident for detection, and too gross for aggravation.'[31] This scathing indictment of the play's fantastic theatricality parallels Gabriel Bell's riff on the last episode of *Lost*: 'the basic justification for all the bad dialogue, lame sets, pointless diversions, cloying music, ridiculous plot twists, silly performances, unbelievable romances, endless flashbacks, self-

[28] E. Dowden, *Shakespeare* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1889).
[29] G. B. Shaw, 'Cymbeline Refinished: A Variation on Shakespear's Ending', Project Gutenberg Australia, 2003 [1936], http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks03/0301031h.html (accessed 28 June 2015).
[30] D. Zurawik, '"Lost" finale: wondering where the wisdom was', *Baltimore Sun*, 23 May 2010.
[31] S. Johnson, *Notes to Shakespeare: Tragedies*, Project Gutenberg, 2015 [1765], www.gutenberg.org/files/15566/15566-h/15566-h.htm (accessed 28 June 2015).

seriousness, gratuitous wet-T-shirt shots, pretentiousness, over-sentimentalized moments, product tie-ins, on-screen Tweeting (remember that?), constant off-screen online theorizing, and tease, after tease, after tease never comes. Why? *Because there was no secret, no meaning to begin with.*'[32] All of these elements would be acceptable, Bell implies, if they had been subtended by some profound revelation in the show's final episode. In the absence of such a unifying force, the story falls apart into its component pieces in a manner that recalls Lytton Strachey's assessment that, in his late period, Shakespeare was 'no longer interested … in what happens, or who says what, so long as he can find a place for a faultless lyric or a new, unimagined rhythmical effect, or a grand and mystic speech.'[33]

The most salient point of disparagement for *Lost* fans, however, was probably not structural or narratological, but attitudinal. The show had made its reputation from its willingness to kill off characters but now it was letting them pass on into eternity. The show had cultivated an audience of postmodern skeptics, but 'The End' pivots into a mood of syrupy transcendence. The mood of irony which had characterized the show since its inception was suddenly disavowed in favor of a conspicuously un-ironic religiosity. A twentieth-century cosmos of randomness, parallel realities, and quantum indeterminism was revealed to have actually been an essentialist monoverse where everyone is exactly who they were fated to be. This is the betrayal at the root of the resentment of so many *Lost* fans and, although it would be difficult to pinpoint Shakespearean critics making this exact point, a similar dynamic may account for the relative unpopularity of three fourths of Shakespeare's late romances. Shakespeare built his reputation on blood and guts – wrath

[32] G. Bell, 'Did "Lost" actually suck? R29 editors duke it out', *R29*, 12 July 2013, www.refinery29.com/2013/07/49898/lost-tv-show-reviews-criticism (accessed 28 June 2015).
[33] L. Strachey, 'Shakespeare's Final Period', *Independent Review* 3 (August 1904): 414–15.

and revenge, betrayal, catastrophe and piles of beautiful corpses. His late romances disavow this pattern of violence and death, however, replacing it with an ethos of forgiveness and understanding drawn from an idiom of pagan-inflected Christianity. Like the writers of *Lost*, Shakespeare seemed to grow tired of killing off his characters or of simply marrying them off; he arranged for their redemption instead. Over the last four hundred years, Shakespeare's fans have been considerably more interested in the comedies and the tragedies than in the difficult moral demands of the late romances, which combine tragedy and comedy together in ambiguous and frustrating compromises.

How should we understand these parallel cases? On the one hand, although Shakespeare is separated by hundreds of years from Lindelof, Cuse and the other writers of *Lost*, he faced the same problem as a writer of how to follow up on a successful run of scripts in a way that would continue to express artistic growth. While second-rate writers can easily fall back on the strategy of repeating the formulas that worked in the past, writers who aspire to greatness continue to push their creative process in new directions, groping for new kinds of artistic forms and challenging human truths which fans of their previous work may not be prepared to understand. The manner in which Cuse and Lindelof's 'late-phase work' echoes the tropes of Shakespeare's late phase, furthermore, suggests that the Bard provided a model for how to navigate this artistic dilemma. *Lost* had already borrowed so many narratological features from Shakespeare's late romances that, when it came to the question of how to end the show, an ending consistent with the ending of Shakespeare's final plays must have seemed a fitting choice.

In introjecting the moral sensibility of Shakespeare's late romances, moreover, *Lost* takes up a literary mystery that can be considered as a kind of meta-mystery subsuming all

of the plotlines' various enigmas. If Howard Felperin has suggested that we have not yet formulated the key that would help us decipher Shakespeare's romances, Howard Bloom has famously attributed our inability to fathom certain aspects of Shakespeare's thinking to the circumstance that Shakespeare's plays 'remain the outward limit of human achievement: aesthetically, cognitively, in certain ways morally, even spiritually. They abide beyond the end of the mind's reach; we cannot catch up to them'.[34] Northrop Frye has also speculated that 'Whatever we don't like in [Shakespeare] we probably don't fully understand.'[35] According to this principle, our confusion regarding the late romances represents a challenge to construe the difficult wisdom of these texts. In adapting the narratological and moral values of Shakespeare's late romances, *Lost* merges its own story-telling project with the deeper historical mystery of what Shakespeare was trying to tell us in his late-phase work.

A popular critical approach to *The Tempest* is to read it as Shakespeare's response to the bold new seventeenth-century world into which the England of his day was setting out. In the emergence of new technologies, the exploration of new lands and the 'discovery' of new populations of human beings, Shakespeare saw the future taking shape and he crafted the bizarre scenario of *The Tempest* as a way of providing an idiom in which to think about this techno-future. In so doing, Shakespeare arguably invented the genre of science fiction with its characteristic tropes of magical technologies, isolated landscapes and alien beings, a genre which subsequent generations of writers would employ to generate ways of thinking about their contemporary moments. The wider significance of the genre of Shakespeare's late romances, however, has yet to be decoded in this way. The cultural

[34] H. Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998), xix-xx.
[35] N. Frye, *On Shakespeare* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 6.

value of these texts remains limited by our failure to apprehend the patterns of signification embedded in these plays.

Again, the parallel between *Lost* and the romances is conspicuous. Shakespeare wrote his romances from about 1608 to 1611, toward the end of the first decade of his century. The final season of *Lost* was written almost exactly four hundred years later, from 2009 to 2010, at a similar time of anxiety and anticipation concerning the future of global techno-culture. *Lost* had always conspicuously foregrounded its ambition to dramatize some of the most salient features of twenty-first century existence, from its cross-cultural cast to its ecological motifs to its post-9/11 iconography. In its incorporation of the sensibility of Shakespeare's late period, 'The End' of *Lost* promotes the moral values of these plays as a prescription for how to inhabit this bewildering future. Specifically, the show's turn from a distinctly twentieth-century mood of irony and indeterminacy in the first five seasons to the redemptive and transcendental tone of the final episode suggests that coming to terms with the moral climate of the romances may provide clues for contemporary audiences about how to respond to the challenges of the emerging historical period.

Specifically, the same qualities of the final episode that irked so many fans of *Lost* may represent particular points where the writers of the show deviated from the twentieth-century sensibility the show had emblematized and, following the example of Shakespeare's late career, redirected the narrative momentum in the direction of redemption and transcendence. Audiences have criticized *Lost* for leaving so many loose ends and similarly fault Shakespeare's romances for their desultory approach to narration, but both examples reflect an awareness of the limitations of conventional narrative

structures when it comes to representing the complex open-endedness of lived experience, particularly in a century, the seventeenth or the twenty-first, characterized by accelerating hyper-connectedness. The criticism that the ending of 'The End,' like the endings of all four of Shakespeare's late romances, is anti-climactic and garrulous speaks to a distinctly twentieth-century appetite for antagonism and confrontation. The examples of all of these texts communicate an aspiration to pass beyond the model of conflict as the primary motive of narrative into a post-narrative space of dialogue and mutual recognition. The charge that *Lost* represents a tangle of disordered and disconnected narrative strands, a charge that is so similar to the critique that Shakespeare's late plays comprise merely a potpourri of beautiful lines, can be reinterpreted as a compelling challenge to our conventional narrative expectations of closure, resolution and coherence. In *Lost*, did the H-bomb's explosion create the sideways universe (as Juliette seems to suggest with her dying words) or is the sideways universe a mutually constituted afterlife (as Christian Shepard explains in the final sequence)? We might address this narratological aporia in the same spirit with which Barbara Mowat describes similarly disorienting narrative fillips in the romances 'where … we, like the characters, experience bewilderment and uncertainty'.[36] How could the characters survive, spend all this time apart and meet again? Is it even 'really' happening? What is the exact nature of the magical events and supernatural powers we witness? The disorienting 'open form' of romance, Mowat argues, creates a 'theatrical experience which breaks through the aesthetic, deliberately destroying dramatic coherence and consistency in order to awaken us to new insights or disturbing truths'.[37] Mowat's critical approach to Shakespeare's romances provides a compelling model according to

[36] B. Mowat, *The Dramaturgy of Shakespeare's Romances* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1976), 107.
[37] *Ibid.*, 100.

which we can interpret the deliberate ambiguities in *Lost*'s narrative as a challenge to address the extent to which similar ambiguities characterize lived experience.

Finally, the emphasis placed by both the final episode of *Lost* and the Shakespearean romances on the values of redemption, reconciliation, faith and transcendence suggests a direct challenge to the worldview of an audience that prides itself on its cynicism and skepticism. *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *King Lear* are arguably the most nihilistic and despairing works in the history of human expression, and our enduring fascination with these plays reflects our sympathy with the worldview they dramatize so forcefully. Likewise, the most characteristic episodes of *Lost*'s early seasons depict an existential landscape where characters' vulnerabilities are cruelly manipulated, where transcendence is always sadistically deferred until the next episode and where, when the characters do manage to get what they want, they find themselves to be more miserable than ever. In Shakespeare's late phase, however, as in the final half hour of 'The End,' all of the characters' sounds of woe are converted into 'hey nonny nonny'. In both cases, audiences are instructed to aspire toward something higher, more magical, more wonderful and more disorienting than what their expectations had led them to anticipate.

In the last scene of *The Tempest*, Prospero renounces his magic and prepares to drown his books. He implores the audience to deliver him from the prison of the island and from the confines of fiction. Prospero grants Ariel his freedom and spectators of *The Tempest* are invited to free the characters from the story. We are encouraged to abandon the book and to exit the theatre, but we return to a reality that has been transformed by

fiction.[38] In a parallel fashion, the last episode of *Lost*, where each character remembers his past life in the *post-mortem* dream, prepares the spectators for the end of the show: viewers are encouraged to remember highlights from the show in flashbacks, to return to the road travelled, to reflect on what they lived through for six years both within the fiction and outside of it, and, finally, to accept that the story ends, to move on to other fictions and to return to their lives, transformed and reoriented by the series, celebrating the relationships that have marked (and continue to mark) their lives. If fiction is imaginary, if it is artificial, it can also think, say and shout the truth. By writing romances at the end of his career, Shakespeare emphasized not only the strength of the imagination but also the value of fiction and the power of art in general. In *The Winter's Tale*, the statue of Hermione comes alive: a statue, which is supposed to imitate life, becomes 'real' in the same way that the characters of a play come to life for the audience as long as the show lasts. This event specifically reverses the common relationship between art and nature: it is not art that imitates nature but nature (Hermione's life) that imitates art. This interaction between illusion and reality is reflected in the TV series when, at the end of the last episode, Jack finds his deceased father and realizes that he is now dead too:

> Jack. You… are you real?
>
> Christian. I should hope so. Yeah, I'm real, everything that's ever happened to you is real. All those people in the church… they're real too.

Jack's questioning of the reality of the other characters and even of himself refers us to a very Shakespearean reflection on illusion. There wouldn't be any clear boundary between

[38] J. E. Howard, 'Shakespeare's Creation of a Fit Audience for *The Tempest*', in H. R. Garvin and M. Payne (eds.), *Shakespeare: Contemporary Critical Approaches* (Lewisburg, Bucknell University Press, 1980), 142–53.

fiction and reality but a continuum between the two – a continuity that is particularly apparent in the impact that fictions have on our lives. 'Real' life and fiction not only are both evanescent but they are both built out of each other and come to haunt each other. Fiction is fully realized when it invades 'real life' and changes it.

According to Kathryn Bond Stockton, '*Lost* is Shakespeare's heir, His TV.'[39] We will never know what Shakespeare would have written if he had lived or performed in a different time than his, especially since his art is intrinsically linked to the period in which he was born. The series *Lost* is perhaps not the heir of Shakespeare or the TV show that he would have produced, but it presents itself as if this were indeed the case and it has often been perceived as such. The show's final message redirects its audience's cynicism and hopelessness into a strange new world of love and forgiveness, proposing these values as representations of the most challenging mystery of all. It is a message of unique relevance to our contemporary period, if we are thoughtful and responsive enough to take it to heart.

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[39] Stockton, 'Queer children', 427.

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