

Restitutional Shakespeare. Past concerns and present issues

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The Shakespearean oeuvre is full of words like ‘remedy’, ‘remediate’, ‘restore’, or ‘restitute’ that imply the overcoming of a crisis by ‘healingly’ coming back to the old order of before. This is based on the fantasy that, if only one waits long enough, the wheel of fortune will always ‘come full circle’. Quite a substantial number of important plays, however, demonstrate that this is not the case. This can be seen as a crisis of cyclical temporality, giving way to the idea of linearity that up until now seems to have won the day. The contribution first addresses the fantasm of restitution *in* Shakespeare and discusses its negotiation and questioning in some of his plays. It then goes on to address the aspect of healing *through* Shakespeare in the way his plays are used nowadays in the attempt to bring people such as prisoners or inmates of psychiatric institutions, facing personal or private crises of their own, ‘back to normal’. In a last step, it touches on the current crisis of linearity, with its by now death-dealing fantasms of growth and progress, and addresses the question what, in view of the palpable impasses and dead ends of that ideology, Shakespeare might, despite everything, still be able to (politically and epistemologically) ‘do for us’.

1. Restitution in Shakespeare

In *The Tragedy of King Lear*, as early as in act 2, a letter from Cordelia, who is banished and in exile in France, already seems to promise, as Kent reads it, “to give / Losses their remedies”, asking “Fortune” to “smile once more” and “turn thy wheel” (*Lr.* 2.2.161-165).¹ After the scenes on the heath, on coming back from France, ‘Queen’ Cordelia, hearing about Lear’s state of mind, immediately asks what she can do “In the *restoring* his bereavèd sense” (4.4.10), before she calls out: “All blest secrets, / All you unpublished virtues of the earth, / Spring with my tears! be aidant and *remediate* / In the good man’s distress!” (16-19) Finally when meeting Lear, she begs: “O my dear father! *Restoration* hang / Thy *medicine* on my lips; and let this kiss / *Repair* those violent harms that my two sisters / Have in thy reverence made!” (4.7.26-29)

¹ All quotes are, under the usual abbreviations, to the Norton edition of Shakespeare, 1997 (for *King Lear*, I quote from the so-called “Conflated Text”); all emphases, unless otherwise indicated, are mine.

Similarly, in *As You Like It*, Rosalind, the banished duke's daughter, towards the end of the play, says: "I have promised to *make* all this matter *even*", and ends her speech by corroborating: "and from hence I go / To *make* these doubts all *even*" (*AYL* 5.4.18/24-25), thus offering the "*wise remedy*" (1.1.20-21) initially sought for by Orlando – and also by Duke Senior – against the 'uneven' treatment they have suffered from their brothers. "Then there is mirth in heaven", harmonious Hymen knows, helping Rosalind, "When earthly things *made even / Atone* together." (5.4.97-99) 'Atonement', 'attunement', being 'at-one', are visible / hearable signs of everything being 'in accord' again: of everybody being in their 'ordinary' place, of all the lands "*restored*" (153), and everybody sharing "the good of our *returnèd fortune*" (163).

Shakespeare's world is full of words like 'remedy', 'remediate', 'restore', or 'restitute', that imply (if not conjure) the overcoming of a 'crisis' by 'healingly' (and 'believingly') coming back to the 'good old times' 're-storing' the 'old' order – which, as a matter of fact, is the only one imaginable in that period: a hierarchy of social classes following the idea of a vertically organised 'chain of being' as the rational 'will' imposed upon 'the' (one and only) world by God as its creator.² This world is invariably 'guaranteed' by the Christian God who 'made' it;³ and 'time' (and, of course, human action in time) may disrupt it and its order, but this same 'time' will always somehow, as the cyclical time that it is, 'healingly' lead back to the state in which everything is as it should be. "O time," says Viola in *Twelfth Night* facing the confusions caused by doublings and false identities, "thou must untangle this, not I. / It is

² For a competent and concise introduction to Shakespeare's 'world' see Stephen Greenblatt's "General Introduction" in Shakespeare, 1997: 1-76; still one of the (to my mind) best overviews of early modern 'Elizabethan' background knowledge is Elton, 1991, for the 'chain of being' and God's role in this see p. 18 (as well as, classically, Tillyard, 1978).

³ For the (largely medieval and Christian) concept of reality as one 'guaranteed' by God see Blumenberg, 1979:

too hard a knot for me t'untie.” (*TN* 2.2.38-39) What cyclical time ideally does in the end is (‘untangling’) realign, on a par, ‘father’ and ‘daughter’, ‘brother’ and ‘brother’, family member and family member, eventually re-establishing the illusion that “The wheel is come full circle!” (*Lr.* 5.3.173)⁴

This vocabulary of restitution is extremely dense in the works of Shakespeare. Among all the words referring to the notion of re-establishing, not so much a previous but an eternal, or ‘immutable’, *status quo* – words such as ‘recover’, ‘redeem’, ‘redress’, ‘remediate’, ‘repair’, ‘repeal’, ‘restitute’, ‘restore’ –, the *Harvard Concordance to Shakespeare* lists 49 entries for the different forms of ‘redeem’ (‘redeem’d’, ‘redeem’st’, ‘redemption’), 30 entries even for a rare word like ‘redress’, and 62 for the word ‘remedy’ alone (without counting its derivations).⁵ As a matter of fact, the word ‘remedy’ appears in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Measure for Measure*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *As You Like It*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *All’s Well that Ends Well*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Winter’s Tale*, *King John*, the second part of *Henry IV*, the first and second parts of *Henry VI*, in *Henry VIII*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Coriolanus*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Cymbeline*, in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, as well as in his non-dramatic work.⁶

This does not really come as a surprise. The genres themselves that Shakespeare makes use of seem to be interested in leading back to restitution. Comedies are somehow restitutorial ‘by nature’, in the sense that they are bent on celebrating harmony, and order, for

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⁴ For the medieval and early modern fantasm of order as a state of ‘evenness’ among feudal ‘peers’ seen as ‘brothers’ see Mahler, 2005: 182-184.

⁵ See Spevack, 1973, under the words given above.

⁶ *Idem*, 1048-1049, s.v. ‘remedy’; the order of the plays arbitrarily follows the order of the entries.

their endings to be ‘happy’, the most frequent device, of course, being reintegration through marriage.⁷ Tragedies, too, are bent on coming back to the old order, though at the price of (as Cordelia has it) ‘losses’. What they stage is restitution through elimination – if not immediately by killing, then by taking ‘evildoers’ out of the game, such as by banishing them or sending them into exile. The histories, whether they are staged as tragedies (as is *Richard III*), or as comedies (as are parts in *Henry IV* or, explicitly again, its spin-off, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*) have a share in both. In a way, one could even argue that the two tetralogies of Lancaster and York as a whole follow the pattern of cyclical restitution with the first Tudor king Henry VII as their final restitutorial ‘hero’, who – after aptly diagnosing that “England hath long been mad, and scarred herself; / The brother blindly shed the brother’s blood; / The father rashly slaughtered his own son; / The son, compelled, been butcher to the sire” – eventually sees himself in a position to “*unite* the white rose and the red”, which enables him to ensure that “peace lives *again*” (*R3* 5.8.23-26/19/40).

Epistemologically speaking, with regard to the ‘world picture’, this medieval / early modern crave for restitution seems to be a natural consequence of the view of cyclicity already mentioned. In this sense, ‘disorder’ looks as if it were either a tragic or a comic ‘flaw’ to be removed in order for ‘the world’ to be able to get ‘back to normal’: to ‘what it (invariably) *is*’.⁸

⁷ One of the most influential formulations of this has been Northrop Frye’s ‘myth of comedy’; see Frye 1990: 163-186 (for a similar structuring of tragedy as following the ‘wheel of fortune’ see pp. 206-223); for a more systematic re-development of this, attributing to comedy a ‘pattern of restitution’ (“Restitutionsschema”) which, however, remains secondary only in relation to the primary comic elements apt to release laughter, see the seminal remarks in Warning, 1976, the quote p. 284.

⁸ The classical description of this concept of ‘order’ as opposed to a general fear of ‘mutability’ or change is, despite all recent criticism and modifications, Tillyard, 1978: 17-25.

2. Restitution in crisis

And yet, at times, even in the comedies, the restitution offered by the ending remains tellingly incomplete. In *As You Like It*, melancholy Jaques, being “for other than for dancing measures”, refuses to join the celebrations, preferring, with the converted Frederick, a life outside “the pompous court” (*AYL* 5.4.182; 171). In *Twelfth Night*, it is the all-too-serious Puritan Malvolio who remains excluded (“I’ll be revenged on the whole pack of you”; *TN* 5.1.365). In *The Merchant of Venice*, it is the ‘foreigner’, if not downright the Jew, who does not fit and will not be (re-)integrated; in *Much Ado*, it is the ‘bastard’; and in *Measure for Measure*, it might even be the bride-to-be herself (with Isabella not explicitly consenting to the Duke of Vienna’s abrupt and unexpected marriage wish).

This doubt about a complete ‘restitutability’ of order, this kind of early modern skepticism, is even more poignant in some of the tragedies.⁹ In *Hamlet*, the eponymous hero is visibly unenthusiastic about his presumptive role of restitutive hero: “The time is out of joint”, he says right at the end of act 1, “O cursèd spite / That ever *I* was born to *set it right!*” (*Ham.* 1.5.189-190) And, as a matter of fact, the wished-for restitution never quite comes about. True, Hamlet manages to eliminate Claudius, the presumptive usurper, as well as Laertes, who in turn tries to take (restitutive) revenge against Hamlet for the inadvertent killing of his father (as well as for Ophelia’s death). But, even though he eventually does ‘set it right’ again, Hamlet, doomed to die, does not succeed in establishing himself as king. All he can ask for is “To tell my story” (5.2.291), which, in Horatio’s words, turns out to be an unrestitutive jumble “Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts, / Of accidental judgements, casual

⁹ For an alternative history of early modern English literature under the auspices of the impact of skepticism, see <http://www.new-faces-erasmusplus.fr/>

slaughters, / Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause; / And, in this upshot, purposes
mistook / Fall'n on th'inventors' heads" (325-329). Instead of providential wisdom leading to
the 'promised end' of 'redeeming' order, all we get is a concatenation of contingencies, with
Hamlet as a king in the subjunctive ("For he was likely, *had he* been put on, / To have proved
most royally"; 341-342) – and with Fortinbras as an accidentally bystanding benefitter
happening to carry on the royal business.¹⁰

The restitutorial cycle is arguably even more under interrogation in *King Lear*. Because
what we as audience have to witness is its semantic invalidation, its annulment, right in front
of our eyes. In actual fact, Cordelia *does* find the remedy to restore peace between herself and
her father. She even does win the battle against her sisters, though, admittedly, only through
the mutual elimination of the two, when suddenly, and inappropriately, she dies. With Lear
being torn between the diagnosis that "She's dead as earth" (*Lr.* 5.3.260) and the vain hope
that, all the same, her breath might stain a mirror indicating that "she lives" (262), Kent, as the
most restitution-minded character of the play, who right in the division of the kingdom is the
first to admonish Lear in an "unmannerly" (1.1.145) way to "[r]everse" (149) his state and to
immediately "[r]evoke" (165) his gift, vaguely speculates: "Is this the promised end?"
(5.3.262), and Lear answers: "This feather stirs; she lives! If it be so, / It is a chance which
does *redeem* all sorrows / That ever I have felt." (264-266) This chance, however, never
comes. Cordelia *is* dead after all, and with the news coming that "Edmund is dead" (294), too,
the last potential gratification for the restitutorial mind would be to see at least Lear re-
established as king. And this is precisely what happens: "You lords and noble friends," says

the seminal book by Lobsien, 1999.

¹⁰ This is what Jonathan Dollimore has discussed in general terms under the heading of a 'disintegration of

Albany, one of the last remaining feudal characters on stage, in imitation of act 1, scene 1, “know our intent. / What comfort to this great decay may come / Shall be applied. For us, we will *resign*, / During the life of this old majesty, / To him our absolute power” (295-299). The word ‘re-sign’ here quite literally signifies ‘to restitute the signs with all their meanings’, which, ‘happily’, means: Lear is king again. And yet, this is precisely the moment – “O, see, see!” (303) – when Lear dies, too (309). The wheel has indeed come full circle, the restitution is complete, but there is no one left to represent the restored order. All that the characters can state is: “The weight of this sad time we must obey; / Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.” (322-323) And what they feel is ‘woe’, not ‘mirth’. There is no restitutorial ‘mirth in heaven’, nothing on earth is ‘even’. What the characters – and we, the audience – have to face is nothing but chaos and contingency.

3. *Negotiating the crisis: cyclicity into linearity*

Before Hamlet knows that he must act, he must find out which side he is on. If the ghost speaks true, Hamlet is, despite everything, on the safe side and can act in the name of restitution. But if it is an ‘evil’ ghost, it might be leading him into temptation (just as the witches do with Macbeth), and it might precisely make him destroy the order he is trying to restore. This can be seen as a (perspectivized) ‘double plot’.¹¹ And indeed, Shakespeare has already experimented with such a mutually exclusive double pattern before *Hamlet* – in his

providentialist belief”, see Dollimore, 1989: 83-108.

¹¹ I take the idea of a ‘double plot’ simultaneously narrating two mutually exclusive stories from the discussions of what he calls ‘arbitrary narration’ in Martínez, 1996; for the idea of perspectivization in drama and, hence, producing two or more points of view on the ‘same’ story, ending up either in a resolvable ‘closed’ or an irresolvable ‘open perspective structure’, see Pfister, 1991: 57-68.

Julius Caesar.¹² If it were certain that Caesar would turn tyrant, the conspiracy would be legitimate. But as long as this is not certain, the conspiracy would mean a disruption of order. In the one pattern, Brutus would be a restitutional hero saving the republic. In the other, he would be one of the culprits creating chaos – and he would be a threat to the commonwealth.

One potential remedy to solve this dilemma is ‘fiction’. In *Hamlet*, it lies in the arrival of the troupe of players and in Hamlet’s idea of letting them stage the doubling game of the *Mousetrap*, which in the end convinces him to the point of “tak[ing] the Ghost’s word for a thousand pound” (*Ham.* 3.2.263-264), with Claudius a little later confessing (to himself and us) his “guilt” (3.3.40). In *Julius Caesar*, the remedy to solve the dilemma of preventive action (“Then lest he may [become a tyrant], prevent”; *JC* 2.1.28) lies in Brutus’s wilful autosuggestive move to “*Fashion* it thus: that what he is, augmented, / *Would run* to these and these extremities; / And therefore *think him as* a serpent’s egg, / Which, hatched, *would* as his kind grow mischievous, / And kill him in the shell.” (30-34) In *As You Like It*, this faculty of inventing, and ‘displaying’, scenarios as the basis for action finds itself commented upon by Touchstone’s wise insight that “Your ‘if’ is the only peacemaker; much virtue in ‘if.’” (*AYL* 5.4.91-92)

‘Fiction’ has been defined as an agency that helps us to ‘identify in distancing’, thus opening up an ‘anthropological dimension’ that would otherwise not be accessible to us.¹³ This is precisely what seems to be at stake with reference to Claudius. Despite Hamlet’s all too obvious protestations that “This play is the image of a murder done *in Vienna* [i.e. not at Elsinore]. *Gonzago* [i.e. not Claudius] is the *Duke’s* [not the King’s] name, his wife *Baptista*

¹² For a discussion of Brutus’s ‘restitutional’ dilemma of not knowing which story he is in, see Mahler, 2005.

¹³ For the idea of fiction as a ‘staged discourse’ that, in initiating us “into distancing”, is apt to provide us with what the sociologist and anthropologist Helmuth Plessner has called a “gain of anthropological dimension”, see Warning, 1980, the quotes on p. 52 (the reference is to Plessner, 1974); for a very similar version of seeing fictionalizing speech acts as agencies of ‘display’, see Pratt, 1977: 132-151.

[not Gertrude]” (*Ham.* 3.2.217-219), it is precisely through the fiction of the *Mousetrap* that Claudius begins to face his (willingly repressed) Danish reality. This is no longer restitution *within* a fiction; it is above all restitution *through* a fiction. Like a detective, Hamlet uses the fiction to find out what ‘really happened’. He uses it as an instrument to detect some ‘linear’ hidden truth, which means that the agent of truth is no longer a ‘guaranteeing’ God cyclically leading back to what is but, rather, a human individual (such as Claudius or, as for that, Hamlet himself) ‘realizing’ through his actions a result that can then be seen as the ‘reality’ realized by him (and corroborated by the observable ‘facts’).¹⁴ This is the early modern epistemological shift from a ‘theological’ closed cyclicity to a ‘secular’, and ‘empirical’, open linearity.¹⁵

4. Restitution through Shakespeare

This use of a restitution *through* fiction is not merely a hypodiegetic means of solving an intradiegetic problem – a kind of more or less artistic ‘explicative’ *mise en abyme*.¹⁶ It can above all be seen in stagings of Shakespeare for manifest therapeutic (i.e. extradiegetic or, even more, extratextual) purposes. It seems most prominent in all those ‘Shakespeare behind bars’ productions that have become an immense focus of interest in recent times.¹⁷ What these

¹⁴ For the early modern / modern concept of seeing reality as the ‘result of a realization’ or, as can be seen more directly in the staging of the *Mousetrap* for Claudius and his court, as the individual ‘actualization of a context’, see Blumenberg 1979: 32-33; for an epistemological reading of the *Mousetrap* as an early modern empirical experiment leading to evidence as its result, see Mahler, 1997: 265-267.

¹⁵ For a thorough description of what he calls the ‘translation’ of ‘cyclical-temporal myth-making’ into ‘linear-discrete plot-making’ (and the early modern ‘superimposition’ of the two), see, with special reference to *As You Like It*, Lotman, 1979-1980: 163-169, as well as Lotman, 1990: 153-157; for a more detailed account of this, with reference above all to *As You Like It*, *King Lear*, and *Hamlet*, see Mahler, 2016.

¹⁶ For the *mise en abyme* as a thematic, explicative, or actional reduplication of the same on another (usually lower) diegetic level, see Rimmon-Kenan, 1983: 92-94; her reference is to Dällenbach, 1977.

¹⁷ For the sake of brevity, I restrict myself to focusing on prison productions only, and leave out other comparable uses of Shakespeare such as, e.g., performances in psychiatric contexts or for educational purposes. For the recent interdisciplinary debate on redemptive dramatherapy against recidivism see, among many others, Heard *et al.*, 2013, Herold, 2014, Pensalfini, 2016, Nicklin, 2017, and, with regard to Italy, Tempera, 2017, and Cavecchi, 2017 (as well as her contribution to the section on “Shakespeare in Captivity” in this collection of essays); for a similar use of Shakespeare in the field of general education, see the contributions on “Shakespeare and Education” in this collection.

productions do is make direct, pragmatic use of the Shakespearean fiction in order to address the inmates' personal predicaments and problems – precisely through the fiction-based amalgamation of identification *and* distance.

In the brothers Taviani's celebrated movie *Cesare deve morire / Caesar Must Die*, which was awarded the 2012 Golden Bear in Berlin, we can see the inmates of the high security section of the Roman prison of Rebibbia come together in order to stage Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* within the context of Fabio Cavalli's prison project *Compagnia di teatro libero*.¹⁸ What we are allowed to witness is a slow, authentic, and sometimes rather painful process of appropriating fictitious roles in which the prisoner-actors 'doubly' and 'distancingly' acquire deep insights into what it means to make decisions, to involve other people's lives, and to have to bear the consequences of what one is doing. The most revealing moments in the movie, with regard to acknowledging this (in a kind of extratextual *anagnorisis*), are the 'interfaces'¹⁹ when the Roman fiction of the conspiracy and the inmates' prison / pre-prison realities visibly overlap: e.g., when 'Cassius' asks 'Brutus' to trust him, and one of the bystanders mumbles that this is precisely what got him into prison: "Don't trust anyone, you great actor. I did and look what happened to me!" (*CMD* 00:18:22); or, when the actor of Brutus stops acting because the lines he has to say are 'hurtingly' similar to the ones some good friend of his uttered in his presence in a real-life situation in the streets of Naples, with him at the time not believing his friend and denying him the necessary solidarity: "And now it hurts me" (00:28:27-00:30:22); or, when the Italy-born actor of 'Caesar' and the Argentina-born actor of 'Decius' – on the basis of Decius trying to convince Caesar to come to the

¹⁸ See Taviani / Taviani (dir.), 2012, abbreviation used: *CMD* (I quote from the English subtitles); for a more detailed discussion of the project see Valentini, 2016, the chapter "The Prison House of Italy. *Caesar Must Die*"

forum despite all the warnings regarding the Ides of March – begin to fight out in reality what the two prisoners have so far accumulated during their internment as (tacit) mutual prejudices, accusations, and aggressions: “He’s really good at playing the schemer.” (00:35:28-00:36:33)

The overall intention of the enterprise looks decidedly restitutive or ‘redemptive’.²⁰ What seems to be tentatively restored through the acting is the hope for some kind of ordinary ‘communal life’ in society – the return to a socially compatible, communally acceptable, behaviour: a return of the ability to relate ‘properly’ to others again in society. Through the interfaces, this leads to various instances of ‘cathartic’ recognition, so that, as some captions at the end of the movie tell us (01:09:34-47), two of the actors begin to write ‘confessional’ autobiographies, whereas ‘Brutus’, after regaining his freedom, manages to become an actor himself, thus reintegrating himself by turning the idea of ‘distancing’ for the sake of finding an ‘identity’ into a downright profession. And even still in the ‘fiction’, the actor of ‘Caesar’, one of the book authors, who serves a life sentence, redeemingly, and regretfully, ends up admitting that he at last begins to realize what it means to him to have lost his freedom, and he finally starts seeing his cell as the ‘prison’ that it is: “Since I got to know art, this cell has become a prison.” (01:08:45)

in Bassi, 2016: 181-201, *Tempera*, 2017, as well as the interview in Pipolo, 2012.

¹⁹ I owe this term to Martin Procházka.

²⁰ For the insight that the actor of ‘Brutus’, Salvatore Striano, in his 2016 autobiography *La tempesta di Sasà* sees “his criminal experiences redeemed through Shakespeare”, see Cavecchi, 2017: 6.

5. Which restitution and for whom?

In a strict sense, however, ‘restitution’ is, as even Shakespeare keeps reminding us, a ‘promise’ (only), an ‘illusion’ – or, as some would say, it is a ‘utopia’.²¹ Even the most orthodox medieval Christian belief would not affirm that the wheel ‘coming full circle’ ends at exactly the same place where it has started. This brings me to my last point. Because what Shakespeare ‘can do for us’ is probably much less to give us the hope that ‘all is well that ends well’ than to make us aware of what ‘restitution’ means and what it does not mean. It never, not even in its most cyclical belief, actually really means to come back to the ‘same’. In a cyclical sense, it aims at ‘renewal’. With regard to the prison activities, it means a new chance – a recognition of what has happened, and then a start into a new life and not (as is to be hoped) yet another start into the old life again.

If Shakespeare’s problematically ‘open’ plots such as *Hamlet* or *King Lear* – as the ‘laboratories’ or agencies of ‘negotiation’ that they are²² – show (or ‘display’) that the ‘premodern’ cyclical belief in restitution is nothing but an illusion, epistemologically (and perhaps unwillingly) to be replaced by an alternative ‘modern’ belief privileging a linear and individual ‘realization of a reality’, what we are facing today is the (if one likes) ‘postmodern’ crumbling of this up until now rather convincing linear idea of realization itself.²³ The promises, however, have remained the same. Today’s rulers, be their names ‘Merkel’, ‘Macron’, ‘May’, ‘Trump’, ‘Tsipras’, or whatnot, still seem to promise the restitution of

²¹ For a thorough discussion of the concept of utopia, see Vieira, 2010.

²² I owe the idea of the ‘laboratory’ to Kiss, 2010: 8; for the idea of a ‘negotiation’ of contemporary social problems in a context of ‘aesthetic empowerment’, see Greenblatt, 1992: 1-20, esp. pp. 5-7.

²³ I am referring once again to Blumenberg 1979; for a fourth concept of reality as one of ‘resistance’, ‘unavailability’ or ‘contingency’ as “*that which cannot be mastered by the self*”, see pp. 33-34 (emphasis in the original).

economic growth, wealth and progress – mostly through (‘realizing’) phases of intense austerity. They suggest that, despite all feelings of ‘crisis’, they / we will be able to ‘heal’ the felt (or real) ‘crises’ by ‘redeemingly’ making our countries ‘great’ / ‘rich’ / ‘autonomous’ / ‘homogeneous’ ‘again’, and that what mostly holds the promise is a return to what was – Brexit / Grexit / Czexit, the ‘return’ to some bucolic Bohemia, an ancient ‘Grecian grandeur’, a ‘merry old England’ (that never was).

In a linear system, however, this is all the more difficult. How can one ‘get back’ when all one does is progress? Shakespeare is certainly not the solution but he is definitely a means. Supposing that ‘Shakespeare’ has become one of the most powerful global metonymies for ‘fiction’, and accepting that fictions are media of raising awareness through distance, what Shakespeare can arguably ‘do for us’ is not so much (in an escapist act) to lead us back to the ‘good old times’ but (cognitively and ‘politically’) to force us to take a thorough look at what ‘restitution’ means – and at what it does and what it does not do. Watching, and performing, Shakespeare makes us, once again or still, aware of the fact that a crisis will never be solved by coming back to the old ideas, but that what we need is always definitely something new.

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