Litera: Dil, Edebiyat ve Kültür Araştırmaları Dergisi
Litera: Journal of Language, Literature and Culture Studies

Litera 2024; 34(2): 423-442
DOI: 10.26650/LITERA2024-1502312

Research Article

The Interview and its Intertexts: Staging Princess Diana in a Mediatized Age

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Submitted: 17.06.2024
Revision Requested: 20.09.2024
Last Revision Received: 07.10.2024
Accepted: 07.10.2024

Citation: Poore, B. (2024). The Interview and its Intertexts: staging Princess Diana in a mediatized age. *Litera, 34*(2), 423-442. https://doi.org/10.26650/LITERA2024-1502312

ABSTRACT

The 1995 BBC interview with Princess Diana, on its flagship current affairs programme *Panorama*, is one of the most famous events in television history. It has since become infamous with the publication of the Dyson Report in 2021 and the BBC's acknowledgement that the reporter Martin Bashir used deception to secure the interview. Recordings of the *Panorama* programme, and all programmes featuring Bashir, have since been erased from the BBC's platforms. This article takes a stage drama about these events, *The Interview* by Jonathan Maitland, as a case study, a 'problem play' that requires us to rethink the usually discrete categories of adaptation, documentary drama, history play, and factual and fictional writing. The article draws on Eckart Voigts's concept of recombinant appropriation in order to understand how the stage play borrows from previous and recurring representations of the Princess. It then uses Seda Ilter's idea of mediatized dramaturgy to question how far *The Interview* explores the cultural implications of this dense intertextual network. Finally, the article argues more generally for an account of intermedial adaptation that works across both spatial and temporal dimensions. The decentred, multidirectional 'rhizomatic' or 'archontic' webs of adaptational relationships need to be complemented by multiple chronologies for us to be able to read adaptations in their cultural moment.
Keywords: Adaptation, appropriation, documentary drama, history play, Princess Diana

Introduction

The Interview by Jonathan Maitland premiered at the Park Theatre in Finsbury, North London, in November 2023, directed by Michael Fentiman. The play reflects on the interview that Diana, Princess of Wales gave to Martin Bashir on the BBC's *Panorama* programme in 1995, an interview credited with hastening the end of Diana's marriage to Prince Charles and exposing the cruelty of life as an outsider in the royal family. The intensity of stage and screen activity around reimagining the life of Princess Diana makes *The Interview* an apt case study in the theatrical adaptation of recent historical material. This essay asks how the example of *The Interview* enables us to extend or

expand on two relevant theoretical models: Eckart Voigts' formulation of *recombinant appropriation,* and Seda Ilter's concept of *mediatized dramaturgy*. Of the former, I ask what happens when a theory that is so well-adapted to digital remediation is applied to a work of theatre; of the latter, I ask what opportunities might exist for a play about such an endlessly remediated subject – Princess Diana – to be subversive in its theatrical form. The second part of the essay asks how these insights about mediatization and appropriation in *The Interview* require us to look again at rhizomatic, or networked, meta-theories of adaptation. I will propose that a metaphor of rhizomatic or archontic intertextualities – including adaptations, appropriations, historical dramas *and* documentaries – enable us to visualise the connections between texts more holistically. This is especially the case since recent work on adaptation and history has called into question the categorical distinctions between these types, and since adaptation in practice uses all these kinds of material. With the case study of *The Interview* in mind, however, I argue that a networked mapping of relationships is insufficient in itself; its spatial account of intertextuality must be accompanied by a temporal one. A synchronic 'thick description' of the way that a topical play like this operates, must also offer a diachronic account of how these tropes and common elements have travelled.

As the above overview suggests, I see *The Interview* as a 'problem play' in a number of productive ways that force a rethink of how we usually conduct analysis of both adaptation and the history play. Firstly, it would not be possible to write a case study that compares source with adaptation, in the time-honoured but overfamiliar model that Kamilla Elliott has highlighted (Elliott, 2020, pp. 212-16), because *The Interview* does not have any agreed singular 'source' or 'original', but instead adapts from a range of materials. Following the conclusions of the BBC's Dyson Report in 2021 that concluded that Bashir has forged documents and misled the Princess in order to pressure her into giving the interview, the *Panorama* programme is no longer available on any BBC platforms, and Bashir has also been removed from all BBC archive recordings available to the public. Secondly, given this striking absence of the 'source' – and given the range of fictionalised treatments of Princess Diana's life story, as well as the various fictions that were presented as fact in her lifetime – any play on this subject now places itself in a nexus of factual and fictional intertexts through which an audience will interpret it as an intervention. A third problem that *The Interview* presents is that, unlike most new plays in UK theatre (Edgar, 2021), it does not exist as a published play text, but as

a live performance and, currently, as a streamed recording from Original Theatre.[1] Hence, the idea of text and performance informing each other and working as a process rather than a finished or bounded product[2], cannot be applied knowledgeably here with the publicly available resources. A performance that exists live and on video but not as text, and an adaptation that has no available direct source, but which is surrounded by documentaries and dramas representing or functioning as proxies for the source, demands that we theorize and interpret it accordingly.

Recombinant Appropriation and 'Old Media'

With this set of relationships in mind, it makes sense to explore the ramifications of considering *The Interview* as what Voigts (2017) calls a 'recombinant appropriation'. Voigts' focus is on how we account for more recent cultural forms, such as 'compiled videos, samplings, remixes, reboots, mashups, short clips, and other material involving text, sound, vision—typically found (and lost) on web-based video databases' (2017, p. 286). He proposes that, as 'remix and mashup vids and clips tend to refunction and remodel existing material, they are better called "appropriations" than "adaptations" and adds that 'the qualifier "recombinant" […] suggests that these texts and practices conjoin all sorts of material from multiple sources' (2017, p. 286). One of the examples that Voigts discusses is the comedic appropriation of the film *Downfall* (2004), which led to the online circulation of 'hundreds of subtitled variations on a scene in which Hitler (Bruno Ganz) has a violent outburst in the Führerbunker on learning that promised troops will fail to arrive in the final stages of World War II' (2017, p. 288). Members of these participatory communities became known as Untergangers, after the original German title for *Downfall*, *Der Untergang* (Voigts 2017, p. 292). Applying this interpretative framework to the decidedly old-media cultural form of the theatrical performance offers some benefits, however, given the particularity of *The Interview* as already discussed. Voigts writes of the Untergangers that '[T]he case signals a shift from an adaptational mode dominated by hermeneutic concerns (rereading texts) to a performative, appropriative attitude toward text as material to be transformed or "versioned" (Voigts, 2017, p. 292). This seems an apt description for a play based on a royal interview that no longer officially exists, by royal order, and which is quite different

1 In the absence of a published text, where I have quoted from the play in this article, I have used a time stamp for the recorded performance.

2 See, for example, the work of M. J. Kidnie (2009) on Shakespeare's play texts, their adaptations in performance, and how this can influence subsequent editions of the play.

from a novel-to-stage adaptation. The absent source continues to be recirculated in dramatized recreations of the interview, in the discourse of the BBC's Dyson enquiry that acknowledged Bashir's wrongdoing, and even embedded in other fictions[3], but it is not available to be 'read' as a source text in the way that, say, the novel *Jane Eyre* is. Hence, every iteration on stage or screen now is performative, a reversioning of previous versions of the Diana interview.

Voigts indicates that the recombinant appropriations that he discusses can be recognised as such by their observation of the *scripts* and *protocols* of that specific genre (examples that he gives include supercuts, response videos, animated GIFs, and fan edits). I suggest that this same pattern of transmissibility applies to the Princess Diana *Panorama* interview. As a theatre production, *The Interview* follows the protocols of these previous iterations, as we would expect any history play or adaptation to do. This is exemplified by the production's poster image, which features the visual signifiers of Diana's hair, outfit and posture. As one audience member says in the Park Theatre's 'Audience Reactions' video for the production, it was just like the Diana that he remembered 'in the way she was dressed, the way she presented, the way she had a little head tilt' (Park Theatre, 2023). There are also lines from the *Panorama* interview that those who saw the broadcast or who are familiar with British culture will likely recognise, all of which are used in *The Interview*: 'Yes, I adored him. Yes, I was in love with him. But I was very let down'; 'She won't go quietly, that's the problem. I'll fight to the end'; 'Well, there were three of us in this marriage, so it was a bit crowded'.[4] So, in a more literal way than perhaps Voigts intended in his theorization, there are scripts that immediately invoke Princess Diana, and which can be re-combined with those visual protocols – and with those presented in other, fictionalized media representations – in different combinations, for new appropriations.[5]

3 For example, footage from the original *Panorama* interview is embedded in Stephen Frears's film *The Queen* (2006), where Eizabeth II is shown rewatching it as a video recording.

4 These quotations are taken from the interview transcript, which is available on the American PBS website *Frontline*: https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/royals/interviews/bbc.html .

5 For example, *The Crown*'s recreation of the interview renders the last of the above quotations as, 'But I won't go quietly. I'll battle till the end'. *The Interview* reinstates the slightly more distanced 'she' that appears in the PBS transcript, but places it in the mouth of Paul Burrell, Diana's butler, with the concluding line, 'Well, she has now'. (*The Interview*, 2023, 1hr.16m).

Figure 1. Poster image for *The Interview* at the Park Theatre, 2023.

The last point I want to draw from Voigts' chapter is his hope that '[a] reinvigorated adaptation studies will renew the focus on issues of distribution, circulation, and performance that were superseded by the comparative textual readings that have given adaptation studies a bad name for so long' (Voigts, 2017, pp. 294-5). By this, I take Voigts to mean that we need to consider the paths and patterns through which texts – and cultural ideas of what certain texts are, and mean – are shared and 'versioned', especially in a mediatized world (that is, a world in which media themselves are 'a social phenomenon exerted on contemporary society and individuals', not simply a means of transmitting or conveying material [Ilter, 2021, p. 16]). This stands to reason, since even in the online contexts that are the focus of Voigts's chapter, memes, redubs and

fansubs are successful because they respond to what came before; the scripts and protocols have to be recognisable for viewers and participants to be in on the joke. Frequently on social media, we might see a recombinant GIF or caption that someone in the replies admits to not 'getting', and occasionally a seasoned user will lead the confused poster through the internet 'lore' that explains what previous piece of media the new post is parodying, recalling, or 'shitposting' on. The process is much faster and more easily documented on social media, but the same principle applies to recombinant appropriations that move between television, film, and theatre. With this in mind, the next section of this article tracks some of the salient versions of the *Panorama* interview that represent key intertexts of Maitland's play.

Historicizing and Mediatizing *The Interview*

This essay takes it as axiomatic that the meaning of a play in a given production is significantly influenced by the historical moment in which it is staged. In keeping with Ilter's concept of a mediatized age, however, we might also say that the play's meaning is influenced as much by its media moment, which might include the adaptations, representations, news stories and scandals that are circulating at that historical moment, whether or not they are current or contemporary in their historical setting. In other words, because our media-saturated, on-demand culture makes 'everything available all at once' – collapsing boundaries of space and time and creating a sense of both cultural acceleration and cultural repetition – identifying the salient features of this media merry-go-round at the time of a live theatre performance becomes a difficult but necessary task in such cases. In what follows, I attempt to construct a historical narrative of media representations of the British royal family, Princess Diana, and the *Panorama* interview, and then to highlight their particular clustering around the play's premiere in October 2023. I therefore offer a combination of a diachronic overview of Princess Diana on stage and screen, followed by a synchronic snapshot of the particular timeliness of Maitland's play during its run.

During Princess Diana's lifetime and in the years shortly after her death, the public conversation was dominated by a series of 'tell-all' biographies. Most significantly, Andrew Morton's *Diana: Her True Story*, based on recordings that the princess secretly gave to the journalist, was published in 1992, and part of the *Panorama* interview's impact at the time was that it confirmed that the account in the book was not journalistic sensationalism. Kate Snell's book *Diana: Her Last Love* was published in 2000, as was

Shadows of a Princess by Patrick Jephson, Diana's former private secretary whose position became untenable when Bashir convinced Diana and her brother that he was in the pay of the Secret Services. A year later, Paul Burrell, Diana's former butler, published his memoir, *A Royal Duty*. It was only with the release of Stephen Frears's film *The Queen* in 2006 – scripted by Peter Morgan and starring Helen Mirren – that Diana began to make the transition to dramatic fiction. The film deals with the aftermath of Diana's death in Paris in 1997, and how the public mood swung against the Queen, and consequently does not feature Diana directly.[6] Shortly after this came Tina Brown's book *The Diana Chronicles*, tying in with the tenth anniversary of the princess's death in 2007 (Jonathan Maitland credits Brown's book, and Jephson's *Shadows of a Princess*, as sources for *The Interview*). Since this point, Diana has increasingly been seen on stage and screen. Oliver Hirschbiegel's 2013 film *Diana*, starring Naomi Watts, was based on Kate Snell's book, which claimed that Diana had wanted to marry the surgeon Dr Hasnat Khan. After the success of *The Queen* and the stage play *The Audience* (which also starred Helen Mirren as Elizabeth II), Peter Morgan's longform television drama series *The Crown*, charting the royal family since Elizabeth's accession to the throne, began in 2016. The show covered the *Panorama* interview in considerable detail in Season 5, Episodes 7, 8 and 9, and Diana featured overall in three of *The Crown*'s six seasons; her first appearance in the show was in 2020. Diana's unhappy relationship with the royal family was revisited in surreal fashion in Pablo Larrain's 2021 film *Spencer*, written by Stephen Knight and starring Kristen Stewart. Joe DiPietro and David Bryan's *Diana: The Musical* was filmed by Netflix ahead of its Broadway opening, which was scheduled for March 2020 but delayed to 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. By this point, it was common for Princess Diana biodramas to include the media context for how details of her unhappy marriage came to light, and so journalists and biographers are written into the story. So, for example, Andrew Morton and Paul Burrell feature as characters in *Diana: The Musical*, while Morton, Burrell, Jephson and Bashir are all part of the cast of characters in *Diana*, as well as in *The Crown*.[7]

6 In *The Queen*, we can see the combination of actors playing real people (Elizabeth II, Tony Blair) spliced with television footage of Diana (and later US President Bill Clinton and South African President Nelson Madela paying tribute). The addition of lines on the screen works as visual code to suggest a lower-quality television videotape recording, and hence to separate the fictional 'news footage' from what is presented as the film itself. In Morgan's later series *The Crown*, the actresses playing Diana also appear in the mocked-up 'news footage' in place of their real-world counterparts, to make the fictional world appear more sealed-off from the intrusion of real-life public figures.

7 On stage in July 2023, Diana's absent-presence could also be experienced in *Peter Smith's Diana* at Soho Theatre, a solo performance piece which has an oblique relationship to the historical princess. *The Evening Standard* review suggests that the show had, in a previous version, featured Smith lip-synching to Diana's interview, a fascinating precursor to *The Interview*'s absent source (Desau, 2023).

Homing in on the period of *The Interview*'s opening, it is important to note that playwright Jonathan Maitland is a journalist turned playwright, who knew and worked with Bashir ('Q&A with *The Interview* Writer Jonathan Maitland', 2023). Maitland himself had appeared as a talking head on a Channel 4 documentary *The Diana Interview: Truth Behind the Scandal* (originally aired in November 2020 and re-broadcast in an updated version in May 2021). In the documentary, he is credited as a 'Playwright and Broadcaster', but speaks to his own knowledge of Bashir and, more broadly, of how ideas of trust have changed in public perception since the interview. Channel 4's documentary investigation led to the establishment in 2020 of the BBC's Dyson Inquiry into the *Panorama* interview, and the subsequent Dyson Report of 2021, which exposed Bashir's methods and the BBC's subsequent failure to investigate him.

The Interview premiered in the same month that Netflix released the first half of *The Crown*'s final season of episodes, following the Princess Diana storyline up to her death in 1997. The next month, during the play's run, the London production of *Diana the Musical* opened at the Eventim Apollo. *The Interview*'s theatrical life was therefore wedged between two earlier attempts to dramatize Diana's life that, strangely, both pre- and post-date the production, in the sense that both were produced prior to *The Interview* but continued their runs after Maitland's play closed. Paul Burrell can be seen on the production's webpage at the Park Theatre, praising the play and Yolanda Kettle's performance as Diana (Park Theatre, 2023). Kettle, in turn, had previously played Camilla Fry in Season 2 of *The Crown*.[8]

As this selective history shows, then, there is a consistent traffic – a feedback loop – between fact and fiction in the appropriation of Diana's life to different media and contexts. Stories initially dismissed as fiction are verified as factual; the journalists and royal staff become the princess's mouthpieces, then their books become sources for

8 Entangled with this history there is, of course, a broader narrative of changing fictional depictions of the royal family, and Elizabeth II especially. In an article responding to *The Interview* and to the announcement of a play about the Queen Mother's valet, *Backstairs Billy,* journalist Mark Lawson notes that 'both shows overlap with *The Crown*' and also that 'It's hard to imagine … that either play could exist without the example of *The Crown*' (Lawson, 2023). Lawson's journey through 'royal representation on stage and screen' omits the Diana films in its pursuit of identifying what he calls 'Peter-Morganatic offspring', and also overlooks the influence of Moira Buffini's popular play *Handbagged*, about the relationship between the Queen and Margaret Thatcher (a work that theatre critic Matt Wolf does acknowledge in his programme note for *The Interview*) (Wolf, 2023'; see also Poore, 2024, pp. 99-104). Missing from Lawson's account, I would suggest, is how deferential *The Crown* is, when compared to *The Windsors* (Channel 4, 2016-), to the royals' *Spitting Image* puppets in the 1980s, or indeed to the Sex Pistols' number-one single 'God Save the Queen (1977) and Jamie Reid's accompanying artwork, which became synonymous with punk rock.

fictional representations, and then they, as historical figures, become characters in the story itself. A journalist becomes a playwright and contributes both to the documentary about the historical Diana, as well as to the re-fictionalisation of Diana in historical drama. The same names recur and circulate, sometimes popping up as participants in the events, as writers recalling them, as actors embodying them, or as audience members commenting on the actor playing them. This free exchange seems to support Thomas Leitch's claim that 'fictionality and non-fictionality cannot be categorically distinguished because they are not substantive but performative, both dependent on the ways they are framed by both producers and audiences' (Leitch, 2018, p. 77).

Two Modes of Mediatization

Having explicated the ways that *The Interview* works as a recombinant appropriation of previous factual and fictionalised representations of Princess Diana, we can now consider whether the play itself reflects this interpolation of media about her and the *Panorama* interview. In other words, does the play's own construction reflect its intertextuality and its intermediality, beyond its timing and headline content? Ilter's book *Mediatized Dramaturgy* helps us to address these questions to *The Interview*. In what follows, I will offer a close reading of Maitland's play in its Park Theatre production of October-November 2023, based on my experience of the performance on 17 November.

Ilter explains that 'when we think about a mediatized culture, we think about the contemporary world in which we are constantly inundated with information, our attention spans are shorter, our spatio-temporal experience has transformed, our interpersonal relationships are demarcated increasingly by social media and our perception of virtual reality and physical reality as distinct states and experiences has radically changed' (Ilter, 2021, p. 4). Later, she adds that 'The increasing power of media over other societal and cultural institutions is an important aspect of mediatization' (Ilter, 2021, p. 15). Most of *The Interview* is set in 1995, as Bashir courts Diana in the hope of gaining an interview with her as an exclusive for the BBC's *Panorama* programme over rivals like NBC's Barbara Walters, and Oprah Winfrey. Hence, the technology dates from the beginnings of the digital age: Nokia mobile phones and television equipment so bulky that it fills a hotel suite in Eastbourne (where the clandestine editing of the interview took place). But the play also looks back on the 1995 interview from more than 25 years later; we hear in voiceover Prince William's 2021 statement in response to the Dyson Report, the BBC's decision to remove Bashir from all of its digital platforms,

and, briefly, Donald Trump denigrating the 'fake news' media. The play explicitly connects the *Panorama* scandal with the 'post-truth' media landscape that we have inherited in the 2020s; a speaker calling herself Truth says to Bashir at one point, 'You started a fire that burned truth to the ground' (*The Interview*, 2023, 56m). On the other hand, at least one character in the play also argues that trust and ethics have become more important *because* of this 'post-truth' media environment, hence the significance of the investigation. Matt Wiessler, the graphic artist whom Bashir instructed to create fake bank statements, says in direct address: 'Twenty-five years later, things were different. The world had changed quite a bit', shortly before Bashir is interrogated by a panel of BBC executives (*The Interview*, 2023, 54m). The play is also critical of the attempt to censor controversial media post-hoc by removing it from digital platforms, which begins to look like a post-truth media tactic in itself – even Orwellian, in the sense of the 'memory hole' in which politically-inconvenient news was obliterated in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.[9] Diana's ghost addresses Bashir at the end of the play, rebuking him that 'So much of what I wanted to say that day, I chose to say that day. But it's been silenced. De-legitimized. Censored. By my own son […] Your lies […] gave them the knife that plucked out my tongue' (*The Interview*, 2023, 1hr.13m). In summary, then, *The Interview* certainly discusses – and indeed historicizes – media ethics and changes in our mediatized society.

However, Ilter draws a distinction between plays which 'use media as thematic content' and those which 'respond to media culture *implicitly* through aesthetic reflection and inquiry, namely, through their dramaturgical structure, without necessarily referring to new technologies in their content' [emphasis in original] (Ilter, 2021, p. 29; p. 1). The former are 'dramatic [as opposed to 'no-longer-dramatic'] mediatized forms' which 'tend to reproduce the dominant narratives, motives and structures of the late capitalist system', whereas the latter provide an 'aesthetic resistance to the proliferation of familiar representational structures [and are] therefore, a political response to the ubiquitous, agreed-upon machineries and discourses of later capitalism' (Ilter, 2021, p. 24; p. 25). For Ilter, then, there is a an overt and a covert version of mediatization – it is either explicit or implicit. The former, 'mere thematization', explores mediatized culture as content, the latter, more subversively, as form (Ilter, 2021, p. 30). The former challenges our perceptions in superficial ways; the latter challenges us more fundamentally to make sense of mediatization's political functions and impacts.

9 It may be recalled that Orwell's statue sits outside the BBC's London Headquarter Broadcasting House, with the inscription, 'If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear'.

So, for all its appropriative and recombinant qualities, as discussed earlier, does *The Interview* exhibit a merely thematized response to mediatization, or a dramaturgical one? The first half of the play, as Maitland explains in the theatrical programme, 'looks at the months leading up to the interview, when Bashir is trying to persuade Diana to do it […] and the "will she, won't she?" element of it' ('Q&A with *The Interview* Writer Jonathan Maitland', 2023). This is presented as straightforward documentary drama: Paul Burrell is established as our narrator and our bedrock of a trustworthy perspective, while Martin Bashir and, occasionally, Martin Wiessler, interject or compete to influence the narrative. As such, there is the familiar problem of documentary theatre that audiences are unable to check sources for themselves, especially in the real-time of performance. We might speculate that parts of the script are based on new, extensive interview material from Burrell; his appearances and positive feedback in the 'Audience Reactions' video would strongly suggest so. As Stephen Scott-Bottoms pointed out in relation to documentary dramas of the early 2000s, including David Hare's *Stuff Happens*, 'the world-shaping role of the writer in editing and juxtaposing the gathered materials' gives the playwright a 'mysteriously omniscient role', a role which at times 'begins to acquire a certain aura of privileged information' (Bottoms, 2006, pp. 59-60). This is also true of the sequence where Bashir is shown viewing the *Panorama* interview footage with Steve, the editor, and where they argue about the parts that should and should not be broadcast. As Maitland makes clear in the theatre programme, 'We include off-cuts of some fascinating stuff that didn't make it, alongside the famous moments that did' ('Q&A with *The Interview* Writer Jonathan Maitland', 2023). So far, then, so conventional: it's a play that capitalizes on the interest in Diana, Bashir, and the *Panorama* interview by offering behind-the-scenes insights into 'what really happened'.

However, the second act of the play is more varied in technique, its approach to the material being much less dependent on theatrical realism. After the point where the interview takes place in Burrell's narrative, three of the actors begin to multirole, and, as three microphone-holding 'Announcers' from the BBC, they act as a form of chorus, contradicting and then re-contradicting themselves as they rehearse the BBC's changing official line on Bashir and his scoop. When Bashir and Steve discuss the editing of the interview, the footage is 'replayed' by Diana (Kettle), who is sitting in the front row of the audience. Later, Bashir is in conversation with an actor who announces herself as 'The Truth' and another who says he is 'The Agreed Narrative'. Here, it is as if Bashir finds himself in a medieval morality play, in conversation with abstract concepts; when 'The Agreed Narrative' keeps changing his name and settles on 'J.S. Mill the philosopher' at

Bashir's suggestion, it feels as if he is a Vice, or a Mephistophelean figure in a battle of wits with the journalist. Truth's monologue announces another stylistic shift on the nature of trust in a post-truth society, which seems like it would not be out of place in one of Caryl Churchill's later plays:

> I don't trust my doctor.
> I don't trust my government.
> I don't trust what I read.
> I don't trust what I eat.
> I don't trust my mother.
> I don't trust my hands are my hands or my feet are my feet.
> I don't even trust that language has meaning. (56-57m)

A few minutes later, as Bashir is questioned by the two actors (possibly BBC executives, possibly the voices of his conscience), the play takes on a more Shavian quality as Bashir defends himself at greater length by questioning conventional thought, an Andrew Undershaft or Jack Tanner for the mediatized age.[10] Invoking the example of Watergate, Bashir insists that 'Every big story starts with an ethical compromise' (*The Interview*, 2023, 1hr.03m-1hr.04m). Finally, in the play's closing moments, Bashir is visited by Diana's ghost, in a move that suggests Shakespearean tragedy (the ghosts of Richard III's victims, of Hamlet's father, of Banquo in *Macbeth*).[11]

While these rapid switches of theatrical framing undoubtedly take us well beyond the limitations of documentary-drama realism, I am not convinced that they represent a mediatized dramaturgy. *The Interview* therefore remains at the level of the overt in Ilter's classification, presenting 'media as thematic content' (2021, p. 29).The fragmentary qualities of the second half are still framed, in the end, by Burrell's closing words; we also cannot know, as audience members in the theatre, how much of the material in the second half is invented, how much verbatim transcription from public records, how much insider-knowledge, how much drawn from off-the-record interviews. So, in a sense we are even more at the mercy of the 'mysteriously omniscient' playwright than

10 Andrew Undershaft is the controversial industrialist of Shaw's Major Barbara. Jack Tanner is the outspoken hero of *Man and Superman*.

11 In this context, Diana's line about having her tongue plucked out perhaps also invokes Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*. The trope of the ghost is a fascinating one to trace in its mutations and reversionings: in *Spencer*, Diana glimpses the ghost of Anne Boleyn, Henry VIII's ill-fated second wife, and *The Crown* controversially introduced the ghost of Diana to converse with her ex-husband and the Queen.

we were in the first part where each of the actors played named individuals. The dramaturgical fluidity of the post-interview sequences therefore seems more a strategy to give the playwright full license over controversial material, than to generate 'aesthetic resistance to the proliferation of familiar representational structures', in Ilter's words (2021, p. 25). The point on which the play ends, too, seems rather unmotivated, dramaturgically speaking. Burrell, addressing the audience directly, becomes indignant at the thought of Prince William's insistence that the interview no longer be available. Although he 'will not have a word said against Wills' as he has 'known him since he was a baby', Burrell decries his actions: 'What right has he got […] to take the words out of her mouth? No one person owns what she said that day. Once said, once out, her words belong to all of us' (*The Interview*, 2023, 1hr.16m). In this last-minute final analysis, then, the story becomes not really about Bashir after all; he was the enabler, the patsy; in Burrell's telling, despite his disavowals quoted above, Prince William is revealed as the true villain. Yet the play, perhaps understandably, does not follow the logic of that conclusion, which would suggest a different shape for the drama, and a focus on the machinations of the royal family in the 2020s rather than the 1990s. The focus on individuals also obscures the role of a pliant BBC, which acceded to the Prince's demands as an act of contrition for its previous promotion and celebration of Bashir and the interview, and to seek to protect its own reputation.[12]

What the play also doesn't do, in performance, is acknowledge that there are other dramatizations of this story in circulation. Despite the choice of frequent direct address, and of Burrell as narrator, the references to other media are limited to Burrell mentioning his book – a moment that prompted laughs of recognition on the night I attended. Despite this, the 'world of the play' appears to be one in which there is no *The Crown*, no *Spencer*, no *Diana: The Musical*. The script must ignore this media-saturated landscape of fictional Dianas, even as it capitalises on this currency. Hence, there are layers of knowledge that the audience will possess that the show, itself a product of recombinant media, avoids acknowledging. It therefore lacks some of the knowingness, the arch self-awareness, of the recombinant appropriations that Voigts discusses (2017, p. 286, p. 296). Put another way, *The Interview* is a documentary drama about Diana; it is intermittently aware that it is a documentary, but not so much that it is a drama, and its consciousness does not extend to the existence of other documentaries and other

12 In doing so, the BBC was following a pattern of removing content from archive and streaming services whenever the people featured had been publicly disgraced and/or the subject of criminal investigations, as in the cases of Jimmy Savile, and later, Russell Brand and Huw Edwards.

dramas on this same subject. Overall, then, despite its fractured dramaturgy, I would posit this as a liberal response to mediatization rather than a radical one. It decries censorship and cover-ups and celebrates and embodies multiple perspectives, rather than seeking to dismantle the machinery that generates these perspectives. Pragmatically speaking, The *Interview* is perhaps as much of a challenge to established modes of representation as a commercial, legally viable work in London theatre can be, while still advertising itself as a play about the Princess Diana *Panorama* interview. The overt representation of a mediatized and recombinantly appropriated story – in the conservative context of British theatre – here seems to actively work against any covert exploration of processes of mediatization and recombinant appropriation in the play's form.[13]

Adapting History, Documentary, and Fiction

In the second part of this article, I want to ask what wider insights we can gain about adaptation from the case study of *The Interview*. Following Kamillia Elliott's example, I will examine how a case study like this can teach us to adapt theorization rather than to distort the text to meet theoretical precepts, or to judge it as a 'bad theoretical object' if it fails to conform.[14] In what follows, I will make use of Voigt's definition of adaptation as 'an umbrella term for cultural borrowing or cultural appropriation' (Voigts, 2017, p. 294).

To begin with, *The Interview* challenges categorical distinctions between an adaptation and a history play; as noted at the beginning, this is a play without a single source, but with multiple factual and fictional intertexts. It also represents and historicizes events of nearly 30 years ago. Since the 2010s, a growing body of work has explored whether historical drama can be seen as a form of adaptation, not from one primary source but from a multiplicity of primary and secondary sources (Raw and Tutan 2012; Leitch 2015, Leitch 2018; Strong 2019). Tom Bryant's recent book *The Dramaturgy of History* refers to his process as a dramaturg – in collaboration with playwrights such as Lisa Loomer, Nancy Keystone, and Robert Schenkkan – as 'the adaptation of history to drama' (Bryant, 2024, p. 1). Bryant discusses the range of historical research that may be undertaken for the writing and development of a play, from 'highly specialized forms of research'

13 Here it is perhaps worth noting that none of Ilter's examples of mediatized dramaturgy address such already-crowded representational territory as *The Interview.*

14 See Elliott 2020, p. 32; p. 66; p. 210.

– legal, medical, newspapers – to 'a few key books', or a single source that is relied upon so heavily that an attribution is required (Bryant, 2024, p. 3). In the broadest understanding of this relationship, held by Raw and Tutan, 'adapting history is not just the preserve of professional historians, but something undertaken by everyone, regardless of age, race, gender, or class, a means of coming to terms with their particular worlds' (Raw & Tutan, 2012, p. 21).

Nevertheless, there are advantages to reading a play like *The Interview* through the singular lens of the history play. One way of characterising Maitland's drama is as a metahistorical play, Mark Berninger's term for a type of history play that is 'dominated by self-reflexivity', 'featuring 'a discussion of different views of history or a discussion of how history is made', and which therefore often has two distinct timelines, past and present (Berninger, 2002, p. 40). In my recent book *The Contemporary History Play* I propose the classification 'dual biodrama' to cover history plays that depict two lives in parallel (Poore, 2024, pp. 96-99). Bryant, similarly, refers to 'the convention of the duelling narrators' when discussing the dramatic tension that powers Lisa Loomer's play *I Am Roe*, and this trope occasionally surfaces in *The Interview* in Burrell and Bashir's attempts to wrest narrative control from each other (Bryant, 2024, p. 55). In its exploration of how television has shaped perceptions of politics, *The Interview* might also be analysed alongside other plays that feature historic interviews and confrontations, such as Peter Morgan's *Frost/Nixon* (2006) and James Graham's *Best of Enemies* (2021).

As the commentary in the first part of this article made clear, there are also benefits to reading *The Interview* as a documentary drama which responds to the expectations of that genre, rather than a history play. Rebecca Benzie and I have elsewhere made the case for an overlap between documentary plays and history plays – that individual works for theatre can be both at the same time – even if the distinction is upheld by others, notably including Freddie Rokem (Benzie & Poore, 2023, p. 10).[15] Classifying a play one way and not another affects the theoretical frameworks and critical histories that a scholar might access in order to analyse and evaluate it, of course. But what is also at stake in making these distinctions is the associations that such labels have in the perceived currency, prestige, or marketability of individual plays. Mindful of the

15 Rokem states in *Performing History:* "Docu-drama" and its closely related forms of stage realism, however, are not primarily interested in drawing attention to the time-lag between the "real" events and their theatrical re-enactment. They are more like newspapers, which report events as closely as possible in time to their occurrence' (Rokem, 2000, p. 7). *The Interview* certainly draws attention to the 'time-lag' between the events and their reckoning, and consequently surely qualifies as a history play by Rokem's measure.

arguments of Leitch (2018), Bignell (2019), and Kidnie (2009), among others, that what constitutes an adaptation is pragmatically defined by producers and audiences, it must be conceded that *The Interview* does not announce itself – does not invite itself to be read – as an adaptation, nor as a history play. Everything about the production design and *mise en scene* tells us that it expects to be understood as documentary drama – any other interpretation is reading against the grain.

Accounts of Adaptation in Space and Time

An account of *The Interview* and its intertexts needs to include all these relationships and more, whether conventionally classified as history or historical drama, documentary or docudrama, film, TV or theatre, whether reverential, investigative, sentimental, or satirical in tone. These mutually informing connections across different media, knowledge domains, and theoretical distinctions strongly suggest a networked idea of adaptation, either along the lines of the rhizomatic model proposed by Deleuze and Guattari, or the 'archontic' model derived from Derrida, and advanced in relation to adaptation studies by Abigail Derecho and then Suzanne R. Black. In Douglas Lanier's application of the rhizomatic model to Shakespeare adaptation, 'rhizomatic structure […] has no single or central root and no vertical structure. Instead, like the underground root system of rhizomatic plants, it is a horizontal, decentered multiplicity of subterranean roots that cross each other, bifurcating and recombining, breaking off and restarting' (Lanier, 2014, p. 28). Similarly, for Black, each new adaptation adds to the archive, which constitutes 'a non-linear series of non-hierarchical relations'; furthermore, 'Critical, as well as fictional, texts become part of the archives they reference and must be acknowledged in any theoretical approach' (Black, 2012, p. 4). Having deployed this approach – Black's archontic network specifically – in a previous work on Sherlock Holmes adaptations, I can testify to its value. Imagining a mapped relationship between, say, the BBC series *Sherlock* (2010-2017), the Arthur Conan Doyle stories, and other film and television adaptations – as well as histories, genres and politics outside these domains – is vital in understanding how it draws on all these sources. After all, the adaptation principle of *Sherlock*, according to the series creators, was that 'everything [is] Canonical' (quoted in Poore, 2017, p. 50). It's equally true that the web of connections travels both ways; readers and viewers may encounter the adaptation first, and discover the source text later, and what the source text means changes according to the ways that they are approached by individual readers and framed by the culture at large. The decentred model of adaptation seems appropriate when exploring reenactments of

an interview that has been removed from the public domain, and where the interplay between media and between different categories and genres of factual and fictional material is especially marked.

However, the back-and-forth nature of the archontic model, and the 'fluidity of ceaseless change' that characterises the rhizomatic concept, do not necessarily mix well with the kinds of historicizing approach that the first part of this essay undertook (Lanier, 2014, p. 27). Visualising intertextual relationships as a web or as underground rhizomatic plants suggests a mapping in space rather than a chronology. Yet for topical plays about recent history like *The Interview*, timing is crucial. It informs the kind of intervention in the public sphere that the play makes, and the prior knowledge, and feelings, that audiences are likely to bring to the production.[16] As noted earlier, there is also more than one chronology that is pertinent to *The Interview*. There is the chronology of mediated representations of Diana during her lifetime and up to the present, entwined with a chronology of when events from the past have become the focus of renewed interest in the present, as with the Dyson enquiry. To this we might add the history of history plays and of documentary drama specifically, since the prior existence of biodramas, behind-closed-doors plays, and interview plays influences audiences' expectations and playwrights' reference-points. What a problem case such as *The Interview* teaches us – with its extreme topicality, its recombinant and self-aware use of scripts and protocols, and its censored source – is that both synchronic and diachronic accounts are necessary to understand its precise theatrical moment.

Conclusion

As Black argues, in an intertextual landscape that has the potential to expand infinitely, 'divisions must be knowingly imposed' placing an 'artificial boundary' around certain sections of the archive for purposes of analysis. This article has sought, in a range of ways, to strategically redraw the boundaries that have conventionally separated investigative reporting from biopics, for example, or documentary plays from adaptations, because *The Interview* demands that we look at how these boundaries start to erode, and become untenable, when they are repeatedly traversed from different angles by cognate disciplines, genres and art forms. This tracking requires a type of double vision,

16 Here it is worth noting the demographic mix on the night that I saw the production. *The Interview* did not only attract people likely to remember the *Panorama* interview at first hand. There was a noticeably high proportion of theatregoers who appeared to be 'Generation Z', and whose experience of Princess Diana is therefore likely to have been mediated entirely posthumously through series such as *The Crown*.

to perceive both potentially infinite intertextual space, and its interaction with time. While the chronologies that I have outlined have been predominantly linear and causal, it should be noted that the reappearances of Paul Burrell, Peter Morgan, Helen Mirren, Yolanda Kettle, and so on, in different times, contexts, and mediums, gives this history an uncanny sense of looped time. It is a feeling of déjà vu that is entirely rational: we *have* been here before.

By the same token, as I have demonstrated, all histories themselves exist in historical time, and reflect the time in which they were written. In *The Dramaturgy of History*, Bryant includes a discussion with playwright Robert Schenkkan on what his landmark dramas of 1960s American history, *All the Way* and *The Great Society,* might have focused on if they had been written in the 2020s (Bryant, 2024, pp. 87-88). Returning to *The Interview*'s ruminations on changing perceptions of trust, it might be said that the attraction of a play with this degree of historical distance from its original events is that most of the players are still alive, but there is a drastic difference in attitudes that has taken place within a human lifespan. Such works, like the Schenkkan plays, might be grouped together in another networked relationship as 'generational shift' history plays, which activate a complex mix of different forms of knowledge – history and memory – in those old enough to remember them, and operate quite differently on those who are not.

Finally, to return to Voigts' recombinant appropriations – it seems that the scripts and protocols of staging Princess Diana have now entered their parodic phase, with comedy performance *Charles and Diana: The Reunion Tour* by Tracey Collins and Russell Lucas, set to tour the UK at the time of writing. Meanwhile, the scripts and protocols of the 'royal interview scandal' have been comprehensively absorbed by television streaming platforms; in 2024, both Netflix and Amazon Prime announced dramas based on Prince Andrew's 2019 interview with Emily Maitlis on *Newsnight,* in which he attempted to clear his name after repeated allegations about his association with child sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein. The Netflix drama, *Scoop*, even cast Gillian Anderson as Maitlis, who played Margaret Thatcher in *The Crown*, while the Amazon Prime three-part series, *A Very Royal Scandal*, cast Michael Sheen – who starred in the Peter Morgan dramas *The Queen*, *The Deal*, *The Special Relationship,* and *Frost/Nixon* – as Prince Andrew. More ominously, the scripts familiar to the public from Diana's story and its numerous adaptations, have fed into widespread suspicion about the health and wellbeing of Catherine, the current Princess of Wales. Speculation on social media, under the hashtag 'whereskate', reached a peak in March 2024 after Kensington Palace shared a digitally

altered photograph of the Prince and Princess and their children (Addley, Milmo & Roth, 2024; Spring, 2024).[17] Although a video, filmed by the BBC, announcing Princess Catherine's cancer diagnosis and that she would be undergoing preventative chemotherapy, caused much of the speculation to abate, an air of mistrust persists about the possibility of history repeating itself with the Windsors. While it is well beyond the scope of the present article, there is much more to be said about the role of conspiracy theories in both the life of Diana and its aftermath. In the light of my argument here, it might have to be admitted that conspiracy theories, too, constitute ever-shifting adaptations of history.

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.
Conflict of Interest: The author has no conflict of interest to declare.
Grant Support: The author declared that this study has received no financial support.

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17 The photograph, in turn, had been an attempt to quell rumours about the Princess after she had been absent from public engagements for longer than expected.

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