


Hip-hop Lear: Intermedial References to the play *King Lear* (1606), by Shakespeare, in the series *Empire* (2015-) /

Hip-hop Lear: referências intermidiáticas da peça ‘Rei Lear’ (1606), de Shakespeare, no seriado ‘Empire – Fama e Poder’ (2015 –)

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ABSTRACT

This article aims at demonstrating the intermedial references to the play *King Lear* (1606), by William Shakespeare, in the thematic structure of the TV series *Empire* (2015-, FOX), conceived by Lee Daniels and Danny Strong. Our working hypothesis is based on the recognition of premeditated correspondences between the composition structures of the Shakespearean text and the composition structures of the TV series in question. Based on the thematic mirroring mechanism used by the authors of the series, widely known by the audience, we aim to present the similarities between these objects, using, for this purpose, the theoretical advances developed by the studies on intermediality – mainly those by Irina Rajewsky (2012) –, and specifically directed to literary studies. To illustrate, in a general way, the process of mobilizing the intermedial references to Shakespeare's work, we also present a *brief introduction* on the relations between American television and the English playwright, as well as a *display* of the cultural products that constitute our proposal for dialogue.

KEYWORDS: Intermediality; Shakespeare; *King Lear*; American television; *Empire*.

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RESUMO

Este artigo se propõe a demonstrar as referências intermediáticas da peça *Rei Lear* (1606), de William Shakespeare, presentes na estrutura temática do seriado *Empire – Fama e Poder* (2015–, FOX), concebido por Lee Daniels e Danny Strong. Nossa hipótese de trabalho se fundamenta no reconhecimento de correspondências premeditadas entre as estruturas de composição do texto shakespeariano e as estruturas de composição da narrativa seriada em questão. A partir do mecanismo de espelhamento temático utilizado pelos autores do seriado, de amplo e notório conhecimento público, buscamos apresentar as similaridades entre estes objetos, utilizando, para isso, dos préstimos teóricos dos estudos sobre a intermedialidade – sobretudo os realizados por Irina Rajewsky (2012) –, e direcionados, especificamente, aos estudos literários. Para ilustrar, de forma geral, o processo de mobilização de referências intermediáticas à obra de Shakespeare, apresentamos uma breve introdução sobre as relações entre a televisão americana e o dramaturgo inglês, assim como uma mostra dos produtos culturais que compõem a nossa proposta de diálogo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Intermedialidade; Shakespeare; Rei Lear; Televisão americana; Empire.*

1 Shakespeare and American television

The influence of Shakespeare on modern culture, especially on drama, tends to be immeasurable. Despite important – and countless – intellectual efforts in this direction¹, it is possible to assume that a precise and detailed description of the real impact of Shakespeare's work on the development of creative productions from his death in 1616 to the present day is close to unattainable. However, it is possible to feel the capillarity – and the power – of its influence in the most varied ways of entertainment and human relationships. In the words of Marjorie Garber, a notorious Shakespearean scholar:

[...] no author is cited as frequently by congressmen, by lawyers, by television personalities [...] In a world increasingly diverse and complex, Shakespeare is read and performed and discussed all over the globe — from France to Egypt to Romania to Japan to Israel. (GARBER, 2005, p. 28-29)

The relationship between Shakespeare and American television first began with the staging and adaptation of his plays to the television format, taking advantage of technological innovations and the possibilities of representation obtained by the emergence of media vehicles². This relationship continued until the mid-1980s, when there was a change in the creative appropriation of this material: from a programmatic source, Shakespeare's plays have become a sort of device for television creation. This phenomenon of ownership, however, did not

¹ Cf. LANIER, Douglas. *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture*. Oxford Popular Topics. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002., and GARBER, Marjorie. *Shakespeare and Modern Culture*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2008.

² Cf. LOTZ, Amanda D. *The television will be revolutionized*. 2. ed. New York: Nyu Press, 2014. 352p.

occur organically. The use of his work as a television model was premeditated, since, according to Whitmire (2011):

Shakespeare's familiarity comes from being valued and utilized for generations, providing a sense of stability. Although the appropriations and uses change, certain aspects of Shakespeare remain constant, so creators can rely upon the audience understanding the reference. Additionally, these references when used remain within the stereotyped interpretations and uses of the plays or quotes. When something more obscure is used, it is given its own interpretation for the audience, making it remain easy for the audience to understand. This makes it easy for these Shakespeare references to be utilized as a tool to impart the surrounding clichés and knowledge quickly. Shakespeare's identification mostly comes from being taught in schools, but it is also a circular phenomenon because his numerous popular culture uses make certain phrases, ideas, plays and plots a type of universal knowledge, even if the audience has never actually read Shakespeare. (WHITMIRE, 2011, p. 37)

While employing widely known patterns, structures, and stories to television format products, American screenwriters evoked the familiarity of viewers with these *narrative prototypes* as a foundation for building their original stories. So, as with other authors, Shakespeare's work has been used both as a source of ideas and models and as an engine to build a cultural authority, since it has the capacity to be appropriated and understood in many ways and in different levels (WHITMIRE, 2011, p.35). Besides that, it is important to recognize the great reach of Shakespeare's work for an increasingly plural and diverse audience when considering the countless adaptations and remakes of his plays in distinct cultural contexts – a major landmark of Shakespeare's adaptation especially throughout the second half of the 20th century.

Many studies related to the creative efforts of Shakespearean material appropriations have long remained focused on filmmaking projects, mostly approaching transpositions, adaptations and intermedial combinations. With the increased creative demand imposed by the market dawn of cable channels, that ceased to be simply rebroadcasters of programs from the first US television networks to become creators of an independent and original programmatic grid, researchers and scholars also began to observe the application, however still incipient, of Shakespearean models on television as well.

From episodic serial narratives like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003, The WB) – known to include small (and sometimes literal) references to Shakespeare throughout all of its exhibition years – to series from the period known as the third golden age of American television,

like *Sons of Anarchy* (2008-2014, FX) – whose plot was built by reimagining events of the Hamlet tragedy (1599-1601)³ – the uses of Shakespearean models have become a permanent presence within the volatile creative market of American television drama, mostly after the 1990s.

In this paper, we intend to discuss the dialogue involving the main intermedial references of *King Lear* (1606) present in the television series *Empire* (2015 -, FOX), created by Lee Daniels and Danny Strong, based on the thematic mirroring mechanism used by the authors, of wide and notorious public knowledge. As far as the scope of investigation of the TV series is concerned, we think it is appropriate to restrict our analytical scope to its “pilot episode” – in other words, the television jargon that names the first episode of the entire series narrative within the American industry, in most of the works. This option justifies itself for two reasons: the dramaturgical characteristics that build up the conception of an episode of this type⁴; and the fact that the serial narrative is still being created and presented during the composition of this paper⁵. In contrast to the prerogatives established for the analysis of the television series, the Shakespearean work will be used in its completeness, even if its general theme provides us with enough elements to support our hypothesis – since we will focus on the composition mechanism mentioned above.

2 Some notions concerning intermediality

The proposed dialogue between the artistic objects outlined above is based on the theoretical framework advanced by the studies of intermediality – in particular, the propositions established by Irina Rajewsky (2012), specifically addressed to literary studies. For that purpose,

³ For a brief analysis of the numerous similarities between the characters in *Sons of Anarchy* and *Hamlet*, see the article: “Sons of Anarchy’ Vs. ‘Hamlet’: These Two Storylines Are Practically One in the Same”.

⁴ In the words of Brett Martin: “The [episode] pilot is a strange beast [that] should accomplish several things at once. First of all, of course, it must have enough impact by itself as an entertainment option to convince first the network executives that it’s worth running a whole season on top of that material, and then the viewers that they should keep watching the show. At the same time, it has to be based on a heavy dose of settings and scenarios – essentially building a world – without, however, letting itself be consumed by these exhibitions [and] leaving implicit a future in general not yet imagined even by their creators”. (Cf. MARTIN, Brett. *Difficult Men: Behind the Scenes of a Creative Revolution: From The Sopranos and The Wire to Mad Men and Breaking Bad*. São Paulo: Aleph, 2014. 366p. Translation by Maria Silvia Mourão Neto, pp.84-85, emphasis added).

⁵ The series was renewed by FOX for its – 6th and – last year in 04/30/2019.

it is up to us first to define our comprehension of the term. In general terms, according to Fischlin (2014):

The word “intermedia” references a vast, ongoing set of practices associated with how narratives travel in and across media, in and through cultures. Intermedia occur when representation is reconfigured through an array of media and cultural forms that arise out of specific contexts, diffuse histories, technologies, and creative practices (FISCHLIN, 2014, p.3).

From this first understanding – which seeks to highlight the non-specific aspects of the analyzed objects, as opposed to the canonical theories of these products which, in turn, regularly tend to emphasize the specific aspects of the media – we intend to draw an approximation, even initially, between these more general perceptions and the theoretical assumptions established by Irina Rajewsky, in her investigation of the borders of and possibilities set out from the perspective of intermediality.

According to the Freie Universität Berlin researcher, intermediality can be understood taking into account two categories: broad and narrow. In the first category, intermediality can be used as an umbrella-term, capable of covering a multitude of different phenomena that manifest themselves between media – without the initial need for classification of specificities and/or boundary linking of artistic achievements. In other words, according to the author:

Regardless of the various research traditions that present important differences when subjected to a closer look, there seems to be a (certain) consensus among scholars regarding the definition of intermediality in a broad sense. In general terms, and according to common sense, “intermediality” refers to media relations, media interactions and media interference [...] Therefore, the crossing of media borders will constitute a founding category of intermediality. (RAJEWSKY, 2012, p. 52, emphasis added)

In order to improve the understanding of the eventual generalizations present in this first classification, Rajewsky also focused on a wide range of examples, as a proposal to illustrate these intermedial manifestations in a broad sense. Thus, according to the perception of the German researcher on this issue,

In literary studies as well as in such fields as art history, music, theater, and film studies, there is a repeated focus on an entire range of phenomena

qualifying as intermedial. Examples include those phenomena which for a long time have been designated by terms such as *transposition d'art*, filmic writing, *ekphrasis*, musicalization of literature, as well as such phenomena as film adaptations of literary works, “novelizations”, visual poetry, illuminated manuscripts, Sound Art, opera, comics, multimedia shows, hyperfiction, multimedial computer “texts” or installations, etc. Without a doubt, all of these phenomena have to do in some way with a crossing of borders between media and are in so far characterized by a quality of intermediality in the *broad sense*. (RAJEWSKY, 2012, p. 22)

After defining the prerogatives – and her illustrative work – on intermediality in the broad sense, the researcher establishes the theoretical definitions of what we can understand as intermediality in the narrow sense. As Rajewsky defends, once the intermedial manifestations are established, they tend to be classified on different levels, based on their modalities and impacts, according to the nature of the conception of cultural products.

To this end, Rajewsky proposed the following tripartition: intermediality in the narrowest sense of *medial transposition*; intermediality in the narrowest sense of *media combination*; and intermediality in the narrowest sense of *intermedial references* – henceforth mentioned and recognized through the terminological differentiations highlighted. These subcategories, as suggested by the researcher, tend to organize – and characterize – the intermedial phenomena from their correspondences and forms of conception.

Regarding the conditional assumptions of the first subcategory, we can understand as medial transposition the “transformation of a given product into media [...] or its substrate into another media” (RAJEWSKY, 2012, p. 24). This classification tends to be known as genetic intermediality, for advocating a close connection regarding the original product (primary source) in the process of transposition between places (media). We can identify the manifestations of this category in cinematographic adaptations and literary musicalizations that are fully guaranteed in the source text.

The manifestations perceived by media combination tend to be understood as the result of the process of combining two or more distinct media, articulating them together (RAJEWSKY, 2012, p. 24), *partially endorsed* in the source text. Operas, paintings and conceptual music, manuscripts with illuminations, comic strips and cinematographic re-readings operate within the characteristics proposed by this categorization.

Finally, different from previous classifications, the intermedial references are usually comprehended from an heterogeneous set of varied “strategies for the constitution of sense that

contribute to the total meaning of the product” (RAJEWSKY, 2012, p. 25), generated from circular dialogues – not always perceptible – between cultural transmitters and receivers.

This subcategory is anchored both in the use of various mechanisms of an inspirational order and in the *total and unrestricted freedom* of use of the source text – which can be worked on in an integral, partial, thematic, symbolic and/or imagistic format – making use, for this, of an eventual circular dynamic between the particular understanding, that is, reception, and previous knowledge of the source material, in other words, the repertoire, of its possible transmitters and/or receivers. It can be identified in cultural products that exemplify both the previous, harder sub categorizations, as well as in other more sinuous forms of entertainment, such as *podcasts*, *video-essays*, *serial narratives* and various other cultural and artistic productions.

For the purposes of this paper, we have established our comparative dialogue from this last subcategory, using, as a fundamental parameter for its identification, the thematic mirroring mechanism deliberately put to work by one of the agents responsible for the process of constructing meaning from the vast scope of the intermedial references – that is, the duo of showrunners of the TV series *Empire*. We understand that, in the case we have chosen to analyze, the intermedial references have been worked on from their composition structure, which allows their presentation in a restricted way in this paper. Therefore, let us move on to the presentation of the objects and the subsequent analysis.

3 Between kings: Lear and Lyon

Written between 1605 and 1606, the play *King Lear* tells the story of an elderly monarch who decides to divide his kingdom between his three daughters. As a condition for the distribution to take place, each of them was to give him a great compliment that expressed their love for their father. Regan and Goneril effusively fulfilled the agreement, while Cordelia, his youngest and favorite daughter, refused to do so, claiming to love him not more, nor less than owed by daughter to father – and thus avoiding the vice of flattery, seen as an unworthy act in the Christian discourse of the time. Enraged at the tone of his youngest daughter's commentary, Lear deserts her and refuses to pay her dowry to her future husband, the King of France, expelling her from the kingdom. Betrayed by his two daughters after the division of his kingdom,

Lear enters on a collision course with his own sanity – being saved, even if late, in the middle of the war, by Cordelia.

Considered by many Shakespearean scholars as one of the bard's most powerful plays, the tragedy of *King Lear*, according to Garber,

[...] has often, and rightly, been regarded as a sublime account of the human condition. Words like “timeless” and “universal,” so often used as virtual synonyms for “Shakespeare”, here find a fitting place. In the twentieth century in particular the celebrity of the play soared. After the emergence of existentialism in philosophy, Lear's ruminations on “being” and “nothing” seemed uncannily apt. The plays of Samuel Beckett – especially *Endgame* and *Waiting for Godot* – seemed to rewrite *King Lear* in a new idiom, and critical books like Maynard Mack's “*King Lear*” in *Our Time* and Jan Kott's *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* stressed the way the play voiced the despair and hope of a modern era. Yet this extraordinary play, in part a poignant and disaffected family drama, in part the political story of Britain's union and disunion, bears as well explicit markers of the time in which it was written, and the time in which it was set. As we have seen with other Shakespeare plays that engage chronicle history, these three crucial time periods – the time the play depicts, the time of its composition, and the time in which it is performed or read – will always intersect. (GARBER, 2005, p. 649)

Designed and structured from characters from a set of British legends assembled in the 12th century by the Welsh priest Geoffrey of Monmouth, the play has certain dramaturgical features that seem to indicate that Shakespeare worked longer on *King Lear* than on most of his other plays. Although several versions – composed by other playwrights – were performed on the stages of the Elizabethan theatre, the version of the story about the old monarch and his three daughters conceived by Shakespeare displays a narrative complexity that seems to overpower the works of his contemporaries:

[...] No previous report suggests that Lear had gone mad or that Cordelia had been hanged by her enemies. Moreover, the incorporation of a subplot that involves Gloucester and Edgar and acts as a counterpoint to the main plot (of Lear and Cordelia) is the entire responsibility of Shakespeare. (FRYE, 2011, p. 131, emphasis added, my translation)

Incorporating the technique of double plots, usually employed in his comedies, the subplots involving Gloucester and Edgar create a dynamic where “the events that are in the foreground summarize the events in the background, which are larger and slower and which

would take longer to elaborate” (FRYE, 2011, p. 143). By using this plot-mirroring resource, Shakespeare not only invigorates the story in terms of complexity, but also intensifies the perception, according to Bloom (2010), of a “cosmos falling into chaos”, caused by children's ingratitude from both core parts of its narrative. This rather dark and melancholy tone was modified during the Restoration, when the piece had some parts rewritten, so that it presented something close to a happy ending. From the 19th century onwards, however, Shakespeare's original version supplanted these more solar re-readings, and was considered by many scholars and critics to be one of the bard's great dramaturgical creations – as well as a fundamental narrative on questions of old age and human suffering.

On January 7, 2015, FOX channel presented the beginning of the story of Lucious Lyon (Terrence Howard), a powerful businessman in the American rap/hip-hop industry. A former drug dealer, Lyon transformed his life after the release of his album by a music industry tycoon, owner of the Empire Entertainment. It was a respected music conglomerate, responsible for leveraging, in addition to Lyon's own career, an entire profitable market for rap/hip-hop artists. In the process of transforming his label into a listed company, Lyon is diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), a degenerative disease of the nervous system that affects the motor neurons – cells responsible for the voluntary movements of the human musculature – that would give him approximately three years of healthy life before his symptoms appear.

Being informed about the poor state of his health, Lucious understands that the time has come to start preparing someone capable to lead his legacy of success within musical entertainment. To maintain the power of his company concentrated – and perpetuated – in the Lyon family, Lucious books a meeting with his children to announce his decision. Without going into any details about his adverse diagnosis, the patriarch decides that the future chairman and consequently future owner of Empire Entertainment would be one of his three sons: Andre (Trai Byers), financial director of the company and his father's right-hand man; Jamal (Jussie Smollett), a songwriter who, because of his father's non-acceptance of his homosexuality, tends to reject the proposals to release an album by Lucious's label; and Hakeem (Bryshere Y. Gray), a rapper averse to family business, who strives to follow his father's musical footsteps – because he understands that Lucious was misplaced as a musician when he became a businessman.

Not long after the secret – and familiar – announcement, Cookie Lyon (Taraji P. Henson), Lucious's ex-wife and Empire Entertainment's first financial investor, was released from prison for good behavior, after serving 17 years of a sentence, from the 30 imputed for her crimes – including the illegal acquisition of the money she had invested in her husband's incipient record company. Willing to take her former husband's part in the company that she helped to establish, Cookie ends up amplifying the dynamic of competitiveness between her sons, already stimulated by Lucious.

Andre, who has been involved with the company since his youth, feels undermined by the announcement of the dispute between the brothers, since he believes he is obviously the best prepared candidate to lead Empire – despite the suggestions of his father, who seems to believe that the company would stay on top if led by one of the two artistic brothers, not an executive. In retaliation for the announcement, unaware of his father's illness, Andre decides to arrange for Cookie to take over the career of his brother Jamal, setting him up against Hakeem – already assisted by Lucious – to dispute the musical legacy in the charts of American hip-hop, creating a media conflict between them and clearing up the path for Empire Entertainment's chairmanship.

A success with audience and critics, *Empire* was elected, in its debut year, as one of the 10 best series of 2015 by the American Film Institute, in addition to receiving the “program of the year” award by the Television Critics Association Award – besides several other nominations and awards, such as the Golden Globe for best actress in drama series for Taraji P. Henson, in the following year. In addition to its favorable critical reception, the series has also achieved good audience numbers. The first season, for example, had a total of 9.90 million viewers; and the final episode had 17.62 million, according to TV By The Numbers⁶.

The hit series has become a valuable asset for FOX: *Empire* has been renewed successive times for new seasons since its launch in 2015 – with the final season expected to occur in the second half of 2020. From among the vast array of cultural influences present in the TV series created by Lee Daniels and Danny Strong, it is possible to note considerable references to William Shakespeare's work – especially to the thematic structures contained in *King Lear* and mirrored in the creative appropriation worked by the screenwriters.

⁶ Cf. “Wednesday Final Ratings: No Adjustments Beyond Previously Released Increases for ‘Empire’ & ‘American Idol’” e “Wednesday Final Ratings: ‘Arrow’ & ‘Survivor’ Adjusted Up; ‘Supernatural’ Adjusted Down & Final ‘Empire’ Numbers”.

4 What is this, King Lear?

We can understand the process of thematic mirroring, in general terms, as a premeditated strategy of emulation, updating and subsequent use of a certain thematic framework that is easy to identify and carry out in full or in part. We can observe this process at the beginning of the pilot episode of the first season of *Empire*, during the establishment of its dramatic prerogatives. The main theme of the series mirrors the plot conceived by William Shakespeare in his 1606 tragedy: the story of the powerful man who, by virtue of some personal circumstances, decides to share his power among his offspring. This thematic mirroring is intentional, as showrunner Danny Strong reports in an interview for The Atlantic:

The idea [of the series] *Empire* [...] came to Danny Strong while he was driving. “*Empire* was just a random idea I had”, said Strong [...] “I was driving and wondered if I could do *King Lear* in a hip-hop universe. So: *King Lear*. Hip hop. And then my next thought was, ‘I should call Lee Daniels’”.⁷

While the story reverberates some other intermedial appropriations, such as situations that emulate Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* – and also James Goldman's *The Lion in Winter*, written in 1966, from which the creators also took the surname of the leading family⁸ – the influence of the Shakespearean tragedy, identified beyond thematic mirroring, is predominant in the development of the plot since its inception. For example, there is a direct citation to the source text – *King Lear* – by one of the protagonist's children during the scene in which he announces that he will begin the process of preparing his successor at Empire Entertainment. Upon discovering that he will dispute control of the company with his two brothers, Jamal asks his father if the Lyon family would become the Lear family:

Lucious is in front of the table. He nods his head to Andre.
LUCIOUS (CONT.): You know, me and your brother [Andre] have been working non-stop to turn Empire into a publicly traded company. [...] I'm going to do what Berry Gordy, Quincy Jones, Russell Simmons, Puffy and

⁷ ZUCKERMAN, Esther. Danny Strong on ‘Empire’: ‘King Lear’ Meets ‘Hip Hop’ Meets ‘Dynasty’.

⁸ Cf. GRUBBS, Jefferson. Is ‘Empire’ Based On ‘King Lear’? The Fox Drama Actually Has More In Common With Another Play.

Jay Z were never able to do. I'm gonna turn our business into a Fortune 500 company. This is my legacy.

HAKEEM: You will be a tycoon.

Lucious smiles at his favorite son.

LUCIOUS: That's right, kid. When we go public, I won't be a retired Philadelphia gangster anymore, I'll be like IBM and Coca-Cola.

Hakeem and Andre look at their father with adoration. Jamal seems indifferent. Lucious looks at each son directly and says the following, carefully:

LUCIOUS (CONT.): As part of going public, I have to choose someone who will take over the company when I leave. It won't happen today or tomorrow, but I have to start preparing a successor. [...] And I can only choose one of you.

Andre and Hakeem look at him, the importance of this conversation has been fully discovered by them. Jamal, however, is not satisfied.

JAMAL: *Is it serious? What is it, King Lear?*

LUCIOUS: You can call it what you like, you smart-ass, but in the coming months I'm going to have to make a decision.

ANDRE: What are you saying? That we're in competition to be the future head of the company?

Jamal puts his head down, disconcerted, not believing what was happening. (DANIELS; STRONG, 2015, p. 8-9, emphasis added)

Another case of thematic mirroring carried out during the pilot goes back to Goneril and Regan's betrayal of the agreement made with their father. In the Shakespearean text, Goneril stands against Lear, disrespecting the prerogatives established for the division of the kingdom, knowingly reducing the number of her father's employees and ordering any requests made by him to be ignored – an attitude later followed by sister Regan, who also decides to oppose the agreement made with the monarch. Similarly, during the first episode of *Empire*, Andre, in conversation with his wife Rhonda Lyon (Kaitlin Doubleday), decides to stand against Lucious, since he believes, because of his efforts to professionalize the company, that he has been ousted by the terms imposed for the forthcoming succession. Ignoring Lyon's confidence in his work within Empire Entertainment, Andre, just like Goneril did, attacks his father by encouraging his brother Jamal to join Cookie against Lyon.

This dynamic of mirroring the main theme of *King Lear* in *Empire*, used by Lee Daniels and Danny Strong in the construction of the first framework of their TV series, goes back to the usual strategy of appropriation of Shakespearean models for the composition of plots and stories easily identifiable by the American audience, carried out by the creators of these programs since the beginning of television history. This method, in making it easier for the viewers to recognize the models, engages them in the development of the story, stimulating the audience to relate to

their repertoire and previous cultural experiences. This method has been widely successful, as we can see from the TV show's positive ratings numbers, reported above.

In the area of intermedial relations, this premeditated dynamic of thematic mirroring carried out by the creators of the series tends to work as one of the countless tools for establishing – and simplifying – meanings that can be used in various other ways, in order to build a cultural product that balances the sometimes ambivalent tensions between novelty and tradition. Mirroring a Shakespearean plot of easy recognition in their TV series, Lee Daniels and Danny Strong trusted the reception of their product to the willingness of their audience to identify these initial correspondences – so that they could build on the other elements arranged in the series.

Final considerations

The freedom of ownership of the source text and its use in accordance with the purposes established by the plot make the series *Empire* a valuable example of the use of intermedial references and appropriations for the composition of new cultural products. Based on the thematic mirroring mechanism, the directors of the TV series focused on adapting and creatively incorporating the structures from the Shakespearean narrative into the framework of a new narrative – in the case of the series, set within the American musical environment.

Thus, it is possible to assume, even if hypothetically, that structural alterations such as, for example, the change of the trio of women, in the Shakespearean text, to a male trio in the series, tend to demonstrate the attention of the writers in the articulation and composition of credible scenarios for the audience of this narrative – in this case, a necessary transition from a place of ancient, aristocratic and hereditary nobleness, to a contemporary world of hip-hop dominated, in its majority, by male artists.

These structural similarities between the plots, premeditatedly manufactured, act both as a strategy of making sense and as an engagement for its audience: that is, by relying on the previous knowledge of a known story – even if only in terms of basic structure – to compose a new dramatic plot, the duo of directors tends to seek balance, through the mobilization of intermedial references to Shakespeare's work, between the notorious and the unknown – which

unveils from the recognition of structural familiarities to the development of episodes, seasons and dramatic plots of a new cultural product.

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