FROM STAGE TO SCREEN: INTERMEDIALITY AND GENDER PERFORMANCE IN *QUEEN LEAR*

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ABSTRACT

Intermediality has become one of the most significant concepts in contemporary film and media studies, highlighting the ways cinema negotiates its borders with other art forms. Pelin Esmer's *Queen Lear* (2019) exemplifies this negotiation by bringing Shakespeare's canonical tragedy into dialogue with the lived experiences of five women from the Toros Mountains. At once a documentary, a record of performance, and a cinematic re-imagining, the film becomes a space where theatre and cinema intersect, overlap, and reconfigure one another. This article explores the film as a case of cinematic intermediality, tracing how Esmer's camera reshapes theatrical performance through framing, montage, and sound, while simultaneously opening new horizons of meaning. Yet *Queen Lear* is not only about intermedial crossings; it is also about how gender itself is performed, embodied, and contested. Drawing on Judith Butler's notion of performativity, the article examines how the women's staging of *King Lear* produces a double performance: enacting Shakespeare's characters while voicing their own stories of labor, struggle, and resilience. In this sense, Esmer's film does not merely adapt Shakespeare but re-visions him from the margins, offering a feminist intervention that destabilizes cultural hierarchies and reframes tragedy through local and collective voices. Ultimately, *Queen Lear* demonstrates the transformative potential of cinema as both a medium of intermediality and a site of gendered resistance.

Keywords: Cinematic Intermediality, Gender Performance, Shakespearean Adaptation, Performative Documentary, Film Studies.

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SAHNEDEN BEYAZPERDEYE: *KRALİÇE LEAR*'DA MEDYALARARASILIK VE TOPLUMSAL CİNSİYET PERFORMANSI

ÖZET

Medyalararasılık, sinemanın diğer sanat formlarıyla sınırlarını nasıl müzakere ettiğini görünür kılarak çağdaş film ve medya çalışmalarında en önemli kavramlardan biri haline gelmiştir. Pelin Esmer'in *Kraliçe Lear* (2019) filmi, Shakespeare'in kanonik tragedyasını Toros Dağları'ndan beş kadının yaşam deneyimleriyle diyaloğa sokarak bu müzakereyi örnekler. Hem belgesel hem bir performans kaydı hem de sinemasal bir yeniden tahayyül olarak film; tiyatro ile sinemanın kesiştiği, üst üste bindiği ve birbirini yeniden şekillendirdiği bir mekâna dönüşür. Bu makale, filmi sinemasal medyalararasılığın bir örneği olarak ele almakta; Esmer'in kamerasının kadraj, kurgu ve ses aracılığıyla tiyatral performansı nasıl dönüştürdüğünü ve aynı anda yeni anlam ufukları açtığını incelemektedir. Ne var ki *Kraliçe Lear* yalnızca medyalararası geçişlerle ilgili değildir; toplumsal cinsiyetin nasıl sahnelendiği, bedenselleştiği ve tartışmaya açıldığıyla da ilgilidir. Judith Butler'ın performativite kavramına dayanarak, kadınların *Kral Lear* sahnelemesinin ikili bir performans ürettiği tartışılmaktadır: Shakespeare'in karakterlerini canlandırırken aynı zamanda kendi emek, mücadele ve direniş hikâyelerini dile getirmek. Bu bağlamda Esmer'in filmi Shakespeare'i yalnızca uyarlamakla kalmaz; onu marjinal bir bakış açısından yeniden görür, kültürel hiyerarşileri sarsan ve tragedyayı yerel ile kolektif sesler üzerinden yeniden çerçeveleyen feminist bir müdahale sunar. Sonuçta *Kraliçe Lear*, sinemanın hem medyalararası bir müzakere alanı hem de toplumsal cinsiyet direnişinin mekânı olabileceğini göstererek dönüştürücü potansiyelini ortaya koyar.

Anahtar Sözcükler: sinemasal medyalararasılık, toplumsal cinsiyet performansı, Shakespeare uyarlaması, performatif belgesel, film çalışmaları.

INTRODUCTION: RECLAIMING SHAKESPEARE FROM THE MARGINS

Shakespeare's *King Lear*[1] is not merely a family drama but one of his darkest tragedies, staging the dissolution of monarchical authority, the fragility of power, and the limits of human existence. Beginning with Lear's attempt to divide his kingdom among his daughters, the play exposes the intimate link between personal blindness and the collapse of political order. Traditionally staged within the mise-

[1] *King Lear* goes back to the ancient legend of Leir of Britain, transmitted through Geoffrey of Monmouth and later chronicles. The story revolves around three daughters: two treacherous and one virtuous. An anonymous play on King Leir circulated on the Elizabethan stage just before Shakespeare composed his version. After the English Restoration, the play was repeatedly rewritten, most famously by Nahum Tate in 1681, who gave it a happy ending. Yet since the nineteenth century, Shakespeare's tragic version has been recognized as the definitive one. Notably, Shakespeare altered the legend by denying Lear and Cordelia a triumph; instead, they die together at the end. This ending, with its bleak implications, has generally been preserved in modern film adaptations, even if some reworkings (such as Kurosawa's *Ran*) offer different emphases. See Geoffrey Bullough (ed.), *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, Vol. 7: Major Tragedies* (Bullough, 1975), esp. the section on King Lear for the transmission of the Leir legend and Shakespeare's alterations. Still, the issue of adapting Shakespeare to film remains controversial. See Russell Jackson, *Shakespeare and the Cinema* (Jackson, 2014) for a detailed discussion of Shakespeare's film adaptations and their critical reception. As Douglas Brode observes, Shakespearean cinema is the only subgenre of narrative film that remains the center of an ongoing debate as to whether it has a right to exist (Brode, 2000, p. 3). Despite this debate, Shakespeare on film demonstrates how stage and screen have become increasingly entangled in our intermedial cultural landscape.

en-scène of monarchy, the play has long been read as a meditation on authority, madness, and mortality. Yet the countless adaptations of *King Lear* across cultures reveal that the play's resonance extends far beyond royal courts. From modern stage productions to cinematic adaptations, from feminist and postcolonial rewritings to avant-garde experiments, it has continually been reimagined and transformed. This long tradition of adaptation has both reinforced the canonical power of Shakespeare's text and created opportunities to question and subvert that very canon. It is within this context that the staging of *King Lear* by women in remote Anatolian villages acquires its striking significance. Performed not by kings and noblemen but by women whose lives are shaped by labor, deprivation, and memory, the tragedy undergoes a radical reframing. The symbolic order of monarchy dissolves into the stark landscapes of the Toros Mountains; the discourse of sovereignty is reshaped through voices grounded in resilience and everyday performance. This displacement renders performance itself a site of negotiation between center and periphery, canon and locality, patriarchal authority and counter-hegemonic voices.

Esmer's film stages this negotiation not with neutrality but through a distinctly cinematic grammar that mobilizes framing, montage, and diegetic sound to translate theatrical presence into filmic narrative. The camera lingers, reframes, interrupts; it does not merely document the women's staging of *King Lear*, but dismantles the illusion of immediacy, reminding us that every act of recording is also an act of rewriting. What emerges is not a transparent window onto performance but a hybrid text in which theatre and cinema interpenetrate, producing what intermediality theorists have called medial transformation. *Queen Lear* places at its center the paradox of performance: that gender, like media, is always performed, embodied, and contested. Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity resonates here with urgency, as women who have long been silenced within both Shakespearean tradition and cinematic canon step into Lear's world. Their gestures, tones, and pauses are not mere imitations of a canonical script but acts of reclamation, weaving their own embodied histories into Shakespeare's text. In this sense, the film unsettles not only medial boundaries but also the hierarchies of authorship, textual authority, and legitimacy that have long secured Shakespeare's privileged position. The film, then, becomes more than an intermedial experiment. It is a feminist re-vision, a counter-reading from the margins that challenges the very economy of representation. By weaving together cinema, theatre, and lived experience, she crafts a text that is at once an homage and a quiet refusal; an intervention that reframes tragedy through the voices of those history has most often left unheard. In refusing to render Shakespeare untouchable, *Queen Lear* performs a double critique: of the hierarchies that sustain the canon and of the cinematic gaze that so often reproduces them.

Seen from this perspective, the staging of *King Lear* by women in periphery acquires a resonance that is both unsettling and revelatory. To see Shakespeare's tragedy stripped of crowns, palaces, and ritual pomp, and reborn instead through the voices of women whose lives have been marked by poverty, labor, and survival, is to confront the vulnerability of the canon itself. The familiar gestures

of sovereignty falter when performed on makeshift stages, the grandeur of monarchy dissolving into the bare landscapes of the Toros Mountains. In these settings, Lear's despair and rage no longer belong to kings but to ordinary bodies, carrying scars of work and memory. This reframing does not merely provincialize Shakespeare; it questions the cultural hierarchies that for centuries have enshrined him as universal while excluding the voices of those at the margins. The discourse of sovereignty, long tied to the spectacle of royal authority, is unsettled and rewritten by women who were never meant to speak its lines. Their accents, pauses, and embodied presence inscribe a different authorship, one that both displaces and enlarges the tragedy. In this displacement, performance becomes an act of critique: an insistence that Shakespeare, for all his canonical weight, can be reclaimed, revoiced, and reimagined from places and bodies the tradition has sought to forget. Specifically, the film emphasizes the visual contrast between the women's worn, practical clothing and the abstract language of kingship they utter, underscoring the political act of claiming the canonical text. This material juxtaposition visually enacts the subversion of social and cultural boundaries.

Esmer frames the women's voices and bodies in ways that immediately blur the boundaries between theatre, film, and lived experience. In the opening scene, the camera moves from behind the women rehearsing Shakespeare's lines by the sea into the shallow water itself, signaling both the passage of time since *The Play* (2005) and the fluidity of their identities. This imagery is juxtaposed with scenes in a Roman amphitheater, where the women reclaim the site for a fleeting rehearsal of *King Lear*. Their performances, often staged in schoolyards without costumes or props, interweave with fragments from their everyday lives, so that the documentary becomes a palimpsest of theatre and reality. The women's life stories run in parallel with the narrative of rehearsal. Zeynep, who plays Lear, recounts how she had to abandon her dream of becoming a nurse because her father needed her domestic labor; through Lear, she discovers herself. On their travels to remote mountain villages, the troupe reflects on freedom, gender roles, and fate. In one exchange, Zeynep insists that "there is no fate except which parents you are born to," a critical stance that unsettles the deterministic worldview of Shakespeare's play. Fate, a recurring theme in *King Lear*, here becomes a subject of feminist contestation: rather than divine providence, the women expose material and structural conditions shaping their lives. This capacity for reflection emerged through the earlier experience of being filmed in *The Play*. Intermediality, performing on stage while being documented on screen, enables not only improvisation within the play but also a reworking of the women's self-understanding. Their theatrical engagement transforms into a critical awareness of the gendered structures in society. In this sense, *Queen Lear* is less a faithful adaptation of Shakespeare than a subversive rewriting in which the play becomes a vehicle for feminist self-consciousness.

BETWEEN THEATRE AND CINEMA: INTERMEDIALITY, PERFORMANCE, AND FEMINIST REVISION

The early development of cinema was profoundly shaped by its relationship to the theatrical stage, both in visual composition and in the way it positioned the spectator. As Noël Burch observes, when early filmmakers began to move the camera closer to the actors and disrupt the fixed, proscenium-like space inherited from theatre, they were compelled to establish new rules of continuity—such as eye-line and screen-direction matching in order to preserve the spectator's spatial orientation that theatre had naturally provided (Burch, 1981, pp. 18-22). This continuity system thus reveals how cinema, even as it moved beyond the physical confines of the stage, continued to negotiate its dependence on theatrical conventions in shaping cinematic space and spectatorship. Yet, as André Bazin reminds us, cinema's specificity lies in its photographic ontology; its capacity to record and preserve the real through an indexical trace, rather than in the immediacy of performance. Bazin argues that the cinematic image "embalms time," capturing the existence of the world itself (Bazin, 2004, p. 14), while he contrasts this mediated realism with the live, spatial immediacy of theatrical presentation (2004, p. 108). Taken together, these perspectives reveal how cinema both inherited and transcended the theatrical mode: borrowing its spatial conventions while redefining presence through the photographic imprint of reality. Therefore, cinema emerges not as a pure medium but as an intermedial practice that negotiates proximity and distance, inheritance and rupture, in its ongoing dialogue with the performance arts. In this lineage, *Queen Lear* situates itself as a kind of cinematic intermediality: Her film does not simply record a theatrical event but reframes it through cinema's own codes –montage, framing, and temporality– while foregrounding how gendered bodies negotiate authority across both arts.

The relationship between theatre and cinema has often been described in terms of rivalry, inheritance, or remediation. From its earliest years, cinema drew upon theatrical conventions like mise-en-scène, dialogue, and gesture while simultaneously distinguishing itself through editing, framing, and the capacity to mobilize space and time. This tension has become central to the discourse of intermediality. Irina Rajewsky offers a useful taxonomy for such encounters in a literary context: *media combination* as the presence of more than one medium in a product; *medial transposition* as the adaptation or transfer from one medium to another, and *intermedial reference* when one medium evokes another without actual combination (Rajewsky, 2005, pp. 51-52). In the film, these modalities converge through cinematic image. The film records a theatrical performance, yet it does not merely transpose the stage to the screen; rather, it constructs a hybrid form in which theatre and cinema continuously reconfigure one another. This hybridity can be further illuminated through Lars Elleström's framework on intermediality. Elleström emphasizes that media are not sealed entities, but porous systems defined by four modalities: material, sensory, spatiotemporal, and semiotic (Elleström, 2010, p. 15). Cinema, when it incorporates theatre, does not simply reproduce it; it transforms the modalities of liveness and corporeality into cinematic codes of framing, montage, and sound. *Queen Lear* exemplifies this

porousness: Esmer's camera captures the immediacy of the women's stage performances while simultaneously reframing them through cinematic rhythm and texture. What the audience encounters, then, is not theatre preserved but theatre re-inscribed in filmic language.

The politics of this intermedial encounter become clearer when considered through performance theory. Erika Fischer-Lichte highlights the transformative power of performance, rooted in the co-presence of performers and spectators and in what she terms the autopoietic feedback loop. The feedback loop between actors and spectators is autopoietic: it continually reproduces and transforms itself, generating the performance as a living event (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, pp. 40-42). However, in here, this loop is mediated by the camera. The film interrupts the immediacy of theatrical presence, reorienting spectatorship toward cinematic temporality. Philip Auslander's classic argument on "liveness" of a performance in a mediatized culture becomes relevant here: liveness is not an essential or transhistorical attribute of performance but a historically contingent category, shaped in relation to successive media technologies. In this sense, theatre has always been in dialogue with its mediatized counterparts (Auslander, 1999, p. 12). It foregrounds this tension by showing performances staged in small villages while simultaneously mediating them for a global film audience. The liveness of the women's theatre is displaced into the reproducibility of cinema, raising the question on what kind of "presence" does the film offer. At this juncture, intermediality and performance intersect with feminist theory. Judith Butler defines gender not as essence but as performativity, enacted and reiterated through bodily acts and social conventions (Butler, 1999, pp. 171-177). In the film, the women's performance of Shakespearean characters produces what might be termed a "double performativity": they embody Lear, Goneril, or Cordelia, while at the same time voicing their own lived experiences of labor, marginalization, and resilience. Their gestures are not simply theatrical but autobiographical, a layering that exposes how gender roles are constructed and contested in both life and reproduction. Here, the intermedial transformation is inseparable from a feminist re-vision: theatre and cinema become vehicles for rearticulating gendered subjectivities.

Engaging with Shakespeare's canonical texts, *Queen Lear* evokes a fundamental distinction in adaptation studies by embracing a feminist strategy of rewriting: *appropriation*. In adaptation studies, appropriation has often been understood not merely as borrowing but as a deliberate re-writing that shifts authority from the canonical text to its new interpreters. This aligns with Linda Hutcheon's definition of adaptation as "repetition without replication" (Hutcheon, 2006, pp. 7-9). Julia Sanders similarly distinguishes appropriation from adaptation by stressing its tendency to relocate a text into new cultural and ideological contexts, often in ways that radically transform or subvert the original (Sanders, 2006, pp. 26-28). Within feminist criticism, this notion takes on a more radical dimension: Elin Diamond similarly argues that feminist performance "unmakes mimesis" by re-staging classical works through female bodies and voices, thereby destabilizing patriarchal authority (Diamond, 1997, pp. 43-52). Adaptation always involves both continuity and change: it repeats elements of the source while refusing

to replicate them verbatim. The film, by situating Shakespeare in the voices and bodies of rural Turkish women, exposes the instability of canon itself: the supposed universality of *King Lear* is refracted through the particularities of local and gendered experience. Moreover, as Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan (2010) argue, adaptation is fundamentally "impure," marked by hybridity and contamination (Cartmell & Whelehan, 2010, p. 8). *Queen Lear* embodies this impurity, functioning simultaneously as a documentary, a record of performance, and a cinematic adaptation. In rejecting purity, her work critiques the very hierarchies that elevate Shakespeare as untouchable and cinema as the supposedly superior medium of preservation. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that the film cannot be understood solely as a documentary or a record of performance. It is an intermediality in which stage and screen overwrite one another, and where gender is performed not as a stable identity but as an ongoing negotiation.

The concept of cinematic intermediality has been particularly useful in theorizing how cinema negotiates its relation to other media. Ágnes Pethő conceives of cinematic intermediality as a mode of analysis that focuses on relations rather than fixed structures, emphasizing what occurs in between media. For Pethő, the "inter" in intermediality signifies cinema's capacity to articulate and explore the thresholds where different media encounter and transform one another. For Pethő, intermedial moments draw attention to cinema's permeability, revealing how film is constituted through its encounters with theatre, painting, literature, or music (Pethő, 2011, pp. 2-5). In a similar vein, further clarity comes from Kim Knowles and Marion Schmid who maps out cinema's productive synergies with other arts and underscores that intermedial practice is not peripheral but central to thinking about cinema's ontology and medium specificity (2021, pp. 2-4). André Gaudreault and Philippe Marion demonstrate that, in moving from one medium to another, the "subject" of a story would necessarily undergo a series of informing and deforming constraints linked to what might be called the new medium's intrinsic configuration, since each subject would be presumably endowed with its own configuration (Gaudreault & Marion, 2004, p. 58). They point out that "[…] physical encounter between idea and material, or in terms of the narrative arts the encounter between the *story* (fabula) and the medium, has important consequences because it assumes that any process of adaptation must consider the kinds of 'incarnations' inherent in this encounter in terms of the materiality of media." (2004, p. 61). From an intermedial perspective, theatre and film are closely aligned not only in dramaturgical structure but also in materiality. Seen in this light, it becomes a paradigmatic case of cinematic intermediality: Esmer's camera does not simply document theatrical performance but reframes it through montage, framing, and sound, producing a hybrid form that oscillates between theatre and cinema while making their boundaries visible.

The hybridity of the film also invites consideration from the perspective of documentary style, particularly the tensions between representation, performance, and mediation. Bill Nichols's typology of documentary modes identifies the performative mode as one in which the subjectivity of participants

and the situatedness of performance become central, disrupting the illusion of transparent access to reality (2001, pp. 131-135). Nichols highlights how the performative mode foregrounds embodied, affective experience, often privileging marginalized voices whose truths cannot be captured by observational or expository strategies. Stella Bruzzi further radicalizes this idea by arguing that all documentaries are inherently performative because they are constituted through acts of performance in front of the camera (2006, pp. 185-189). For Bruzzi, the significance of performative documentary lies not in claiming objective truth but in making visible the very processes of mediation, subjectivity, and interaction. *Queen Lear* operates at the intersection of theatre and cinema as a performative documentary: the women perform Shakespeare's *King Lear* not only for their local audiences but also for Esmer's camera, layering the act of stage performance with a cinematic reframing. The film thus embodies the "double performance" already identified in feminist theory; gender as performance (Butler, 1999, p. 173) while also enacting what Nichols and Bruzzi describe as performance within documentary practice. *Queen Lear* thus unsettles the presumed boundaries between reality and fiction, stage and screen, truth and performance.

The entanglement of theatre and cinema has never been a neutral one: it is bound up with questions of authorship, performance, and cultural authority. While much of film theory has emphasized this relationship in a European or global context, in Türkiye the dialogue between stage and screen carries weight, shaping not only aesthetic practices but also debates on national identity and modernity. This dynamic is crucial for situating the film within a longer genealogy of intermedial crossings. Nijat Özön influentially periodizes Turkish cinema into "theatre artists," "transition," and "filmmakers" phases, arguing that the Ertuğrul/Darülbedayi era (c. 1922–1939) left a lingering "tiyatro kokusu" ("theatrical smell") that delayed the formation of a distinct film language; from the 1950s onward, a new generation of "filmmakers" gradually asserted cinematic specificity (Özön, 2010, p. 27). This shift marked cinema's emergence as an independent art form capable of shaping its own aesthetic logic rather than reproducing theatrical modes. Yet, as the history of Turkish cinema shows, this separation was never absolute—traces of theatricality continued to inform cinematic performance, mise-en-scène, and spectatorship. This historical dynamic also provides a critical lens for understanding contemporary Shakespeare adaptations in Türkiye. *Queen Lear* revisits the long-standing dialogue between stage and screen, but from a reversed perspective. The film reactivates the theatrical legacy that once dominated Turkish cinema, yet re-inscribes it within a contemporary, feminist, and intermedial discourse.

Pelin Esmer began with the experimental short *Kar* (*The Snow*, 2002), followed by her first feature documentary *Koleksiyoncu* (*The Collector*, 2002). After founding her own production company, Sinefilm, she moved fluidly between documentary and fiction: the feature-length documentary *The Play* was succeeded by three fiction films –*11'e 10 Kala* (*10 to 11*, 2009), *Gözetleme Kulesi* (*Watchtower*, 2012), and *İşe Yarar Bir Şey* (*Something Useful*, 2017)– before she returned to documentary with this film. All these films were produced with small crews and modest budgets, yet they display a distinctive

stylistic vision. Her work is marked by a constant negotiation between documentary realism and fiction. Rather than representing reality "as it is," she reconstructs it through fictional elements already embedded in lived experience, thereby crafting a hybrid form that resists strict genre. Her aesthetic relies on idiosyncratic techniques that evoke the flow of real life; natural lighting, fluid camera movements, and everyday settings such as homes, trains, or watchtowers while refusing to surrender entirely to realism. Narratives generally follow chronological structures with classical conflicts, but she destabilizes the invisibility of continuity editing by foregrounding mise-en-scène. In her films, the arrangement of characters, gestures, and spaces before the camera shapes continuity as much as editing does, echoing the legacy of Italian Neorealism through her reliance on non-professional actors. Sound design is equally central, often disrupting the dominance of the visual and creating sensorial textures that anchor viewers in the emotional climate of a scene. Crucially, she has always engaged intermediality as both method and sensibility. In her screenwriting and visual strategies, she draws on literature and theatre, not to reproduce them, but to insert cinema into liminal spaces where art and life, fiction and reality, performance and everyday practice intersect. As she herself has observed, "art can flourish better in in-between spaces, at moments and places of transition, through paradoxes and conflicts" (Özsoy & Öztürk, 2017, p. 174). Her characters, too, often inhabit such thresholds, suspended between inner worlds and the realities that surround them. In this respect, her cinema intentionally embraces an intermedial context, positioning itself at the crossings of media and lived experience.

While *The Play* is anchored in a local context, *Queen Lear* places that locality in dialogue with a transnational canon by filtering Shakespeare's *King Lear* through the voices and bodies of rural Turkish women. Fourteen years after Esmer first filmed the troupe, she returns to follow their journey once again, now in the form of a traveling theatre that brings *King Lear* to remote mountain villages and ancient amphitheaters in southern Türkiye. The project, directed by Hüseyin Arslanköylü of Mersin City Theatre, combined professional actors with the five women from *The Play* (Behiye, Fatma, Zeynep, Cennet, and Ümmü) and staged performances in villages of fewer than 500 inhabitants, often without running water or paved roads. Each stop transformed communal spaces into sites of performance, where local audiences actively participated, blurring distinctions between actor and audience. The itinerary itself, marked across mountain plateaus and village squares, reinforced the sense of in-betweenness that defines her intermedial practice. The adaptation of *King Lear* gradually emerged through improvisation, negotiation, and lived encounters along the road. Shakespeare's tragedy intertwined with the women's own life stories, its moral dichotomies refracted through their daily struggles. In this process, Fatma's transformation of Lear became emblematic of the film's feminist revision, turning a patriarchal archetype into a vehicle for female self-expression. Even the motif of travel –constant movement from village to village– functions as a metaphor for intermediality itself: a negotiation between art and life, canon and locality, theatre and cinema. As Esmer documents these performances, she highlights not

only the adaptability of Shakespeare's text but also the transformative potential of performance for marginalized voices.

PLAY WITHIN PLAY: CINEMATIC RECONFIGURATIONS OF THEATRE

Theatre has long been one of cinema's privileged interlocutors. From filmed stage productions to experimental hybrids, the tension between theatrical presence and cinematic mediation has generated a rich history of aesthetic negotiation. *Queen Lear* situates itself within this lineage, but with a crucial difference: its theatre is not a polished stage performance in an urban theatre house, but a series of makeshift enactments in Anatolian villages, performed by women who embody both Shakespearean characters and their own lived identities. The result is a layered play within play, where Shakespeare's *King Lear* becomes a frame through which cinema reconfigures performance and community alike. The notion of play within play recalls Shakespeare's own use of meta-theatrical devices –Hamlet's "Mousetrap," or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*'s comic artisans– where performance reflects upon itself. In *Queen Lear*, however, the doubling is mediated by cinema. The women stage *King Lear*, but Esmer stages the women staging "gendered" *Lear*, refracting theatrical performance through the cinematic lens. This double framing resonates with Bazin's reflections on the relationship between theatre and cinema. Bazin observes that the screen does not create a theatrical space; it redistributes reality according to the laws of cinema (Bazin, 2004, pp. 96-102). From this, *Queen Lear* exemplifies how theatrical performance, once mediated through the camera, is transformed into a cinematic event rather than a mere reproduction of stage presence. But her film complicates this idea: the theatre performed in the moment is not embalmed intact but fragmented, reassembled, and mediated through montage, framing, and sound. The supposed transparency of cinema reveals itself instead as a process of construction. Key to this reconfiguration is the camera's selective gaze. She frequently frames the women in close-up as they recite Lear's lines, juxtaposing their Shakespearean speech with the textures of their everyday environment. The gaze is reoriented here: the women are not objectified as passive subjects but foregrounded as active performers and narrators of their own stories. The close-up does not fragment their bodies into eroticized images but invests their faces with authority, embedding Shakespeare's canonical lines in a lived context of gendered labor and resilience.

Sound plays an equally transformative role. The diegetic sounds of village life interweave with Shakespeare's text, producing what Rick Altman terms a *soundscape*. Altman notes that "sound's ability to diffuse the cinema event throughout the culture is matched by sound's equal capacity to infuse cinema with elements of the culture's soundscape." (1992, p. 14). This layering of voices and noises destabilizes the hierarchy between script and environment. Theatre, traditionally performed against the silence of a stage, is here embedded in a sonic ecology that resists containment. The women's delivery of Shakespeare's words is inseparable from their acoustic milieu, reminding the viewer that performance is always situated and contingent, and never abstract. The use of montage further complicates the relation between theatre and cinema. Sergei Eisenstein famously defined montage as the collision of

images to generate meaning (1949, pp. 34-37). In *Queen Lear*, Esmer juxtaposes scenes of rehearsal, performance, and everyday domestic work, creating a montage of dissonance that redefines what counts as theatrical. The performance is not confined to the staged scenes but extends into kitchens, fields, and communal gatherings. In this sense, she enacts the materiality of cinema, a practice that refuses to erase the conditions of production. For instance, the sound of a nearby tractor engine often drowns out a crucial line of Shakespeare, forcing the viewer to prioritize the rural environment over the canonical text. This deliberate acoustic choice effectively integrates the labor of the women into the theatrical performance itself.

In 2003, Esmer encountered a newspaper report about a group of peasant women in the village of Arslanköy, Mersin, who had founded a theatre troupe. This discovery led to her first feature-length documentary *The Play*, whose very title already signals intermediality. The film follows nine women from the Taurus Mountains as they collectively write and stage *Kadınların Feryadı* (*The Outcry of Women*), a play based on their own life stories and burdens. Under the guidance of school principal Hüseyin Arslanköylü and despite the skepticism of the village men, the women rehearse in the local schoolhouse and confront personal histories they had scarcely voiced even to themselves. As Feride Çiçekoğlu observes, their decision to switch gender roles constituted a subversion of a long theatrical tradition in Türkiye, where women were historically excluded from the stage (Çiçekoğlu, 2020, p. 31). In this sense, *The Play* foregrounds intermediality not only as a crossing between stage and screen but also as a vehicle for female agency, embodiment, and resistance. *Queen Lear* returns to these women fourteen years later, but now with a more explicitly self-reflexive and intermedial focus. Whereas the first film captured the immediacy of their embodied performance, the second meditates on how their lives have been (re)mediated through their own images on stage and screen. A comparison between *The Play* and *Queen Lear* highlights a significant shift in both documentary mode and the filmic treatment of theatre. *The Play* adopts what Nichols describes as a "participatory mode", where the filmmaker's presence and interaction with her subjects are foregrounded (Nichols, 2001, p. 121). The women are depicted rehearsing, negotiating scripts, and navigating patriarchal resistance, with her camera emphasizing process and collaboration. In contrast, *Queen Lear* moves closer to what Nichols terms the "performative mode", privileging subjective embodiment and affective resonance over direct observation (2001, p. 124). While *The Play* frames theatre as a communal project of empowerment, *Queen Lear* reframes theatre as a kind of intermedial encounter, transforming the ephemerality of stage performance into cinematic permanence. This shift also invites a more critical reflection. In *The Play*, theatre operates primarily as a social practice, enabling village women to negotiate their voices within a patriarchal community. In *Queen Lear*, by contrast, theatre becomes an aesthetic and intermedial resource for cinema, aligning with Pethő's claim that intermedial moments expose cinema's permeability and hybridity (2011, pp. 7-12). One might ask whether this transformation risks diluting the immediate political force of theatre by subsuming it into the cinematic frame, or whether it amplifies

its resonance by circulating it to wider audiences. Similarly, while *The Play* depicts women in the process of becoming subjects through collective authorship, *Queen Lear* presents them as already-constituted performers whose bodies simultaneously channel Shakespeare's characters and their own lived histories. Taken together, the two films illustrate her evolving strategy: from documenting the making of theatre to reimagining theatre itself as cinema.

What emerges from these cinematic strategies is a radical redefinition of theatricality. Drawing on Erika Fischer-Lichte, we may distinguish the eventness of performance from the representational (semiotic) dimension of theatre; in her account, spectators' perception continually shifts between presence and representation, and performance is best understood as an event, not a fixed work (2008, pp. 72-75). Esmer's film oscillates between the two: it preserves the event of the women's performances while simultaneously representing them through cinematic codes. The oscillation produces an intermedial surplus, where theatre is neither absorbed into cinema nor left intact, but remade as a kind of overlapping modes. This reconfiguration also carries a political charge. As Diamond argues, feminist performance —drawing on Brechtian strategies– works to demystify representation by revealing its conditions of production, rather than leaving theatrical meaning to appear natural or given (1997, pp. 43-54). *Queen Lear* does precisely this: by framing women who are not professional actresses but villagers performing Shakespeare, the film highlights the artificiality of theatrical convention and the authority structures embedded within it. The "play within play" thus becomes a "play against play": a challenge to the exclusivity of canonical performance, reclaiming theatre as a space for marginalized voices. In conclusion, *Queen Lear* demonstrates how cinema can reconfigure theatre not through faithful preservation but through creative mediation. By mobilizing framing, montage, and sound, Esmer produces a layered performance that is at once Shakespearean and non-Shakespearean, theatrical and cinematic, local and universal. The play within play becomes a critical device through which theatre is not only represented but transformed. The motif of the "play within a play" has long been a device through which theatre reflects upon its own conditions of performance. In cinema, such self-reflexive moments often reconfigure theatricality by layering multiple modes of representation; stage, screen, and lived experience. *Queen Lear* mobilizes precisely this device, transforming Shakespeare's tragedy into a site where theatre is refracted through film, and film, in turn, stages theatre anew. Fatma, both in *The Play* and *Queen Lear*, impersonates King Lear by putting on a mustache, embodying Shakespeare's tragic patriarch through her own rural performance. In the latter, after the troupe stages the play, they watch themselves in a bus where a projection of *The Play* is screened, creating a striking layering of theatre, cinema, and lived experience. The editing intercuts seamlessly between the women's current journey, their earlier performances, and Shakespeare's text, producing a kaleidoscopic effect. Narratively, this becomes a mediatized story: the play functions as the base text, but its meaning is reconfigured through cinema. Each medium asserts its own expressive resources all converging in the intermediality.

EMBODIED VOICES: GENDER PERFORMANCE AND COUNTER-HEGEMONIC APPROPRIATION

The women at the center of *Queen Lear* embody a paradox: they are at once performers of Shakespeare's canonical text and narrators of their own marginal stories. This doubleness exemplifies Butler's notion of "gender performativity", which emphasizes that gender is not an inner essence but a repeated stylization of the body (1999, p. 173). In it, gender is performed twice over: the women take on Shakespearean roles while simultaneously staging their identities as rural women marked by labor, poverty, and resilience. Their voices, gestures, and bodily presence render visible the contingency of both theatrical roles and social identities. Yet this layering is not without ambivalence. On the one hand, it destabilizes the presumed universality of Shakespeare's tragedy by filtering it through female bodies and vernacular experience, thereby provincializing the canon. On the other hand, the very reliance on Shakespeare raises questions about cultural legitimacy: do these women gain visibility precisely because they borrow the authority of the canon, or does their appropriation expose how fragile that authority is when re-embodied at the margins? This tension suggests that *Queen Lear* simultaneously affirms and unsettles the symbolic power of Shakespeare, making the film less a celebration of fidelity and more a critical site where gender, class, and cultural hierarchy are negotiated through performance. Indeed, one of the film's most powerful moments occurs when the actors, during a rehearsal, begin to narrate their own real-life stories, thus matching the fictional suffering of King Lear with their own lived experiences of poverty and injustice. This moment blurs the boundaries not only of performance but also of the function of theatre as a tool for social resistance.

This doubleness complicates traditional notions of authorship. Shakespearean adaptation always reopens questions of textual authority: who owns the text, and who has the right to rewrite it? In *Queen Lear*, authorship is no longer located in Shakespeare's canonical authority or even in Esmer's directorial vision, but in the collective performance of the women themselves. Their embodied voices enact what bell hooks describes as "talking back" –a gesture of resistance in which marginalized subjects claim discursive space (hooks, 1989, p. 9). By voicing Lear's lines in their own accents, rhythms, and vernacular inflections, the women displace the center of authorship from canonical text to counter-hegemonic performance. Yet this process is not free of contradiction. The film still depends on Shakespeare as a cultural touchstone, raising the uneasy question of whether the women's voices are amplified because they appropriate the canon or whether such appropriation risks reinscribing the very hierarchies it seeks to unsettle. Their act of "talking back" thus oscillates between empowerment and ambivalence: it simultaneously validates subaltern expression and exposes the persistent gravitational pull of canonical authority. In this sense, the film exemplifies both the liberatory potential and the structural limits of feminist appropriation when it engages with one of the most powerful cultural texts in the Western tradition.

The embodied dimension of this performance cannot be overstated. Fischer-Lichte emphasizes the corporeality of performance as central to its transformative power, generated in the autopoietic feedback loop between performers and spectators (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, pp. 38-42). In the film, the women's bodies –aged, weathered, and visibly inscribed by agricultural labor– do not conform to the normative expectations of Shakespearean heroines or kings. Instead, they infuse the text with alternative corporealities that expand its semantic field beyond the confines of the canon. Their embodiment enacts what Diana Taylor terms the "repertoire," a mode of transmitting cultural knowledge through embodied practice rather than written archive (Taylor, 2003, pp. 20-23). Yet this repertoire is not neutral; it challenges dominant aesthetics that have long privileged youthful, idealized, and often white bodies as the legitimate vessels of Shakespearean performance. By bringing their lived bodies into dialogue with canonical lines, the women simultaneously broaden the interpretive possibilities of *King Lear* and expose the exclusions embedded in its performance history. In this sense, *Queen Lear* becomes a repertoire of counter-memories, where Shakespeare's text coexists uneasily with the gestures, accents, and rhythms of rural women's lives. The result is both empowering and unsettling: empowering, because it reclaims cultural space for marginalized bodies; unsettling, because it reveals how deeply entrenched norms of representation continue to shape what is considered "authentic" Shakespeare.

The camera intensifies the embodiment by privileging close-ups and long takes that linger on faces, hands, and pauses. Rather than fragmenting women's bodies into fetishized images, as classical cinematic grammar often does (Mulvey, 1975), Esmer's lens emphasizes their authority as speaking and laboring subjects. This move can be read alongside hooks's notion of the "oppositional gaze", which insists on reclaiming visuality from the structures of patriarchal and racial domination (hooks, 1992, p. 116). By lingering on wrinkles, hesitations, and silences, she refuses the erasure of difference and affirms what Trinh T. Minh-ha calls an ethics of "speaking nearby" rather than speaking for (Minh-ha, 1991, p. 125). Moreover, the corporeal detail of hands marked by agricultural labor and faces weathered by age foregrounds what Sobchack terms the "carnal address" of the cinematic image, whereby spectators engage affectively with embodied presence rather than abstract representation (Sobchack, 2004, p. 64). *Queen Lear* mobilizes film form to resist both patriarchal representation and the authority of the Shakespearean canon, transforming silence and delay into counter-hegemonic gestures that inscribe new modes of visibility for marginalized bodies. Hélène Cixous's call for *écriture feminine*; a writing of the body that resists phallocentric discourse (Cixous, 1976, p. 880), echoes in these performances, where the women write themselves into Shakespeare not through pen but through embodied presence. Their wrinkles, accents, and gestures become inscriptions of difference, re-signifying Lear's tragedy through local textures of gendered labor and rural resilience. Yet this gesture of feminist rewriting is not without ambivalence. On the one hand, it enacts what Julia Kristeva has described as the disruptive force of the semiotic, breaking into the symbolic order of canonical language (Kristeva, 1985, p. 28). On the other hand, the women's voices remain tethered to Shakespeare's text,

raising the question of whether their authorship emerges independently or whether it still relies on the cultural capital of the Bard.[2] In this sense, *Queen Lear* illustrates both the liberatory potential and the structural limits of feminist appropriation: it destabilizes textual authority by embodying it otherwise, yet also reveals how deeply entrenched canonical frameworks continue to mediate what counts as legitimate authorship.

By situating these performances in the material and cultural specificity of the Toros Mountains, *the film* articulates a subtle yet forceful critique of universality. The film destabilizes the long-standing assumption, often attached to Shakespeare, that his works transcend context and speak equally to all audiences. Esmer's film counters this logic by insisting that meaning emerges through specific bodies, places, and histories: the women's agricultural labor, their aging bodies, and the rural landscapes of the Toros Mountains all inflect and reshape the text. This localization of performance functions as a counter-hegemonic act, echoing Gayatri Spivak's call to "speak from the margins" in ways that resist subsumption into dominant discourse (Spivak, 1988, p. 272). By allowing Anatolian women to claim Shakespeare as their own, *Queen Lear* resists the fetishization of global Shakespeare which often masks Eurocentric hierarchies under the rhetoric of universality.[3] In conclusion, *Queen Lear* exemplifies how embodied voices can destabilize canonical authorship and generate counter-hegemonic cultural authority. Through the double performance of Shakespeare's text and their own lived realities, Her protagonists enact a feminist intervention that reclaims theatre, cinema, and authorship alike. Their performance suggests that the canon's authority is not immutable but negotiable, subject to revision through the embodied practices of those it has historically excluded. The location thus becomes not a peripheral site of reception but a stage where the universality of Shakespeare is provincialized, and cultural authorship is redistributed.

INTERMEDIAL PALIMPSEST: NEGOTIATING CANON, LOCALITY, AND RESISTANCE

The notion of the palimpsest has become a fashionable, almost overworked metaphor for intermedial practice. While its original reference –to manuscripts where older texts linger beneath new inscriptions– undeniably captures processes of layering, overwriting, and reactivation, its critical use sometimes risks flattening the specificity of media interactions into a generalized image of accumulation. In cinema, intermediality is frequently described as palimpsestic, yet one might ask

[2] The reference to Shakespeare's "cultural capital" draws on Pierre Bourdieu's theorization of capital as not only economic but also social and cultural resources that confer symbolic power and legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1986). Within this framework, Shakespeare as *the Bard of Avon* functions as a privileged marker of high culture and literary authority in Western traditions. To appropriate Shakespeare is thus to negotiate access to that cultural capital: it can amplify marginalized voices by granting them legitimacy through canonical association, but it can also reinscribe hierarchies by making visibility contingent on proximity to the canon.

[3] The critique of "global Shakespeare" as a discourse that often masks Eurocentric hierarchies can be traced in postcolonial scholarship. See *Post-colonial Shakespeares* (Loomba & Orkin, Post-Colonial Shakespeares, 1998) esp. "Introduction"; and Denis Kennedy, *Foreign Shakespeare: Contemporary Performance* (Kennedy, 1993), which discusses how localized performances resist the homogenizing rhetoric of universality.

whether this analogy illuminates the distinct tensions between forms or merely romanticizes their coexistence. *Queen Lear* is often taken as a striking example: Shakespeare's *King Lear* is not simply adapted or displaced but refracted through the lived experiences of rural Turkish women. Still, rather than a seamless layering, the film reveals frictions between canon and locality, performance and lived reality that resist the smoothness implied by the palimpsest metaphor. In this sense, *Queen Lear* may invite us to reconsider whether "palimpsest" adequately names what is at stake in such intermedial crossings, or whether it obscures the uneven negotiations through which meaning emerges.

In *Queen Lear*, adaptation can be often read as a kind of palimpsest: Shakespeare's lines are spoken but never carried with their original authority. Instead, they are refracted through local dialects, performed in village squares, and set against the rhythms of daily labor. The play does persist, but its persistence is fragile, marked by contestation and by the constant intrusion of new inscriptions that displace as much as they preserve. Gérard Genette's notion of "hypertextuality" provides a useful frame here: the later text does not copy but transforms, creating a relation of derivation without fidelity (Genette, 1997, pp. 5-7). Still, *Queen Lear* demonstrates how such hypertextual rewriting is never neutral. In this sense, the palimpsest and hypertext metaphors illuminate but also risk idealizing what is, in practice, a far more unsettled negotiation. The film stages not a seamless layering of Shakespeare with local voices, but an uneven negotiation in which rural women actively rewrite a patriarchal tragedy on their own terms. In doing so, *Queen Lear* challenges the gendered hierarchies of cultural authority, suggesting that adaptation is less about repetition than about resistance, less about preserving a legacy than about creating space for new, feminist inscriptions. The film's frequent use of jarring cuts between the women performing a royal scene and immediately returning to their arduous farm work emphasizes this friction over fluid layering. This layering destabilizes the presumed universality of Shakespeare, a universality that, as Ania Loomba argues, is inseparable from histories of colonialism and cultural hegemony (Loomba, 2002, pp. 6-8). To situate *King Lear* in the Toros Mountains is therefore not simply an act of local appropriation but an intervention into those hegemonies. The performance is not a passive reception of the global canon but an embodied act of re-signification, in which patriarchal and colonial legacies alike are unsettled. The women's presence insists on the local, the specific, and the peripheral; registers often excluded from the Shakespearean archive and from the broader structures of cultural authority. Their enactments reveal how adaptation can be not just aesthetic but also resistant, unsettling the hierarchies that privilege certain voices while silencing others. At the same time, it would be reductive to celebrate this simply as "liberation": the canon persists, albeit uneasily, within the performance. Shakespeare is neither erased nor fully dethroned; instead, his text is revoiced in ways that make its authority contingent, fragile, and entangled with new feminist and postcolonial inscriptions. The palimpsest here thus becomes political not only in its refusal of erasure but in its insistence that cultural meaning emerges through contestation, negotiation, and the agency of those historically relegated to the margins.

Esmer repeatedly intercuts scenes of performance with fragments of everyday life so that Shakespearean tragedy is not set apart as an autonomous aesthetic event but inscribed directly onto the textures of rural existence. This formal choice recalls Walter Benjamin's insistence that cultural texts must always be read in relation to their material conditions foregrounding the inseparability of art and life (Benjamin, 1999, pp. 460-465). By layering Lear's lines over images of subsistence labor, she politicizes the intermedial encounter: theatre is shown not as a transcendent cultural inheritance but as something fragile, embodied, and contingent upon women's lived realities. Yet, the strategy is not without a certain ambivalence. On one hand, it disrupts the aura of Shakespeare by juxtaposing the canonical with the mundane, gently destabilizing the hierarchy that privileges "high" culture over "low." On the other, her intercutting inevitably aestheticizes the everyday: women's labor (cooking, farming, caring for animals etc.) becomes part of the film's visual texture. However, rather than reducing these activities to decorative backdrops, the cinematography imbues them with gravity and intimacy. Her use of natural light, handheld camera movements, and close framings underscores the physicality of daily routines, situating them not as mere "local color" but as the very ground upon which Shakespeare's text is revoiced. The alternation between staged performance and quotidian labor produces a montage that resists separation: theatre is folded back into life, and life infuses the theatrical with unexpected resonances. The women's gestures, whether lifting a basket, stirring a pot, or delivering Lear's lines, are granted equal visual weight, affirming their dual status as both performers and subjects of their own narratives.

Esmer's montage expands intermediality rather than simply politicizing it. By weaving canonical text into the visual and sonic textures of rural existence, she redefines what cinematic adaptation can look like: not a translation of one text into another, but a layering of voices, gestures, and environments. The result is not an uneasy compromise between visibility and appropriation but a carefully crafted negotiation, one that frames rural women as active cultural agents while acknowledging the persistence of the canon. The palimpsest thus becomes a cinematic method: She uses the language of film to allow multiple worlds to coexist without erasing one another. Camera angles further reinforce these dynamics. Sound design plays an equally important role. When the women recite Lear's lines, the soundtrack often includes ambient noises, animals, the wind, the clatter of daily chores. These diegetic sounds seep into the performance, breaking the authority of Shakespeare's text and rooting it firmly in the context of the Toros Mountains. Taken together, these strategies make clear that her cinematography cannot be reduced to a simple "documentary aesthetic." Instead, it constitutes a layered visual language that brings together canon and locality, performance and daily life, representation and embodiment. Her film style materializes the palimpsest metaphor by allowing these multiple registers to overlap without erasing one another.

Besides, the structure disrupts linear temporality. As Andreas Huyssen observes, palimpsestic cultural forms are defined by the simultaneity of past and present (Huyssen, 2003, pp. 2-4). In *Queen*

Lear, Shakespeare's seventeenth-century tragedy does not belong to a distant past but coexists with twenty-first-century rural Türkiye. The film refuses to subordinate one temporality to the other; instead, it insists on their coexistence, making both visible at once. This temporal layering resonates with Dipesh Chakrabarty's call to "provincialize Europe," (Chakrabarty, 2000, pp. 16-18): unsettling the assumption that European texts speak with universal authority and foregrounding instead their entanglement with other times and places. Esmer's intervention also introduces a distinctly feminist dimension. The temporal logic of the film is structured not around abstract historicity, but around women's embodied rhythms —the daily, repetitive cycles of cooking, farming, caregiving, and storytelling. These forms of labor, often dismissed as "timeless" or outside history, here become the very ground against which Shakespeare is reactivated. By juxtaposing canonical tragedy with cyclical, gendered labor, *Queen Lear* redefines temporality itself. The women's presence disrupts the linear temporality of the canon, introducing what might be called a "feminist polytemporality,"[4] where the repetition of domestic and agricultural routines acquires the same weight as the repetition of canonical lines. Far from mere background, these acts of labor function as inscriptions in the film, demonstrating that cultural texts endure not in abstract universality but through their entanglement with everyday survival. Thus, the film not only provincializes Europe but also challenges patriarchal constructions of time. The palimpsest here is both political and feminist: it refuses erasure, resists linearity, and insists that history, canon, and everyday life must be read together in their layered, uneven simultaneity.[5] Theatre, in a sense, mediates this emotional labor process and a kind of intermedial adaptation emerges with feminist imagination. From this aspect, this intermedial adaptation does not aim to have fidelity to the original play. In the parallel story to the journey of the theatre group, Fatma Fatih found a job at the hospital and persuaded her family to live alone in a single house in Mersin on her weekdays in the recent film. Her self-consciousness was so different from the one in the first one and took the lead role in the play, *Queen Lear* which will be staged by visiting mountain villages in the second documentary. She perfectly portrays the queen who hands down properties to her daughters, and even later, she takes on that personality while rehearsing her lines in the hospital cafeteria where she worked.

Ultimately, the intermediality of *Queen Lear* negotiates the boundaries between canon and locality, universality and specificity, authority and resistance. By refusing to privilege one inscription over the other, the film exemplifies how intermediality can serve as a mode of critique. Shakespeare

[4] The phrase "feminist polytemporality" is used here as a critical formulation, drawing on Julia Kristeva's theorization of cyclical and monumental time on "Women's Time," (Kristeva, 1986) as well as more recent feminist and queer discussions of nonlinear temporality. On these critiques of temporality in relation to everyday labor, see Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Freeman, 2010), esp. introduction; and Victoria Browne, *Feminism, Time, and Nonlinear History* (Browne, 2014), which interrogates how women's temporalities disrupt linear historical narratives.

[5] Feride Çiçekoğlu and Yağmur Nuhrat especially focus on the stories of Zeynep Fatih, Fatma Fatih, and Behiye Yanık who played in Esmer's both films, in their articles focusing on gendered emotional labor. They show how working outside the home can transform gender-related behaviors. According to them, it can be read that the life and theatre stories of these female protagonists as emotional labor stories. The theatre and the emotions represented in the theatre are compensation for the emotional alienation caused by the emotional labor that is expended in daily life and unequally distributed between the sexes (Çiçekoğlu & Nuhrat, 2021, p. 514).

remains present, but he is no longer sovereign; his text is overwritten, revoiced, and reframed by the embodied performances of rural women historically excluded from both theatre and cinema. In this layering, resistance emerges not as simple erasure but as an insistence on multiplicity, hybridity, and counter-hegemonic authorship. What Esmer achieves, however, is more than a symbolic inversion of power. Her film demonstrates how cultural authority itself is unsettled when canonical texts are filtered through lives and voices marked by class, gender, and geography. The women's performances do not merely "localize" Shakespeare but transform him, inscribing alternative histories and temporalities into a text that once claimed universality. This intermediality becomes a space of negotiation: one where the canon is neither dismissed nor revered but made to coexist with the specificities of rural women's labor, humor, and resilience. *Queen Lear* models a cinematic practice of adaptation that is at once critical and generative. It critiques the hegemony of the canon while simultaneously creating room for new cultural authorship that is collective, embodied, and situated. The palimpsest, then, is not only a metaphor but a method: a way of showing how resistance can take the form of overlay, interruption, and coexistence rather than outright replacement. By staging Shakespeare alongside women's lives in the village, she crafts a cinema that affirms the value of voices historically rendered peripheral, insisting that world literature and world cinema must be rewritten from those margins inward.

It is crucial to examine the role of the documentary mode comparatively to understand how intermediality and adaptation operate in Esmer's work. *The Play* employs what Serpil Kırel identifies as an "observational" mode (Kırel, 2010, p. 101), aligning with Bill Nichols's definition of a form that stresses non-intervention, ceding control to events unfolding before the camera (Nichols, 2001, p. 38). The director's presence is only perceptible when the women address her directly by her first name, creating a sense of intimacy without overt interference. As Claire Johnston has argued, women's cinema often draws on *cinéma vérité* techniques, foregrounding women's experiences through direct address. Yet, she warns, a non-interventionist strategy risks reinforcing passive subjectivity at the expense of analysis (Johnston, 1999, p. 37). *Queen Lear* complicates this dynamic. Here, the women do not simply appear before the camera; they actively communicate with her, negotiating their roles within both theatre and film. Intermediality, in this sense, becomes a means of producing female subjectivity: the act of performing Shakespeare while being filmed generates a self-reflexive awareness that exceeds the limits of realist documentary. E. Ann Kaplan's critique of women's realist documentary is relevant here: for Kaplan, conventional realist codes risk essentialism and must be reworked to disrupt audience expectations (Kaplan, 1988, p. 80). The film can be seen as precisely such a reworking. By combining adaptive strategies from theatre with cinematic techniques, *Queen Lear* resists the illusion of an unmediated world and insists instead on its constructedness. The result is a subversive intermedial adaptation in which the audience remains aware not only of the play being staged but also of the film as an act of reproduction and intervention.

CONCLUSION: INTERMEDIALITY AS FEMINIST INTERVENTION

Queen Lear resists containment within conventional categories. Neither purely documentary nor entirely fictional, and neither a faithful Shakespearean adaptation nor an ethnographic record, it unsettles such distinctions by staging theatre through cinema and cinema through theatre. This refusal of neat classification is not an accidental feature but a deliberate strategy: it forces us to reflect on the very processes of representation, reminding us that cultural texts are never stable but always mediated, refracted, and contested. At the same time, the film demonstrates how intermediality can function as a feminist practice. By situating Shakespeare's tragedy in the voices, gestures, and everyday spaces of rural Turkish women, Esmer reconfigures the relationship between canon and locality. Authorship no longer resides solely with Shakespeare; it is redistributed to those who embody the text, reshaping it through their own experiences and social realities. Performance itself is reimagined; not as repetition of a script, but as a collective act rooted in memory, improvisation, and the embodied labor of daily life. In this way, the women become not passive interpreters of a global canon but active cultural agents who inscribe their own histories into the text. This is strikingly visible in the film's final act, where the women perform in a rugged, open-air space that deliberately lacks the formal boundaries of a traditional stage, emphasizing the integration of their performance into the material landscape of their lives. The absence of a conventional stage reinforces the film's central argument that the performance of the canon is inseparable from the reality of its marginalized locale.

The political stakes of this practice are significant. By placing a universalized figure like Shakespeare into dialogue with marginalized lives, *Queen Lear* exposes the limits of cultural authority. It shows that canonical texts do not float above history but acquire meaning only when entangled with specific histories, geographies, and subjectivities. This decentering of Shakespeare is not an erasure but a reorientation: the canon is transformed from a symbol of universality into a site of negotiation, tension, and re-signification. In doing so, the film highlights how intermediality can open space for counter-hegemonic authorship and for voices that have historically been silenced. Ultimately, *Queen Lear* is more than a creative adaptation of *King Lear*. It is an experiment in feminist intermediality: a practice that uses the crossings of media not only for aesthetic innovation but also for critical intervention. By inhabiting the "in-between" of stage and screen, canon and periphery, visibility and appropriation, it refuses closure. Instead, the film insists on multiplicity as both method and message. Its strength lies precisely in keeping alive the frictions between art and life, between the authority of tradition and the agency of those who rewrite it. In this sense, *Queen Lear* becomes a meditation on what it means to adapt, to perform, and to claim authorship in contexts marked by gender, geography, and power. The film achieves a powerful political moment when a group of women pauses mid-performance to discuss the local poverty caused by crop failures, explicitly substituting Lear's abstract "kingdom" with their own material losses. This direct shift from canonical dialogue to contemporary social critique enacts the film's core principle of reorienting cultural authority from the historical canon to the present-day margin.

Queen Lear also invites us to reconsider the specificities of the Turkish context, where the entanglement of theatre and cinema has historically been more formative than in many other national traditions. The film not only exemplifies intermediality as a global theoretical concept but also gestures toward a distinctly local articulation of it, one shaped by the legacies of Turkish theatre, oral storytelling, and community-based performance. Future research might therefore expand the scope of intermedial studies by attending more closely to non-Western practices, exploring how intermediality in Türkiye emerges through vernacular forms, collective authorship, and feminist reinterpretations of cultural canons. In doing so, scholars can trace not only how intermediality functions as an aesthetic strategy but also how it becomes a means of negotiating cultural authority in contexts marked by uneven histories of modernization, gender politics, and transnational exchange. This article advances three interlocking contributions. It treats intermediality not as a mere concept but as a method, showing how *Queen Lear*'s framing, montage, and sound reorganize theatre into a specifically cinematic event. It theorizes feminist subjectivation through "double performativity," where Shakespeare's text is enacted even as the women stage their own lived histories, redistributing textual authority through embodied voices. It anchors these processes in locality, reading the Toros Mountains' material specificity alongside "universal" Shakespeare and situating the film within Türkiye's historically entangled theatre–cinema ecology. Together, these moves recast performative documentary from a merely aesthetic hybrid into a political stance, mobilize the palimpsest metaphor critically (foregrounding friction and uneven layering rather than romantic accumulation), and build a conceptual bridge across intermediality, adaptation, and feminist performance. The result is a scalable analytic protocol rooted in *Queen Lear* yet transferable to broader contexts.

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