Stage Appropriations of Shakespeare's Major Tragedies, 1980-2010

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A childless couple look for an alternative life project; three sisters argue about their senile father; a young student struggles with his tricky family situation and an attitude problem. Appropriations, adaptations and productions from the decades around the turn of the millennium often treat Shakespeare's major tragedies as domestic drama, which brings out the gender- and family-related issues in them. This book examines appropriations of five of Shakespeare's tragedies (*King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*), written for the stage between 1980 and 2010 and set in Shakespeare's playworlds. It investigates how these appropriations are used as a strategy for discussing issues that are central both to Shakespeare's plays and to the present gender-political climate, with particular focus on the depiction of women and familial relationships.

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Table of Contents

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Introduction

Three sisters' arguments with one another and with their senile father lead to the disintegration of a family; an infertile couple look for an alternative life project; two battered wives are killed by their husbands; a teenage girl is given poor advice by the adults around her and ends up making bad choices; a young student struggles with his tricky family situation and an attitude problem. Over the past forty years, productions of Shakespeare's major tragedies have not infrequently treated the stories as domestic drama, sometimes boiling down the main plots so that they can be described in these recognisable and highly topical, if mundane, terms.[1] If Shakespeare's texts in performance can depart so radically from convention, the many new stage plays about Shakespearean tragic characters that have been written and performed in the course of the last few decades have had the opportunity to take this development a step further, as they are free to put the themes and stories into any words they choose.

As can be inferred from the one-sentence pitches above, the practice of seeing Shakespeare's tragedies as domestic drama and focusing on the private rather than the public sphere emphasises familial relationships and gender roles in the plays. This tendency can be seen in appropriations of the tragedies from the decades around the turn of the millennium, especially feminist re-visions, as well as in productions of Shakespeare's trage-

1 Needless to say, Shakespeare-as-domestic-drama is not the only trend in Shakespeare productions from this time period, but it is a fairly prominent one. The rise of this tendency in mainstream British theatre can arguably be traced back to the founding by Buzz Goodbody in 1974 of the Royal Shakespeare Company's studio theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon, The Other Place, a space that suited intimate and even 'claustrophobic' performance particularly well. See Alycia Smith-Howard, *Studio Shakespeare: The Royal Shakespeare Company at The Other Place* (Aldershot, Hants & Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006). Two especially influential RSC productions from the late 1980s that treated two of Shakespeare's major tragedies as domestic drama were Adrian Noble's *Macbeth* (1986), on the mainstage, and Trevor Nunn's *Othello* (1989), at The Other Place. For a study of *Hamlet*, *Othello* and *Macbeth* read as domestic tragedies, see Emma Whipday, *Shakespeare's Domestic Tragedies: Violence in The Early Modern Home* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

dies from the same time period. This study deals with stage appropriations of Shakespeare's five most frequently appropriated tragedies (*King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*) written between 1979 and 2010. While some of these appropriations are explicitly feminist and others are not, the general tendency is to give proportionately more attention to the female characters than the original Shakespeare plays.[2]

With a special focus on portrayals of women and relationships within the family, this gender-sensitive study argues that stage appropriations from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries function as a strategy for engaging with certain central themes from Shakespeare's tragedies that are also central to the gender-political climate of the present day. The study investigates how the stories and characters of Shakespeare's plays connect with one another in different versions over time, shedding light on the interaction between Shakespeare's texts, their sources, their productions and their appropriations, with regard to gender- and family-related issues. Since the appropriations will be studied as instances of engagement with Shakespeare's plays rather than as free-standing texts, a good deal of space is devoted to these issues as they occur in Shakespeare's texts and in performances of his plays.

The selection criteria were that all appropriations had to be published plays, written around 1980 or later, written in English, written for the stage – with the exception of Perry Pontac's plays, which were originally written for the radio but were subsequently published as stage plays and have been performed as such – and be spoken theatre rather than musical theatre or opera. Above all, they had to fit into the category of appropriations which place Shakespeare's characters in new or modified stories. This aspect of the delimitation will be further explained below. The appropriations that have been selected for this study are *Lear's Daughters* (1987) by the Women's Theatre Group and Elaine Feinstein; Howard Barker's *Seven Lears: The*

2 In this study, the pairings woman/man and female/male (with accompanying pronouns) with reference to characters, roles and actors refer to their gender as coded in the theatre. Characters and roles have no biological sex (although the characters' fictional sex can of course be referred to in biological terms in the play); and while the coding of actors as male or female is in most cases in accordance with their biological sex, the significant aspect here is which set of roles they are perceived as being traditionally eligible for. With reference to directors and writers, woman/man and female/male refer to their genders as perceived by the public and/or as self-identified. I use the word 'actor' regardless of gender except when talking specifically about female actors in a context where their gender is a factor of patent significance – then I use the word 'actress'. The male equivalent is 'male actor', since 'actor' is used gender-neutrally.

Pursuit of the Good (1989); Perry Pontac's *Prince Lear* (1994); Jules Tasca's *Prince Lear* (2007); John Cargill Thompson's *Macbeth Speaks* (1991; 1997); David Calcutt's *Lady Macbeth* (2005); David Greig's *Dunsinane* (2010); Paula Vogel's *Desdemona: A Play about a Handkerchief* (1979; 1994); Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* (1988; 1990); Allison Williams's *Drop Dead, Juliet!* (2006); Perry Pontac's *Fatal Loins: Romeo and Juliet Reconsidered* (2001); John Cargill Thompson's *Hamlet II, Prince of Jutland* (1984); Perry Pontac's *Hamlet, Part II* (1992); Jean Betts's *Ophelia Thinks Harder* (1993); Allison Williams's *Hamlette* (2001); and Howard Barker's *Gertrude – The Cry* (2002).[3] Among these, special attention will be given to the specifically feminist re-visions: *Lear's Daughters*, *Desdemona: A Play about a Handkerchief*, *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* and *Ophelia Thinks Harder*.

A central idea in this study is that an appropriation may have the power to change how spectators/readers think of the appropriated text. As early as 1916, S. P. B. Mais argued for this effect in connection with Gordon Bottomley's *King Lear's Wife*, a prequel to Shakespeare's *King Lear*:

> In point of fact, anyone who has for years been troubled by the earlier play will recognize at once how much the new one clears up the ground. It is impossible to re-read 'King Lear' after finishing 'King Lear's Wife' without noticing again and again points that used to puzzle the imagination, now made perfectly plain.[4]

A similar argument, that coming into contact with an appropriation before reading the appropriated text for the first time influences the reception of the appropriated text, has been made by Jane Smiley, who wrote *A Thousand Acres* (1991), a novel telling a modern American version of the *Lear* story from Goneril's perspective:

3 For plot summaries, see Appendix 1. The study includes four appropriations of *King Lear*, five of *Hamlet* and two to three of the three remaining plays. This discrepancy is partly because *King Lear* and *Hamlet* are more popular objects of appropriation, at least when it comes to the kind of appropriation studied here. (This, in turn, may be because these two plays have an even higher status as 'great' tragedies than the three other plays.) It is also partly because in all cases except *Hamlet* it has been possible to discern a trend among the appropriations, and the appropriations that have been selected are those that adhere to that trend. Appropriations of *Hamlet*, by contrast, do not follow any particular pattern, so there was no justifiable rationale according to which some appropriations could be excluded, and for this reason five disparate appropriations have been included.

4 Quoted in Richard Foulkes, '"How Fine a Play was Mrs. Lear": The Case for Gordon Bottomley's *King Lear's Wife*', *Shakespeare Survey*, 55 (2002), 128-38 (p. 130).

> I knew that the mind of the reader-jury would be influenced by the order in which it encountered the two works. I hoped that the minds of adolescent girls would encounter *A Thousand Acres* first, and that it would serve them as a prophylactic against the guilt about proper daughterhood that I knew *King Lear* could induce.[5]

Although the appropriations studied here are not primarily concerned with interpreting Shakespeare's texts but rather use Shakespeare for their own purposes, they share the trait of introducing some condition that could have an impact on how the audience understands Shakespeare's original play when they return to it (or encounter it for the first time) after having been exposed to the appropriation. These conditions are of varying monumentality and are sometimes mere suggestions dangled before the audience, never to be revealed as true or false. They include the following: Cordelia is not Lear's biological daughter; Macduff's eldest son is Lady Macbeth's long-lost child; Lear has abused his wife and/or children; Kent is a woman in disguise; Ophelia survives. These propositions, and others like them, seem to have the potential to change spectators'/readers' perceptions of Shakespeare's plays. An additional aim of this study is therefore to identify these new conditions and consider their possible impact on spectators/readers.

There are many different terms to denote a text created by someone else on the basis of an original by Shakespeare (or any writer), 'adaptation' and 'appropriation' being the two most frequently used in contemporary criticism. Both 'adaptation' and 'appropriation' can be used to refer to a work that is based on another work in such a way that a recipient who is familiar with the source text perceives that source text as being at the core of the new work's identity. As Linda Hutcheon puts it, adaptations are 'haunted at all times by their adapted texts. If we know that prior text, we always feel its presence shadowing the one we are experiencing directly. When we call a work an adaptation, we openly announce its overt relationship to another work or works'.[6] To denote a specifically feminist appropriation, the term 're-vision' (as opposed to the more neutral 'revision') is sometimes used. The word was originally coined in reference to feminist criticism by Adrienne Rich, who explains it in the following way:

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5 Jane Smiley, 'Shakespeare in Iceland', in Marianne Novy (ed.), *Transforming Shakespeare: Contemporary Women's Re-Visions in Literature and Performance*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 159-79 (p. 171); Jane Smiley, *A Thousand Acres* (New York: Anchor Books, 2003 [1991]).

6 Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London & New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 6.

> Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for women, is more than a search for identity: it is part of our refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society.[7]

Both re-vision and appropriation are associated with political engagement in a way that adaptation is not and can thus be seen as indicating a polemical or subversive stance.

In their introduction to *Adaptations of Shakespeare*, Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier discuss their choice of the term 'adaptation': they chose it '[f]or lack of a better term', because '[i]t is the word in most common usage'. Furthermore, they favoured it for its connotations to 'recontextualization' and 'process rather than a beginning and an end'. The implication of 'progress' may be seen as suggesting that adaptations are by definition 'better than originals', which is not something Fischlin and Fortier see as an advantage. Most importantly, however, they claim that 'adaptation' is the term least likely to create 'confusion'.[8] But the most common understanding of the word 'adaptation' is a transfer from one medium into another, such as a novel made into a film. This appears to me to be a strong reason for choosing a different word to denote a work based on another work within the same medium. In *Appropriations of Shakespeare's* King Lear *in Three Modern North American Novels*, Anna Lindhé selects the term 'appropriation', despite its being perceived by some as 'pejorative' owing to possible connotations of criticism, the seizure of power and even violence. When seen in relation not only to the appropriated text but to the spectator/reader, Lindhé argues, appropriation can be understood as 'an ethical process' and not just 'a political or oppositional act'.[9]

The terms adaptation and appropriation are, in practice, often used interchangeably, albeit with slightly differing overtones. Julie Sanders, however, distinguishes between the two phenomena:

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7 Adrienne Rich, 'When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision' (1972), in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978* (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Co, 1979), p 35.

8 Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier, 'General Introduction' to *Adaptations of Shakespeare: A Critical Anthology of Plays From the Seventeenth Century to the Present* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 3.

9 Anna Lindhé, *Appropriations of Shakespeare's* King Lear *in Three North American Novels* (Lund: Lund Studies in English, 2012), pp. 35; 14.

> There are many ways in which both the practice and the effects of adaptation and appropriation intersect and interrelate, yet it is equally important to maintain some clear distinctions between them as creative activities. An adaptation signals relationships with an informing sourcetext or original; a cinematic version of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, for example, although clearly reinterpreted by the collaborative efforts of director, scriptwriter, actors, and the generic demands of the movement from stage to film, remains ostensibly *Hamlet*, a specific version, albeit achieved in alternative temporal and generic modes, of that seminal cultural text. On the other hand, appropriation frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain. This may or may not involve a generic shift, and it may still require the intellectual juxtaposition of (at least) one text against another that we have suggested is central to the reading and spectating experience of adaptations. But the appropriated text or texts are not always as clearly signalled or acknowledged as in the adaptive process. [10]

According to Sanders' definition, the plays studied here are appropriations, as they do 'not involve a generic shift' and as they are clearly new works that draw on sourcetexts rather than 'specific versions' of those sourcetexts. A relationship to the appropriated text is always signalled, but not as clearly as with, for example, a film adaptation of *Hamlet*.

For the purposes of this study, the distinction between appropriation and adaptation will be the distinction between using Shakespeare to explain the world and using the world to explain Shakespeare. An appropriation draws on a Shakespearean text to make a point about contemporary conditions, while an adaptation makes changes to Shakespeare's play to make it fit contemporary conditions. Inter-medial translations that use mostly Shakespeare's text and that do not involve any change of perspective are, for example, referred to as adaptations.[11] In accordance with this definition, it is possible to argue that even stage productions of a play constitute a form of adaptation. Fischlin and Fortier come close to making this claim:

> [E]very drama text is an incomplete entity that must be 'translated' by being put on stage. Adaptation is, therefore, only an extreme version of the reworking that takes place in any theatrical production. Theatre does things to the drama text that cannot be justified as acts of fidelity, and yet are necessary for any production to take place. For example, Isabella's reaction to the Duke's two proposals at the end of *Measure for Measure* must be staged in some way, although the text itself gives

10 Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 26.

11 This is, of course, a narrow definition of 'adaptation', which is a term that may also be used in a much wider sense.

> no indication as to what this reaction should be. Theatre is always a form of reworking, in a sense the first step toward adaptation.[12]

However, as is clear from Fischlin and Fortier's argumentation, making a distinction between a play as a work and its performances would be problematic: *Hamlet* is not the same thing as the text of *Hamlet* (even if there had been one definitive text). A play does not fully exist until it is performed, and so *Hamlet* is the sum of all its productions.

In *Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation*, Margaret Jane Kidnie takes issue with Fischlin and Fortier's statement that productions may count as adaptations of a play, which she sees as a way of avoiding the problem of deciding where to draw the line between production and adaptation. Instead of being a work that is adapted by being staged and/or by being rewritten, Kidnie argues that a play 'is not an object at all, but rather a dynamic *process* that evolves over time in response to the needs and sensibilities of its users'.[13] Kidnie elaborates on the difficulty of distinguishing between production and adaptation by saying that

> [a]n encounter with an instance of dramatic production prompts one either to find a place for it within an already-existing conception of a dramatic work (or to *make* a place for it, if necessary, by adjusting one's expectations of the work), or to identify it as a first encounter with what seems, in one's own experience and according to one's own historically and culturally contingent criteria, a new work.[14]

According to Kidnie, then, the experience of a production as an 'original' Shakespeare play or as an appropriation is subjective. The problems of how far a text may be altered without constituting an adaptation and which version or combination of versions of Shakespeare's texts may be considered as 'the text' remain, but these are not central concerns of this study. For the kind of plays with which the present study is primarily concerned,

12 Fischlin and Fortier, 'General Introduction', p. 7.

13 Instead, Kidnie refers to both 'scripts' and 'performances' as 'productions', to reflect that both 'the play' and 'adaptation' are unstable categories. Margaret Jane Kidnie, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation* (London & New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 2, 10. Kidnie begins her study by discussing Matthew Warchus' 1997 RSC production of *Hamlet*, in which the text had been heavily cut and rearranged, prompting reviewers to reassure any outraged spectators that *Hamlet* had not been permanently damaged by Warchus' treatment but would still be there for others to enjoy. Kidnie finds such pronouncements problematic, as they assume that there is a true, eternal version of the play that 'exists apart from its printed copies and performances', a version that 'survives' performance; pp. 1-2, 11.

14 Ibid., p. 32.

the term 'appropriation' will be employed rather than 'adaptation', to reflect the stance of the plays studied, which is to make Shakespeare's plays their own (to appropriate them) rather than making them fit into a new context (to adapt them). The term 're-vision', an appropriation that reviews a classic text from a female perspective, is used to denote specifically feminist appropriations.

Two terms that are used throughout the thesis are 'unsatisfying endings' and 'the appropriative impulse'. The idea that Shakespeare's endings are often unsettling, troublesome, frustrating, unsatisfactory, nagging or jarring and will not leave the spectator/reader alone after the end of the play is well known in Shakespeare studies as well as in the theatre. These unsatisfying endings may be seen as a strategy for social critique. The phenomenon has been pointed out less often in the tragedies than in the comedies, where the unsatisfying solution usually consists in the various constellations in which the characters are married off.[15] However, if the marriage-based endings of the comedies are less than happy, the death-based endings of the tragedies are often less than cathartic. As Samuel Johnson pointed out with reference to *King Lear*, Shakespeare's tragic endings do not satisfy any yearning for justice.[16] In *King Lear*, nearly all characters die, and there can consequently be no justice and no answers. Ophelia and Lady Macbeth both die offstage, rumoured to have committed suicide, and there are no answers as to what 'actually' happened. Othello, having murdered Desdemona, turns himself into a victim by killing himself and cannot be tried for the murder; he gets the final say and cannot be argued with, because he is dead. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the Friar's plan annoyingly gets in the way of a happy ending, and, as Michael Bogdanov has pointed out, the Montagues and the Capulets can only express their peace in monetary terms.[17] These 'unsatisfying endings' are connected to my other term,

15 For example, it has been suggested by both critics and directors that the male main characters of *Twelfth Night* are inferior to the female ones and that the play's solution does not amount to a happy ending for Olivia or Viola. Similarly, the marriages between Hero and Claudio in *Much Ado About Nothing* and between Phebe and Silvius in *As You Like It* may make spectators/readers feel uncomfortable, since in both cases one of the parties has been tricked into the marriage, and since Claudio has treated Hero horribly badly and Phebe has consistently rejected the attentions of Silvius. The fact that both the Antonios, in *Twelfth Night* and in *The Merchant of Venice*, are deserted by the man they love (in whatever way) for a woman and end up alone, and the fact that these circumstances are entirely uncommented on within the plays, also has the potential to leave spectators/readers with a sense of unfinished business.

16 *Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare*, ed. H. R. Woudhuysen (London: Penguin, 1989), pp. 222-23.

17 Michael Bogdanov, *Shakespeare the Director's Cut: Essays on the Tragedies, Comedies and Histories*,

'the appropriative impulse'.[18] I use this phrase to denote the impetus behind the activity of appropriation, building on the idea that the open-endedness and ambiguity of Shakespeare's works stimulate this impulse.

Shakespeare has always been adapted and appropriated by other playwrights, just as he himself adapted and appropriated other writers. Indeed, the first Shakespeare appropriation specifically of the type studied here was *The Woman's Prize; or The Tamer Tamed*, a sequel to *The Taming of the Shrew* from around 1611 by John Fletcher, who would then go on to collaborate with Shakespeare.[19] Shakespeare's works are both the products and the sources of adapting processes; consequently, his versions constitute one stage in an ongoing process of adaptation. During the first period of intensive Shakespeare adaptation, the Restoration, Shakespeare had not yet developed into the cultural icon he is today. Shakespeare's play-texts were altered (or 'improved') as tastes changed. It was taken for granted that current opinions on what constituted good theatre had to rule any artistic choices. In the mid-eighteenth century, however, things began to change. The actor-manager David Garrick was one of the most prominent figures in a new theatre movement that wanted to go back to Shakespeare's original text (although the texts he used were in fact only marginally less altered than the versions performed by other companies), a policy which has come to be seen as the ideal when producing Shakespeare. Garrick was also central to the creation of Shakespeare as a cultural icon. The idea of Shakespeare as an unsurpassed genius whose originality is celebrated emerged with the romanticising of Shakespeare in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and it has been important for the continuation of the history of Shakespeare adaptation.[20] In the latter half of the twentieth century, the

revised ed. (Edinburgh: Capercaillie Books, 2013 [2003]), p. 53.

18 Iska Alter uses the term 'revisionary impulse' in her essay '*King Lear* and *A Thousand Acres*: Gender, Genre, and the Revisionary Impulse', in *Transforming Shakespeare: Contemporary Women's Re-Visions in Literature and Performance*, ed. Marianne Novy (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), but in contrast to what the title suggests the concept is not developed in the text but merely taken for granted. Ruby Cohn mentions in *Modern Shakespeare Offshoots* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976) that, according to her, '[t]he impetus to adaptation […] is often a specific production [of a Shakespeare play]' and that '[t]he most obvious reason for adapting Shakespeare is to modernize him', pp. 4, 7.

19 John Fletcher, 'The Woman's Prize; or The Tamer Tamed', in *Adaptations of Shakespeare: A Critical Anthology of Plays from the Seventeenth Century to the Present*, ed. Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 25-63; Fischlin and Fortier, introduction to Fletcher, 'The Woman's Prize', in *Adaptations of Shakespeare*, pp. 23-24.

20 See further Fischlin and Fortier, 'General Introduction'; Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation and Authorship, 1660-1769* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992);

second period which saw an explosion in Shakespeare adaptations, many adaptations and appropriations were inspired precisely by Shakespeare's status as a cultural icon. Authors and theatres appropriated him *because* he was considered to be the greatest, not because they found him imperfect. Now the very point was that Shakespeare enjoyed unique prestige, because that was something that could be challenged. As a canonical male figure, he specifically came to be seen as a symbol of patriarchal society and hence a suitable source for feminist appropriation, despite the fact that in his own time he was one of the main popular dramatists who emphasised the condition of women.

Adaptation and appropriation have of course been the objects of many studies. Two seminal works on adaptation in a wider context are Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* and Julie Sanders' *Adaptation and Appropriation* (both published in 2006). An early work specifically on re-workings of Shakespeare's plays is Ruby Cohn's *Modern Shakespearean Offshoots* (1976), and a more recent one is *Shakespeare and Appropriation*, edited by Christy Desmet and Robert Sawyer.[21] These four works all deal with several different media and with adaptations and appropriations both between and within these media, not primarily with stage plays based on other stage plays. Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier's anthology of dramatic adaptations, *Adaptations of Shakespeare: A Critical Anthology of Plays from the Seventeenth Century to the Present* (2000), has had a significant role in making the phenomenon of appropriations written for the stage more widely known. Lynne Bradley, in 'Meddling with Masterpieces: The On-Going Adaptation of *King Lear*' (2008), and in the subsequent version *Adapting King Lear for the Stage* (2010), discusses dramatic appropriations of one play, *King Lear*, with one chapter on feminist re-visions branching out to include appropriations of *Othello* as well.[22] In the field of feminist criticism of Shakespeare, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (1975) by Juliet Dusinberre and the edited volume *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare* (1980) are two ground-break-

Vanessa Cunningham, *Shakespeare and Garrick* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). For nineteenth-century English and American burlesques of Shakespeares plays, see Stanley Wells (ed.), *Nineteenth-Century Shakespeare Burlesques* (Edition Synapse, 2007).

21 Ruby Cohn, *Modern Shakespeare Offshoots* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); Christy Desmet and Robert Sawyer (eds), *Shakespeare and Appropriation* (London: Routledge, 1999).

22 Lynne Bradley, 'Meddling with Masterpieces: The On-Going Adaptation of *King Lear*' (Dissertation, Department of English, University of Victoria, 2008); Lynne Bradley, *Adapting King Lear for the Stage* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

ing works.[23] Carol Chillington Rutter is a central figure within the practice of applying feminist criticism to Shakespeare in performance, with studies including *Clamorous Voices: Shakespeare's Women Today* (1988) and *Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare's Stage* (2001).[24] Marianne Novy has edited two anthologies specifically about feminist re-visions of Shakespeare: *Cross-Cultural Performances: Differences in Women's Re-Visions of Shakespeare* (1993) – which includes Lizbeth Goodman's chapter 'Women's Alternative Shakespeares and Women's Alternatives to Shakespeare in Contemporary British Theatre' – and *Transforming Shakespeare: Contemporary Women's Re-Visions in Literature and Performance* (1999) – which contains Novy's own chapter 'Saving Desdemona and/or Ourselves: Plays by Ann-Marie MacDonald and Paula Vogel'.[25] Novy, Goodman and Bradley all deal with some of the appropriations studied here: The Women's Theatre Group and Elaine Feinstein's *Lear's Daughters*, Paula Vogel's Desdemona: *A Play about a Handkerchief* and Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*.

This project departs in a number of ways from most other studies on Shakespeare appropriation. Researchers in this field have often either focused on appropriations of a particular play by Shakespeare or covered a vast range of appropriations regardless of which Shakespeare play they are based on, some also dealing with adaptations of Shakespeare's plays into a different medium.[26] Studies of Shakespeare appropriations usually do not take main-

23 Juliet Dusinberre, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, 3rd ed. (Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003 [1975]); Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene and Carol Thomas Neely (eds.), *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, (Urbana, Chicago & London: University of Illinois Press, 1980).

24 Carol Rutter, with Sinead Cusack, Paola Dionisotti, Fiona Shaw, Juliet Stevenson and Harriet Walter, *Clamorous Voices: Shakespeare's Women Today* (London: The Women's Press, 1988); Carol Chillington Rutter, *Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare's Stage* (London: Routledge, 2001).

25 Marianne Novy (ed.), *Cross-Cultural Performances: Differences in Women's Re-Visions of Shakespeare* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Marianne Novy (ed.), *Transforming Shakespeare: Contemporary Women's Re-Visions in Literature and Performance* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999.). Novy has also contributed significantly to feminist criticism of Shakespeare, notably with her work *Love's Argument: Gender Relations in Shakespeare* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

26 For example, Lynne Bradley discusses only stageplays and Anna Lindhé only novels appropriating *King Lear*. Julie Sanders, in *Novel Shakespeares: Twentieth-Century Women Novelists and Appropriation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), includes novels irrespective of which Shakespeare play they appropriate. Desmet and Sawyer, likewise, include studies on stage appropriations of any Shakespeare play in their anthology. Bernice W. Kliman, in *Shakespeare in Performance:* Macbeth, 2nd ed. (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2005), includes both stage and film

stream performances of Shakespeare's plays into account; and studies of Shakespeare and gender, whether including performance aspects or not, seldom show any awareness of even the appropriations that would be most relevant for this topic.[27] This study, by contrast, will discuss appropriations of five Shakespeare plays from a specific time period, and relate them to productions of Shakespeare's plays. The contribution of this study will be to see the appropriations and Shakespeare's plays not only in relation to one another, but also in relation to performance and to Shakespeare's sources. This will show how the stories have travelled and been interpreted and appropriated in different ways through time, with a focus on the period after 1980. Restricting the study to stage appropriations (rather than branching out to, for example, novels and films) and comparing them to stage productions of Shakespeare's plays makes it possible to see the appropriations as part of the larger context of engagement with Shakespeare in the theatre and to relate the themes of the appropriations to discussions about today's Shakespearean stage. Among appropriations of Shakespeare from the last few decades, stage appropriations are a relatively unexplored field in comparison to inter-media adaptations from the same time. Some of the appropriations discussed in this study, including Jean Betts's *Ophelia Thinks Harder,* David Calcutt's *Lady Macbeth* and Perry Pontac's parodic radio plays, have received little critical attention. Furthermore, the studies that do focus on stage appropriations tend not to distinguish between different types of appropriations within the broad genre, despite the fact that there are vast and fundamental dissimilarities between different types of stage appropriations of Shakespeare.[28] This study, by contrast, will re-

performance of one play, *Macbeth*. Many shorter studies deal with only one appropriation in relation to the appropriated text, for example Annamária Fábián, 'The "Unfinished Business": The Avoidance of *King Lear* by the Prequel *Lear's Daughters*', in *TRANS – Revue de littérature generale et comparée*, No. 12: La Trace (Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2010), 1-9, and Laurin R. Porter, 'Shakespeare's "Sisters": Desdemona, Juliet and Constance Ledbelly in *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*', *Modern Drama*, 38:3 (1995), 362-77.

27 In *Shakespeare and Gender in Practice* (London & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), Terri Power mentions in passing that 'many playwrights, dramaturgs and companies have developed adaptations, revisions and appropriations of Shakespeare's plays' and gives the examples of *Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief*, *Dunsinane* and Tina Packer's *Women of Will*; p. 54.

28 Lynne Bradley, for example, includes many different kinds of stage adaptations and appropriations of *King Lear* in her study. Sharon Friedman, in 'The Feminist Playwright as Critic: Paula Vogel, Ann-Marie MacDonald, and Djanet Sears Interpret *Othello*', in *Feminist Theatrical Revisions of Classic Works: Critical Essays*, ed. Sharon Friedman (Jefferson, NC, & London: McFarland, 2009), discusses three stage appropriations of *Othello* in the same study, although one of them, Djanet Sears' *Harlem Duet*, is formally not at all the same kind of appropriation as the other two.

strict itself to the particular type of play that places Shakespeare's characters in a new story.

I have devised a system of categorisation for Shakespeare appropriations which will clarify the rationale behind the selection of plays studied here.[29] On the most basic level, the appropriations can be divided into two categories: plays which are about Shakespeare's own characters and plays which are not (although they may still be about counterparts of Shakespearean characters but with different names and in a completely different setting). The plays that are not about Shakespeare's characters can be further subdivided into plays which tell the story of Shakespeare's original play in a new, modern, setting (for example Deborah Levy's *Macbeth – False Memories* and Dennis Kelly's *The Gods Weep*, which are versions of *Macbeth* and *King Lear*, respectively, set in the business world), and plays which revolve around a production of a Shakespeare play and draws parallels between the frame story and the plot of the play – such as Ronald Harwood's *The Dresser*, which is about a senile actor-manager giving his final performance as King Lear during an air raid (the storm), aided by his dresser (the Fool), who tries to cheer him up and give him good advice, and the brusque stage manager (Cordelia), who turns out to be the only one who genuinely loves him.[30]

A certain type of appropriation that revolves around Shakespeare's characters follows Shakespeare's storyline but in a version with alterations. This was the most frequent form of appropriation in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, a famous example being Nahum Tate's *The History of King Lear* (1681).[31] Other appropriations, while also revolving around Shake-

29 See Appendix 2. Ruby Cohn's useful division of 'offshoots' into 'reduction/emendation', 'adaptation', 'addition' and 'transformation', from 1976, was made before the appropriations studied here had been written and is primarily concerned with how close the new texts are to Shakespeare's texts rather than *how* they appropriate them. Kidnie describes Cohn's system as 'a sort of metaphorical family tree' (Kidnie, p. 3). The kinds of appropriation that I classify as categories 3 and 4 are not included in Cohn's categorisation. The appropriations that this study is concerned with should according to Cohn be described as 'transformations', in which 'Shakespearean characters are often simplified or trundled through new events, with the Shakespearean ending scrapped' and where 'Shakespearean characters move through a partly or wholly Shakespearean plot, sometimes with the introduction of non-Shakespearean characters' (Cohn, p. 4).

30 Deborah Levy, 'Macbeth – False Memories', in *Plays: 1* (London: Methuen, 2000), pp 143-81; Dennis Kelly, *The Gods Weep* (London: RSC & Oberon, 2010); Ronald Harwood, *The Dresser* (Charlbury, Oxon: Amber Lane Press, 2005 [1980]).

31 Nahum Tate, 'The History of King Lear', in *Adaptations of Shakespeare*, ed. Fischlin and Fortier (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 68-96. It could be argued that Edward Bond's *Lear* (1971) belongs in this category, even though it is much more substantially altered than Tate's play, since it follows the structure of the original and presents modified versions of the main characters in a way which

speare's characters, tell completely new stories, or supply additions to Shakespeare's story. These are usually compatible with the original play in a way that the 'altered versions', such as Tate's *Lear*, are not, as they tend to serve as additions to rather than complete rewritings of the original story. This category may be further divided into the subcategories of prequels (plays that take place before the story of Shakespeare's play), sequels (plays that take place after the story of Shakespeare's play) and midquels (plays that take place during the story of Shakespeare's play) – these can have either a parallel storyline or an alternative storyline which interrupts Shakespeare's.[32] Midquels seem to be particularly closely connected with feminist re-vision. Both *Desdemona: A Play about a Handkerchief* and *Ophelia Thinks Harder* take place at the same time as Shakespeare's plays, but in a different room, and show what happens to and between the women while Othello, Iago and Hamlet are soliloquising centre-stage. There also seem to be connections between certain categories and certain plays. For example, all the prequels in the category of appropriations studied here are prequels of *King Lear*, and all the appropriations of *King Lear* are prequels.

Appropriations that adhere to Shakespeare's storyline but employ a completely different setting and different characters appear to aim to improve the understanding of Shakespeare's play; they place the story in a different context and investigate the inner workings of Shakespeare's text.[33] The appropriations that use Shakespeare's text to say something about the present-day world tend, paradoxically, to be the ones that revolve around Shakespeare's characters and are set within Shakespeare's playworld.[34] There is a general tendency among the appropriations to focus on Shakespeare in plays which are set outside Shakespeare's playworlds and to focus on our own world in plays that are set in his. It is plays in the latter category that often seem to have the power to change the spectator's/reader's perception

makes it an alternative to Shakespeare's story rather than an addition. It could also be argued that Bond's play is yet another version of Shakespeare's source, as it goes back to Holinshed and Geoffrey of Monmouth in Cordelia's rise and fall as queen, which is a part of the story that is completely absent from Shakespeare's version.

32 An additional subcategory, which I will not include in the study, is about Shakespeare's characters but not set in one particular playworld, namely the type of play that imagines meetings between Shakespearean characters from different plays, such as Charles George's *When Shakespeare's Ladies Meet (With Apologies to the Bard): Comedy for the Fair Sex in One Act* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1969 [1942]), Rae Shirley's *A Merry Regiment of Women* (Los Angeles: Baker's Plays, 1966) and Judy Elliot McDonald's *In Juliet's Garden: A Comedy in One Act* (New York: Samuel French, 2008 [2001]).

33 See categories 3 and 4 in Appendix 2.

34 Category 2.

of Shakespeare's plays, and this is the category investigated here.

The angle of approach of this study is how Shakespeare's plays have been used and treated on stage during the last few decades. For that reason, Shakespeare's texts will not primarily be understood in the context of the time and society in which they were written, but as they are understood in the theatre, as living, working texts that must be made sense of for a contemporary audience. This approach will inevitably lead to some purposely anachronistic readings. As Ruben Espinosa and David Ruiter observe in *Shakespeare and Immigration*,

> Today, we are the community of readers, scholars, students, theatregoers, actors, directors, and writers who make Shakespeare's lively presence in the present. As such, as these makers, we can only choose to use the tools and considerations of our dramatic, historical moment to enrich our experience with Shakespeare and the arts.[35]

An anachronistic approach, when judiciously applied, may lead to new knowledge about what Shakespeare's plays tell audiences in our time, and how they can be used in the contemporary theatre, whether within the scope of productions using Shakespeare's play-texts or in productions of their appropriations. In addition to this, the use of anachronisms is connected to the desire to treat Shakespeare's plays not solely as literary texts but also as performance, and to take advantage of the knowledge and experience of creative drama interpretation of theatre practitioners. By necessity, actors and directors treat the action as taking place in the present moment, regardless of the historical period in which the production happens to be set, and they are free to use anything that may inform an understanding of the play for the time in which it is performed.

In addition to a good deal of close reading as basis for the analysis of the plays, video (and, in some cases, audio) recordings of stage performances, as well as written reviews, have been consulted wherever possible. I have also been able to interview some of the authors of the appropriations: Howard Barker, Elaine Feinstein, David Calcutt and Perry Pontac.[36] The study furthermore includes a performance perspective, mainly in the form

35 Ruben Espinosa and David Ruiter, *Shakespeare and Immigration* (Farnham & Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), p. 4.

36 The three former in person and the latter by email. The selection was based partly on geographical proximity, partly on which authors' views of their plays were not already available.

of taking into consideration actors' and directors' accounts of working with the plays. These accounts have proved valuable sources, as the study deals with how Shakespeare's plays are used and perceived on stage. In addition, I have taught an academic course on 'Shakespeare's Women in Modern Drama', where the students filled in questionnaires about their response to reading three Shakespearean tragedies and one present-day feminist re-visions of each of them.[37] Finally, I have included a 'practice as research' element as a way of gaining additional insights: I directed a student production of *Lear's Daughters* in 2010 and one of *Othello* in 2015 (after first translating both plays into Swedish) for the Lund Student Theatre, the local university drama society. The productions were an extracurricular activity for the actors, whose areas of study ranged from biomedicine to philosophy. In 2016, I co-directed a production of *Macbeth* with an amateur Shakespeare company that I co-founded earlier that year. I draw on the experience of directing these plays wherever relevant. I have also conducted an interview and a questionnaire with parts of my *Lear's Daughters* cast. The students playing Goneril, Cordelia and the Nanny answered the questionnaire, and the latter two took part in the interview, which took place in early 2013.[38]

To structure the material, I make use of the observation that different plays by Shakespeare have given rise to different kinds of appropriations. For each of the five Shakespearean tragedies, a question is presented to reflect the appropriations' take on that particular Shakespeare play; for example, the question about *King Lear* is 'Why did it happen?' and about *Romeo and Juliet* 'What might have happened?' The 'it' of these questions refers to the story of Shakespeare's play, or some aspect of it. It must be stressed that these are not questions posed by this study; they are speculative questions, thought experiments, which the appropriations can be perceived as posing to Shakespeare's plays about their fictional worlds. Appropriations – just like any other creative response, not least straightforward theatre productions – tend to work on the (pretended) assumption that

37 An explanation of my method for collecting and interpreting this material, along with a detailed account of the results, can be found in Appendix 3. I will refer to individual results, to impressions from the course and to informal discussions with students wherever relevant throughout the thesis.

38 The reason for the time lapse (about two years and two months) is that the present project was only initiated in the autumn of 2012. The selection of respondents was based on which of the five individuals were available and willing to take part.

Shakespeare's playworlds are real.[39] Needless to say, that is not an assumption shared by this study; however, in explaining the approach to Shakespeare's plays of various appropriations and productions, it will sometimes be necessary to make use of a type of discourse where this assumption is implicit. A core argument throughout the thesis will be that this type of speculative question is invited by Shakespeare's unanswered questions and unsatisfying solutions, and that this is an important source of what I refer to as the appropriative impulse.

The main body of this dissertation is divided into five play-specific chapters. In appropriations of *King Lear*, the daughters' mother, conspicuously missing from Shakespeare's play, is the common denominator, and the question is, 'Why did it happen?' Appropriations of *Macbeth* take their jump-off point in Lady Macbeth's missing child and ask the question 'What "really" happened?' The aspect of *Othello* on which the two appropriations of that play focus is Desdemona's lost handkerchief, and the question is, 'Did it have to happen?' The possibility of romantic comedy, arguably inherent in *Romeo and Juliet*, is the topic of the next chapter, where the question the appropriations ask is, 'What might have happened?' Appropriations of *Hamlet* are more varied, but they all ask the Question with a capital Q, the to-be-or-not-to-be of some essential part of Shakespeare's plot: 'Did it happen?' These five chapters will be preceded and followed by two chapters that deal with gender-related aspects of Shakespeare in performance and appropriation across play boundaries. An initial chapter, on Shakespeare and women – both women in his plays and women in today's theatre – will consider Shakespeare appropriations as one solution to the imbalance between male and female roles in Shakespeare's plays in relation to the distribution of men and women in the acting profession today. The final chapter analyses the feminist strategies employed in the re-visions.

39 As Elizabeth Schafer points, out, 'many practitioners, when they are speaking of how they work on developing a character for performance, often will talk about those characters as if they were real people'. Elizabeth Schafer, *MsDirecting Shakespeare: Women Direct Shakespeare* (London: The Women's Press, 1998), p. 5.

1.
Shakespeare and Women

The feminist Shakespeare re-visions written around the 1980s are central to the boom in Shakespeare appropriations that took place during the following couple of decades, as the feminist perspective was in many ways a starting-point for other kinds of challenging stances towards Shakespeare. In this chapter, the phenomenon of re-vision is considered as an effect of three different phenomena: firstly, differences between the theatre in Shakespeare's day and that of the late twentieth century, notably in respect of gender balance; secondly, the second wave of feminism, including the gender-political climate in the theatre and the specific concerns of radical feminism; and, thirdly, Shakespeare's 'unsatisfying' endings, often related to gender, which trigger the appropriative impulse.

This chapter also expounds the distinction between ideological and practical feminist approaches to Shakespeare as employed in performance and re-vision, as well as considering to what extent Shakespeare's plays may be said to contain ideas that would subsequently be described as feminist, and whether feminist readings work with or against Shakespeare's texts. It must be stressed that what is claimed about Shakespeare's works is primarily applicable to the four major tragedies and, to some extent, to *Romeo and Juliet*. Some critics would claim that *Romeo and Juliet* should be included among Shakespeare's major tragedies; but, apart from other dissimilarities, *Romeo and Juliet* shows less gender inequality than the other four plays studied here. The plays that I refer to as the major tragedies – *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth* and *Othello* – contain a disproportionate amount of oppression of women in relation to the rest of the Shakespeare canon. No doubt this contributes significantly to the appropriative impulse when it comes to feminist re-visions of these particular plays. Even among these

four plays, however, a difference is discernible: *Macbeth*, which is the major tragedy containing the least oppression of women, is the only one that has not been appropriated into a feminist re-vision.

Women in Shakespeare: Shortage and Superabundance

Shakespeare's female characters, both in criticism and in common parlance, are often referred to as strong and intelligent, in addition to being said to possess more moral integrity than their male counterparts. In view of this general perception, it is noteworthy that Shakespeare's female roles are smaller and fewer than his male ones. Women make up only 16% of Shakespeare's characters.

In the four major tragedies, the heroines die before the heroes, their bodies are often handled violently in connection with their deaths, and they are not infrequently objectified, as the plays place other characters' 'male' gaze on the lifeless female bodies. Cordelia dies before Lear, giving him the opportunity to grieve. The actor's arduous task of carrying Cordelia on stage is often commented on (Donald Wolfit's much quoted advice to any actor undertaking the role of Lear to 'get yourself a light Cordelia' is a case in point); but the actress's uncomfortable task of being carried, not to mention put down, while playing dead has received less attention. On the 'villain' side, Goneril and Regan die before Edmund, and the audience has to accept his account of what has happened and why. Lady Macbeth dies before Macbeth, Desdemona before Othello, Emilia before Iago, Ophelia before Hamlet and Gertrude before Claudius. In all these cases, the prerogative of interpreting the destinies of the women belong to men – not only to their partners or the main characters of the plays, but to people like Malcolm, Lodovico, Gratiano and the Gravedigger. Emilia and Desdemona do comment on Desdemona's death, and Gertrude briefly on Ophelia's, but they do not get the final say. Dramaturgically, women in Shakespeare's major tragedies can be said to die to forward the man's plot; when the man dies, on the other hand, that constitutes the tragedy of the story and the play is over. In *Shakespeare's Women: Performance and Conception*, David Mann speaks of the 'tradition in Shakespeare's works in which female characters are presented as sacrificial victims':

> [T]heir sleeping, dead, or comatose bodies form the focus of the action and symbol of loss: Juliet drugged in her bed on her wedding day; Ophelia in her coffin; Desdemona on her bed, murdered; and possibly the most touching moment in the canon, the lifeless body of Cordelia carried on by Lear.[1]

Mann argues that the plays see their female characters' tragedies from a male perspective, a central idea in re-visions such as The Women's Theatre Group and Elaine Feinstein's *Lear's Daughters* (1987) and Jean Betts's *Ophelia Thinks Harder* (1993):

> Even as wrongs are being done to women in Shakespeare's plays, the spectator is invited to sympathise with the husband, the father – even the perpetrator – and *his* sense of loss; so that it is Lear's agony at Cordelia's murder that is the centre of attention, and her mute body only its object. This is not to deny sympathy to the victim, but places it at one step removed, inviting pity rather than identification.[2]

Another way in which Shakespeare puts men in the spotlight is that many of the plays are named after the male main character; even in the few cases where the sole main character is female, the play is named either after a smaller, male character, such as *Cymbeline*, or according to some other rationale, such as *As You Like It.*[3]

Shakespeare certainly created some powerful and memorable female characters; but on a quantifiable level, as been pointed out many times in recent years, his female roles generally have a small percentage of the lines and the stage time of the plays. In *King Lear*, for instance, the leading female character, Cordelia, speaks only 3% of the entire play-text, while Lear speaks 22%. Further examples of female protagonists with a low percentage of text are Ophelia (4%) and Desdemona (11%), compared to Hamlet's 37%, Othello's 25% and Iago's 31%. Somewhat surprisingly, given that she is spoken of by the male characters as an improperly talkative woman, Kate only has 8% of the lines in *The Taming of a Shrew*, compared to Petruchio's 22% and Tranio's 11% – Hortensio also speaks 8%. Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*, who is also perceived as loquacious, not least by Benedick (as whose equal she is represented), has 10% of the lines, whereas Benedick

1 David Mann, *Shakespeare's Women: Performance and Conception* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 201.

2 Mann, p. 202.

3 To be fair, not only female characters are disfavoured in this way: *Othello* is not called *Iago* even though Iago is the character with by far the greatest proportion of the play's text.

himself has 17%. Leonato (13%), Don Pedro (12%) and Claudio (11%) all speak more than Beatrice. In certain plays, the female protagonist has the second highest amount of lines, following her male counterpart: Antony (24%) and Cleopatra (19%), Macbeth (29%) and Lady Macbeth (11%), and Romeo (20%) and Juliet (18%). A few rare female protagonists have the highest percentage of all characters: Imogen in *Cymbeline* (16%), Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* (22%) and Rosalind in *As You Like It* (25%). Sir Toby Belch and Viola tie for first place in *Twelfth Night* with 13% each.[4]

In recent years, the so-called Bechdel test, designed to reveal women's underrepresentation in film, has become well known in popular culture, at least in feminist circles.[5] To pass the test, a film must 1) include at least two (named) female characters who 2) talk to each other 3) about something other than a man. The test is by no means a measure of gender equality, as it can be passed even by a film where men make up the majority of the cast and where the few female characters talk predominantly about men. If there are thirty male characters, the film passes the test if there are also two female characters; if the two female characters have a brief exchange about something other than a man – for example the weather – and then immediately go on to discussing men for the whole of their only scene together, the film passes the test. The significance of the test is rather that it reveals how shockingly few films satisfy even these simple criteria. The Bechdel test, while mainly quantitative, reveals stereotyping in the portrayal of interaction between women and shows up lack of awareness that women have lives outside their relationships with men; that is a qualitative aspect, but it does not mean that the female roles are not good *per se*. Nor does it say anything about the nature of the conversations women in films have about men; though it is likely to be tedious as the sole subject of conversation in the long run, there may in some cases be very good reasons to talk about a man, and the perspective of the conversation may even be feminist.

The only one of the five Shakespeare plays studied here that could be argued to pass the Bechdel test is *Othello*. It has three named female characters, and two of them talk to each other, albeit it mostly about Othello and about men in general. But, although Desdemona and Emilia's conversations are predominantly about men, the play could be said to pass the

4 All the percentages are from Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (eds), *The RSC Shakespeare Complete Works* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2007).

5 See 'Bechdel Test Movie List' <http://bechdeltest.com> [accessed 12 September 2016].

third criterion on the basis of their short exchanges about the lost handkerchief, the wedding sheets, Desdemona's getting ready for bed, the wind making a knocking noise and Barbary – except that these things are of course all implicitly connected to men. Not every single word spoken between the two women on their deathbeds is about a man, but the very last words Desdemona utters refer to her husband. It could, perhaps, be argued that Emilia's calling Bianca a 'strumpet' qualifies as a conversation about something besides men – though probably not very convincingly. Macbeth fails the first criterion, because the only named female character is Hecate. The characters to whom we have come to refer as Lady Macbeth and Lady Macduff are never actually named in the text.[6] Furthermore, the only 'women' (if, indeed, they are women) who talk to one another are the Weird Sisters and Hecate. If they had been named, the play would have passed the test, though, because their conversations do not exclusively revolve around men. *King Lear* fails the third criterion, because, although Goneril and Regan do talk to each other, they only talk about Lear, Gloucester and Edmund. *Romeo and Juliet* fails the first criterion in that neither Capulet's or Montague's wives nor the nurse is named.[7] In V.4, Capulet asks 'Angelica' to '[l]ook to the baked meats'. According to René Weis he is 'probably' addressing the nurse rather than his wife;[8] but as it is not possible to say with any certainty who Angelica is, she can hardly qualify as a named character. Rosaline is of course also named, but she does not appear on stage. The play is also close to failing the third criterion, because all conversations between Juliet, her mother and the nurse are *mostly* about men (the nurse's late husband, Paris and Romeo); but the nurse's tirades about Juliet's age and her own aching back save the situation. *Hamlet* passes the first and second criteria but not the third: whether Ophelia is sane or mad, dead or alive, the conversations between her and Gertrude are about men.

The Sphinx Theatre Company, formerly the Women's Theatre Group, have recently devised a version of the Bechdel Test for the Theatre.[9] The Sphinx test has a more qualitative way of looking at the underrepresenta-

6 The stage directions in the Folio text refer to Lady Macbeth variously as 'Macbeths Wife', 'Macbeths Lady' and 'Lady' and to Lady Macduff as 'Macduffes Wife' or, simply, 'Wife'; and, in any case, it must be remembered that audiences do not see stage directions.

7 The two wives are referred to in stage directions in the same way as the two Ladies in *Macbeth*.

8 René Weis, commentary notes to *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. René Weis (London: Methuen Drama, 2012), p. 302, n. 5.

9 See 'The Sphinx Test: Redressing the Balance', Sphinx Theatre Company <http://www.sphinxtheatre.co.uk> [accessed 12 September 2016].

tion of women than the Bechdel test, and is not primarily intended as a test that plays can pass or fail; rather, it functions as an aid for playwrights who wish to create new drama with good roles for women without falling into routine stereotyping. The Sphinx test asks the playwright to consider the following questions: 'Is there a woman centre stage?'; 'Does she interact with other women?'; 'Is there a woman driving the action?'; 'Is she active rather than reactive?'; 'Does the character avoid stereotype?'; 'Is the character compelling and complex?'; 'Is the story essential?'; 'Does the story have an impact on a wide audience?'.

One plausible explanation for the inequality between Shakespeare's male and female roles with regard to number and size is that the latter were written to be performed by boy actors, who were both fewer and less experienced than the actors playing men, and that their tasks were made less taxing than those of the adult players.[10] It is important here to distinguish between the quantitative aspect, that the female parts are less physically and vocally taxing than the male parts (because they involve less text), and the qualitative aspect of whether the female parts are artistically less challenging. Lorraine Helms thinks that Shakespeare's female parts are both quantitatively and qualitatively inferior to his male ones, and she suggests that '[t]echniques originally designed to feminize the boy actor may infantilize or eroticize those who now play his roles. They may turn women, like boys, into female impersonators'.[11] The practice of employing boy actors could, according to this line of argument, be responsible for any stereotypical dimension perceived in the delineation of female characters.

It is of course impossible to know what difference it would have made for the quality of Shakespeare's female roles if they had been written for actresses.[12] In fact, it is not even known why there were no women on Shakespeare's stage. It seems to be generally assumed that such a thing

10 Ton Hoenselaars states that the reason why so many Shakespearean heroines pretend to be boys was 'to save the boy actor's voice'; 'Shakespeare: Colleagues, Collaborators, Co-Authors', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Contemporary Dramatists*, ed. Ton Hoenselaars (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 102-156 (p. 198).

11 Lorraine Helms, 'Acts of Resistance: The Female Player', in Dympna Callaghan, Lorraine Helms and Jyotsna Singh, *The Weyward Sisters: Shakespeare and Feminist Politics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, & Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 198.

12 During the Restoration, when the female characters were suddenly played by actresses rather than boy-actors, the female parts were expanded and multiplied. But this was more for decorative purposes than as a central part of the story. The parts were quantitatively larger and more numerous, but hardly qualitatively 'better'.

would have been deemed deeply inappropriate, and for a long time there was even thought to have been a legal prohibition, but this does not seem to have been the case. Jessica Schiermeister's research shows that there is widespread disinformation to the effect that it was 'illegal' (and even 'punishable by death'[13]) for women to perform, but that there are no historical sources that indicate this.[14] Outside London, female performers were nothing unusual. Also, the practice of boy actors playing the female parts in professional companies was peculiar to England: on the continent, female roles were played by professional actresses. According to Phyllis Rackin, 'there was no legal prohibition against performances by women', but 'it seems to have been a point of pride with the English professional companies that none of their players were women':

> Excluding women from their companies may have been an attempt to insulate themselves both from the taints of effeminacy and immorality that were associated with theatrical impersonation and from the low status of travelling players. The exclusion of women made the new professional companies look more like the male students who performed Latin plays at Oxford and Cambridge and less like the amateurs who performed in village festivals or the wandering professionals[.][15]

Glynne Wickham stated as early as 1959 that 'women could and did perform as amateurs and professionals in so far as society would allow them to', offering the not entirely convincing guess that women's voices were not trained 'in the art of oratory' and were perhaps less suitable in terms of 'pitch and resonance' for performance 'in the open air', and that it was therefore 'normally found that men and boys were more reliable performers than women'.[16] Schiermeister's explanation includes the idea that during the early modern period prepubescent males were not understood as so fundamentally different a category from either pre- or post-pubescent

13 See Elaine Avila, 'Lisa Wolpe Uses Shakespeare to Bend Gender', *American Theatre* <http://www.americantheatre.org/2014/08/13/lisa-wolpe-uses-shakespeare-to-bend-gender-roles-around-the-country> [accessed 14 September 2016].

14 Jessica Schiermeister, 'The False Issue of the "Illegality" of Female Performers', *Shakespeare Standard* <http://theshakespearestandard.com/false-issue-illegality-female-performance> [accessed 13 September 2016].

15 Phyllis Rackin, *Shakespeare and Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 41, 42-43.

16 Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages 1300-1660*, vol. 1 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 272. Dismissing this idea, Tiina Rosenberg suggests that the main reason for the exclusion of women from the stage must have been the lack of civic rights for women and proscriptions by the Church; *Byxbegär* (Stockholm: Alfabeta, 2000), pp. 50-51.

females as it is today and the idea that the theatre, like other trades, employed the master-apprentice system.[17] Drawing on these ideas, Terri Power concludes that acting would probably not have been 'a popular career choice' for women, as it would be detrimental for their reputations, and that audiences preferred 'a male-dominated transvestite theatre' as a matter of 'cultural taste'.[18]

The boy players must have been considered good actors for the practice to continue and for a theatre employing it to be so popular, and many actors today argue that Shakespeare's female roles are indeed qualitatively rich and challenging, surprisingly so considered that they were written for such young performers.[19] In Carol Rutter's *Clamorous Voices: Shakespeare's Women Today*, Harriet Walter observes:

> Across the repertoire I don't see much evidence that less acting ability was demanded of the boys than of the grown men. Shakespeare's verse is as dense and as beautiful, the emotional depth as great, the wit even more brilliant, the psychology as complex in the female characters as in the male.[20]

By all accounts, the boy actors were highly skilled; but it is fair to assume that their less substantial training and experience as well as their young age meant that they had less stamina than the adult actors, not least vocally, and that this is at least one important reason why their parts were often made quantitatively less extensive.[21] Of course, the company also con-

17 Schiermeister, <http://theshakespearestandard.com/false-issue-illegality-female-performance>.

18 Terri Power, *Shakespeare and Gender in Practice* (London & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 60.

19 Helen Faucit believed that Shakespeare 'must have looked beyond "the ignorant present" and known that a time would come when women, true and worthy, should find it a glory to throw the best part of their natures into these ideal types of womanhood, and to make them living realities for thousands to whom they would else have been unknown', since she considered his female characters too realistic representations of women to be portrayed by boy actors: 'How could any youth, however gifted and specially trained, even faintly suggest these fair and noble women to an audience? Woman's words coming from a man's lips, a man's heart – it is monstrous to think of! One quite pities Shakespeare, who had to put up with seeing his brightest creations thus marred, misrepresented, spoilt'; Helena Faucit Martin, *On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011 [1885]), pp. 4-5.

20 Harriet Walter, in Carol Rutter, with Sinéad Cusack, Paola Dionisotti, Fiona Shaw, Juliet Stevenson and Harriet Walter, *Clamorous Voices: Shakespeare's Women Today* (London: The Women's Press, 1988), p. xxiv.

21 Cf. Juliet Dusinberre, who, speaking of Lyly's children's companies, says that '[c]hildren tire more quickly than adults; their light voices are not suitable for elaborate soliloquies involving complex psychological development'; *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, 3rd ed. (Bas-

tained fewer boy actors than adult players, and this is a likely reason for the plays' containing fewer female than male characters. In fact, it is also a possible reason for the parts being so small, since a small number of actors would probably mean that some of the female parts would have to be doubled. This in turn naturally leads to the female characters interacting more with male characters than with other female characters – though it is of course no reason why the few conversations that do take place between women should revolve almost entirely around men.

However, although the scarcity of substantial female roles may be a result of the female parts having been written for boys rather than adults, the smaller number and, above all, size of parts for women in Shakespeare in comparison to male roles create a difficult situation for Shakespearean actresses today. The main problems that actresses experience when working with Shakespeare are that there are fewer female than male parts; that the female parts have fewer and shorter speeches (especially fewer soliloquies) and are less central to the stories; and that the big, universal questions are usually reserved for the male characters. In her epilogue to *Brutus and Other Heroines*, which takes the form of a letter to Shakespeare, Harriet Walter voices some of these concerns: 'All the world is indeed a stage, and I cannot imagine a world without you. I just wish you had put more women at the centre of your world/stage'.[22] Walter states that women 'seem only to be allowed into your stories as the daughters, mothers, wives or widows of the Main Man. Are you just not interested in our lives? I so want to be included in your wise humanistic embrace'.[23] She goes on to say that while Shakespeare often puts the case of his female characters 'so beautifully and eloquently', 'once they have had their say (usually in one scene) you remove us from the play, and we have to spend the rest of the evening in our dressing room'.[24] Interestingly, Walter's phrasing implies the impossible possibility of actually changing Shakespeare's plays: 'I feel churlish for saying this, but many of us feel excluded, and I would love you to come back and do some rewrites'.[25] This is of course a humorous way of explaining the problem that Shakespearean actresses face today; but in the context

ingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003 [1975]), p. 10.

22 Harriet Walter, *Brutus and Other Heroines: Playing Shakespeare's Roles for Women* (London: Nick Hern, 2016), p. 207.

23 Ibid., p. 203.

24 Ibid., p. 205.

25 Ibid., p. 204.

of stage appropriations of Shakespeare, it can be seen as an indication that the impulse to 'do rewrites' of Shakespeare in a way that redresses the gender balance comes from inside the acting profession.

The reason for criticising the gender imbalance is not merely an ideological aspiration for equality, nor is it the individual actress's aspiration for as important and interesting parts as possible. The situation also constitutes actual inequality among actors in their working life. Especially in Britain, where Shakespeare constitutes such a large proportion of all drama that is produced (not least because of how funding is distributed), this creates a real problem. Over the last few decades, many female actors and directors have criticised the imbalance between the number of highly qualified actresses today and the scarcity of roles for them in Shakespeare's plays, which dominate the stage in large parts of the English-speaking world.[26] An additional effect of the gender imbalance in Shakespearean drama is, according to Brigid Larmour (the artistic director of Watford Palace Theatre and sometime assistant director at the Royal Shakespeare Company), that the same gender proportions are reproduced in newly written drama: 'the problem is that we have kept the same gender balance in today's theatre because of the success and genius of [Shakespeare's] plays. It created a blueprint that means playwrights do not notice when they have written something for nine men and one woman'.[27] Phyllida Lloyd also points out that the repertory system means that if a season is to include a play like *Macbeth* or *Hamlet*, which is often the case, that means that there is 'a large number of male actors on board and you need other things to do with them', and consequently the other plays in the season will also be male-dominated.[28]

If Shakespearean roles are too few even for young actresses, the problem increases noticeably with age. And the parts become not only fewer and smaller, but decreasingly challenging. It has been pointed out by actresses that the most difficult Shakespearean parts, such as Juliet, are generally given to young and inexperienced actresses, while older ones, who have

26 In fact, the imbalance is even greater than it may appear, since the majority of drama-school graduates today are women. Penny Gay, 'Changing Shakespeare: New Possibilities for the Modern Actress', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Actress*, ed. Maggie B. Gale and John Stokes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 314-26 (p. 323).

27 Quoted in Vanessa Thorpe, 'Did Shakespeare Sell Women Short?', *The Guardian* 14 September 2014 <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2013/sep/14/shakespeare-women> [accessed 4 September 2016].

28 Phyllida Lloyd, programme note, Shakespeare Trilogy, dir. Phyllida Lloyd. Donmar at King's Cross, 2016.

gained the skill and experience necessary for a part like Juliet, have to dwindle into Nurses. In the last few years, two appropriations of *Romeo and Juliet* have appeared which are, while not falling within the scope of this study as such (since they are not about Shakespeare's characters), relevant in connection with this problem: *Juliet and her Romeo: A Geriatric Romeo and Juliet* (2010), adapted by Sean O'Connor and Tom Morris, a play set in a nursing home about the younger generation taking control over their aging parents; and Ben Porter's *A Tender Thing* (2009), a play about an aging married couple – two plays both featuring a pair of elderly star-crossed lovers. These versions use Shakespeare's own text, but shortened, re-ordered and transposed to different contexts.[29] On one level, this is a way of getting down to the core issue of generational conflicts and one generation's power over another, which is one of the main themes of Shakespeare's play. But it can also be seen as a way of dealing with an age-and-gender-specific problem for actresses of middle age and beyond.

The imbalance between men and women in the world of Shakespearean theatre is not restricted to the stage. Traditionally, female directors and artistic directors have been few and far between, and this is true in particular of classic theatre. For example, Jane Lapotaire stated in 1991 that she had only worked with three women directors during a quarter of a century as an actor.[30] The combination of few women on stage and directors typically being male leads to the common experience of Shakespearean actresses described by Fiona Shaw as being 'often the only woman in the room' during rehearsals.[31] Elizabeth Schafer claimed in 1998 that 'while women theatre directors today are increasingly visible and high profile, there is still a common perception that they don't generally do Shakespeare':

> [T]hey do new plays, especially women's plays, fringe, and community theatre, but they don't tend to direct mainstream, mainstage professional productions of the playwright who is still the most produced, high status and high profile in British theatre, William Shakespeare.[32]

29 Coincidentally, the Swedish stage has recently seen two scaled-down productions of *Romeo and Juliet* adapted for two actors unconventionally advanced in years: Erland Josephson and Lena Nyman in Thomas Pontén's fringe production in 2005, and Sven Wollter and Evabritt Strandberg in Dag Norgård's 2016 production at Stockholm City Theatre and on tour.

30 Carole Woddis (ed.), *'Sheer Bloody Magic': Conversations with Actresses* (London: Virago Press, 1991), p. 7.

31 Fiona Shaw, in Carol Rutter, *Clamorous Voices*, p. xvii.

32 Elizabeth Schafer, *MsDirecting Shakespeare: Women Direct Shakespeare* (London: The Women's Press, 1998), p. 1.

While Schafer shows that women do direct Shakespeare and have done so for a long time, she is clear about the fact that male Shakespearean directors are statistically more likely to get work than their female counterparts. Female directors who work in mainstream theatres are less likely to direct Shakespeare than something else, and female directors who direct Shakespeare are less likely to work in mainstream theatre than somewhere else.[33] The survey 'The Status of Women in the British Theatre 1982-1983', carried out by the Conference of Women Theatre Directors and Administrators, shows that in England and Wales that year 12% of artistic directors, 17% of associate directors, 41% of assistant directors and 24% of freelance directors were women. Excluding all theatres except the National Theatre, the RSC and repertory theatres, the equivalent figures are 7% of artistic directors, 9% of associate directors and 36% of assistant directors. In her introduction to the report, Sue Parrish states that these results 'rais[e] serious questions about equality of opportunity and of artistic expression', which has 'fundamental implications […] for women to direct Shakespeare, and other classics, which are also their heritage'.[34] A similar survey by the Sphinx Theatre Company from 2006 shows that 23% of theatre productions in Britain were directed by women, and in Purple Seven's survey from 2012-15 36% of directors were female, which indicates a steady, if slow, development towards gender equality.[35] The kind of fringe theatres that typically staged feminist re-visions of classic plays during the 1980s and 1990s were central for creating opportunities for more women to direct, and so the history of the female director is inextricably bound up with this genre.

Practical and Ideological Approaches

With the second wave of feminism, a widespread desire to create new possibilities for female theatre practitioners emerged in the 1970s. A number of newly formed explicitly feminist fringe companies started to pro-

33 Ibid., pp. 3-4, 240.

34 Sue Parrish, 'The Status of Women in the British Theatre 1982-1983', The Conference of Women Theatre Directors and Administrators (1983) <http://www.sphinxtheatre.co.uk/the-status-of-women-in-the-british-theatre.html> [accessed 14 September 2016].

35 Sphinx Theatre Company, 'Women in the Theatre 2006 Survey' <http://www.sphinxtheatre.co.uk/women-in-theatre-2006-survey.html> [accessed 14 September 2016]; Purple Seven, 'Gender in Theatre', <http://purpleseven.com/media.ashx/gender-thought-leadership.pdf> [accessed 14 September 2016]. On female and male directors, see also Michelene Wandor, *Carry On, Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics* (London & New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986 [1981]), pp. 108-13.

duce new drama by female playwrights as well as devised-theatre pieces, often directed by women.[36] According to Michelene Wandor, the British feminist and gay alternative theatre movement was born during the years of the Women's Liberation Movement and the Gay Liberation Front around 1970. The plays were 'agitprop' with 'cartoon-like characters', 'naturalistic, "telling-it-like-it-is" scenes, punctuated by music', which were used to raise consciousness about topical issues, often with a discussion after the performance. In the middle of the 1970s, however, professional feminist and gay theatre companies were formed by theatre practitioners who wanted to 'move away from issue-based agitprop' to 'more complexly developed plays, with more concern for the subtleties of character'. The main companies were The Women's Theatre Group (an all-female company), Monstrous Regiment (a feminist company including a minority of men, who often played the 'villains') and Gay Sweatshop (who were divided into one male and one female group).[37] The Women's Theatre Group (WTG) was founded in 1973 and renamed the Sphinx Theatre Company in 1990.[38] During the late 1970s, several other feminist theatre companies were formed, including Hormone Imbalance, Beryl and the Perils and Mrs Worthington's Daughters; but none of these lasted more than a few years, whereas the Sphinx is still active.[39]

At the same time as fringe theatre saw the emergence of specifically feminist companies, things were slowly starting to change in mainstream theatre as well. A new generation of Shakespearean actresses was beginning to question conventional ways of interpreting Shakespeare's female characters and to explore new approaches to the parts. The question has increased in topicality ever since, and it is now taken seriously by many major theatre companies. Notably, Emma Rice said on taking over the artistic directorship of the Globe that she would work for a 50/50 gender balance. In her speech after the 2016 summer season's closing performance

36 Devising is a way of creating a performance where a group of people, usually the intended cast, collaboratively create the script, based on improvisations around certain themes or ideas.

37 Wandor, pp. 32-34. See also Lizbeth Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own* (London & New York: Routledge, 1991); Christopher Innes, *Modern British Drama 1890-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 448-53; Elaine Aston, *Feminist Views on the English Stage: Women Playwrights, 1990-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 14-17.

38 Sphinx Theatre Company <http://www.sphinxtheatre.co.uk> [accessed 12 September 2016].

39 Wandor, pp. 82-84; Unfinished Histories: Recording the History of Alternative Theatre <http://www.unfinishedhistories.com> [accessed 6 February 2017].

of *Imogen*, Rice announced to a cheering audience that for the first time in history that Globe season had included 45% female actors.[40]

There are a few different ways in which theatres may deal with the problems connected to the imbalance between the proportion of female roles in Shakespeare and that of women in the acting profession. One possibility is of course to produce more new plays and fewer classics. But even if new writing with central female characters and more equal proportions of men and women, including a larger proportion of writing by female playwrights, is part of the development of the theatre, any solution which significantly reduces the number of Shakespeare productions is hardly feasible.

A solution that can be applied within the scope of a Shakespearean production is to employ either of the two basic methods of changing the gender of characters and/or of the actors eligible: cross-gender casting or character regendering. What was once indiscriminately referred to as 'cross-dressed Shakespeare' was of course Shakespeare's practice from the beginning and has gained ground once more in recent years. Maureen Lipman's song 'PC or not PC' from the RSC's *Shakespeare Revue* (1995) shows how topical the tendency was at that time: new and surprising enough to be an interesting subject for satire, but sufficiently well known for the jokes to be appreciated by a mainstream audience. In the song, Lipman mixes recent examples of cross-cast Shakespeare (''Cos feminist rationale down at the National, / States that the future has beckoned, / As Deborah Warner reveals from her corner / Fiona Shaw's Richard the Second') with imagined future casting choices:

40 Less than two weeks later, the Globe announced that Emma Rice would step down as artistic director after the 2017/2018 winter season. Though the artistic differences that led to this decision were connected to lighting rather than casting, the decision received a good deal of criticism for being reactionary and it was feared at the time by those in the industry who advocate more equal casting on the mainstream stage that it would prove a setback. However, under Michelle Terry, who took over as artistic director, the Globe went even further in applying gender-blind casting. See, for example, Matthew Hemley, 'Rice to Step Down as Artistic Director of Shakespeare's Globe', *The Stage* 25 October 2016 <https://www.thestage.co.uk/news/2016/emma-rice-to-step-down-as-artistic-director-of-shakespeares-globe> [accessed 6 February 2017]; Hannah Furness, 'Emma Rice Leaves Shakespeare's Globe After Row Over Modern Lighting', *The Daily Telegraph* 25 October 2016 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/10/25/emma-rice-leaves-shakespeares-globe-after-row-over-modern-lighti/> [*sic*] [accessed 6 February 2017]; Lyn Gardner, 'As Emma Rice Departs, the Globe has Eggs on Its Face – And No Vision', *The Guardian* 25 October 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2016/oct/25/shakespeares-globe-emma-rice-department-comment> [*sic*] [accessed 6 February 2017].

Sir Ian McKellen looks ever so sickly,
He wanted Doll Tearsheet and got Mistress Quickly,
And critics will ponder forever just *how* right
It was to put Falstaff in the hands of Joan Plowright.

Dame Maggie's Malvolio's frankly confessing,
She won't be cross-gartered, she'll just be cross-dressing.
And Emma's Petruchio will leap from a casement,
To land with a thud on Ken Branagh's replacement.[41]

These particular actors may not have appeared in these particular roles, but it would certainly be less surprising today than it would have been twenty years ago.

Completely gender-blind casting has so far been unusual in mainstream theatre, where colour-blind casting is becoming increasingly normalised. However, both gender- and colour-blind casting will in practice often come across as gender- and colour-conscious, as argued in relation to colour-blind casting by Ayanna Thompson, who states that 'it has become clear that the various models of nontraditional casting can actually replicate racist stereotypes *because* we have not addressed the unstable semiotics of race (when we see race; how we see race; how we make sense of what race means within a specific production)'.[42] The same is true of gender: even if the casting process is gender-blind, audiences are not. They are therefore likely to read their own assumptions about gender into unconventional casting choices. To avoid the kind of gender-conscious casting that claims to be gender-blind but leads to stereotyping, it may be more constructive to employ the kind of gender-conscious casting that avoids stereotypes and takes possible gendered interpretations into account. Emma Rice's recent *Mid-*

41 'PC or not PC' (words by Maureen Lipman; music by Denis King, 1995), in *The Shakespeare Revue*, compiled by Christopher Luscombe and Malcolm McKee (London: Nick Hern, 1995), pp. 55-57. A recording of a 1996 performance of *The Shakespeare Revue* is held at the National Video Archive of Performance.

42 Ayanna Thompson, *Passing Strange: Shakespeare, Race and Contemporary America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 77. Paraphrasing Clinton Turner Davis and Harry Newman's definitions from *Beyond Tradition: Transcripts of the First Symposium on Non-Traditional Casting*, Thompson identifies four 'models' of non-traditional casting: 'colorblind casting', which is 'a meritocratic model in which actors are cast without regard to race; the best actor for the best role'; 'societal casting', which is 'a socially informed model in which actors of color are cast in roles originally conceived as being white if people of color perform these roles in society as a whole'; 'conceptual casting', which is 'a conceptually conceived model in which actors of color are cast in roles to enhance the play's social resonance'; 'cross-cultural casting', which is 'another conceptually conceived model in which the entire world of the play is translated to a different culture and location', p. 76.

summer Night's Dream, for example, was gender-conscious rather than gender-blind: Rice cast a male actor as Helena and regendered the role as 'Helenus', as she felt uncomfortable about the extent to which Helena humbles herself in relation to Demetrius and felt that she could not celebrate a marriage with that kind of dynamic between husband and wife.[43] Portrayed as a gay couple, however, it made sense for them to have been temporally divided by Demetrius's attempt to conform to heteronormativity and marry Hermia and for Helenus to beg Demetrius to cast those thoughts away and be true to himself. To accommodate a 50/50 gender balance, all the mechanicals except Bottom were also regendered.

With regard to cross-gender casting and character regendering, the change can affect either all parts or only some, or even just one single part. There are productions where all parts are played by women, as well as productions where only one or a few male parts are played by women, with an otherwise conventionally gendered cast. In some productions where women play all or some male parts, all or some female parts are likewise played by men. Cross-gender casting and character regendering can also sometimes co-exist within the same production. An example of this is Sarah Frankcom's 2014 production of *Hamlet*, where Hamlet was played by a woman but referred to as 'he' and 'lord' and dressed in a male-coded costume, while Polonius and Marcellus, who were also played by women, were called 'Polonia' and 'Marcella' and referred to as 'she', 'lady', 'mother', etc., and no attempt was made to make either actress resemble a man – Marcella wore a gender-neutral uniform and Polonia clearly female-coded clothes.

The most extreme form of cross-gender casting for the purpose of extending the number of female roles is so-called all-female Shakespeare. During the last few decades, several all-female Shakespeare companies have been founded, most prominently the Los Angeles Women's Theatre Company, founded by Lisa Wolpe, but also, for example, The Queen's Company in New York and the London-based Smooth Faced Gentlemen.[44] But all-female Shakespeare has also gained a place in mainstream theatre. At the Globe, Phyllida Lloyd's 2003 production of *The Taming of the Shrew* and Tamara Harvey's 2004 production of *Much Ado About Nothing* both had all-female casts. The women playing men in these productions all

43 Emma Rice, interviewed by Meera Syal, interval feature for live streaming of *Midsummer Night's Dream* 11 September 2016 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/events/ehw2mb/live/cw8g9r> [accessed 11 September 2016].

44 See also Power, pp. 81-100.

appeared in male-coded attire, such as false whiskers and doublet and hose. According to Penny Gay, '[t]he director [of *Shrew*] and her principal actors were determined that the play should retain its modern feminist critique of the notion that women need "taming". Thus all the male characters were played with an edge of parody of typically male behaviour'.[45]

The Globe's all-female productions can be seen in parallel to Mark Rylance's all-male Original Practices productions of *Twelfth Night* and *Richard III* (2002, 2012), where the single-sex casting constituted only one aspect of the original practices, which also included music, dancing and costumes. The all-male versions did not constitute a deliberate political statement but invited understanding as artistic attempts to imitate Shakespeare's own productions, with the obvious difference that the female parts were in Shakespeare's time played by prepubescent boys and not adult men.[46] It should be noted that some scholars and theatre practitioners believe there are arguments to suggest that some of Shakespeare's female roles were played by adult men. However, Stanley Wells' comparison of the number of female roles in Shakespeare's plays and the number of boy actors employed by the company when the various plays were written shows that it would have been possible to fill all female roles with the small number of boys available and 'supports the contention that women's roles were always played by boys'.[47] Power points out that the Globe's choice to cast adult male actors in female roles is likely to give audiences 'the impression […] that this is historically accurate'.[48] There are also specific all-male Shakespeare companies, including Propeller Theatre, and individual all-male Shakespeare productions by other companies, such as Cheek by Jowl's *As You Like It* from 1991, revived in 1994, in which Adrian Lester gave a lauded performance as Rosalind.[49]

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45 Gay, p. 316.

46 It is important to note that puberty occurred at an older age than it usually does today.

47 Stanley Wells, 'Boys Should be Girls: Shakespeare's Female Roles and the Boy Players', in *New Theatre Quarterly*, 25:2 (May 2009), 172-77 (p. 177).

48 Power, p. 61.

49 Adrian Lester (interviewed by Ayanna Thompson, World Shakespeare Congress 2016, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 2 August 2016) has spoken in a nuanced way about his technique for playing a woman, 'emasculating' rather than 'feminising' himself and making subtle changes to his voice and body language. The video recording held at the National Video Archive of Performance, probably because of the amplifying effect of close-ups, gives a rather more stereotyped impression, however. Mark Rylance's performance as Olivia in *Twelfth Night* (a recording of which is commercially available) displayed stylised femininity to an even greater extent. See also Power, pp. 63-80, on all-male Shakespeare companies.

Phyllida Lloyd and Harriet Walter's all-female Shakespeare project has led to a different kind of single-sex Shakespeare performances. They staged *Julius Caesar* in 2012-13 and *Henry IV* (an adapted version of *Henry IV, Parts I and II*) in 2014, both performed at the Donmar Warehouse and subsequently transferred to St. Ann's Warehouse in New York. In the autumn of 2016, the company finished the trilogy with a production of *The Tempest*, as well as reprising *Julius Caesar* and *Henry IV* to create a repertory season consisting of one play from each of Shakespeare's three main genres, at the purpose-built King's Cross Theatre. The plays were set in a women's prison, where the inmates perform Shakespeare's plays. This means that all actors were playing women, but most of them were playing women playing men.[50] They were not visually disguised as men, but wore gender-neutral costumes. Another difference from the all-female Globe productions was that the plays chosen for the Donmar productions were plays that are typically seen as 'male', with very few female characters and little delving into matters that would invite the label 'women's issues'. This allowed the actors to move outside the conventionally female domain in a different way than, for example, a production of *The Taming of the Shrew* would have done.

All three productions have been highly acclaimed. Out of the fourteen reviews of the 2012 *Julius Caesar* in the *Theatre Record*, only one was unfavourable, and the majority of the seventeen reviews of the 2014 *Henry IV* were enthusiastic. According to Suzannah Clapp, Ashley McGuire was 'not just a good but a magnificent Falstaff' and '[a] one-person vindication of the

50 The prison-setting was not only a device used to explain why all the performers were women. The production was a collaboration with Clean Break, a theatre company originally started by two female prisoners which still focuses on working with women in the British justice system. A minority of the actors in Lloyd's company were former prisoners themselves, and each of the actors invented a 'prison character' with an elaborate backstory that parallelled the story of the Shakespearean part she played. The performances included brief interludes where the fictional prisoners broke out of character, part scripted and part improvised. In the 2016 trilogy, three of these backstories were revealed, as at the beginning of each play one actor spoke a prologue as their prison character. The actors' backstories were also made available digitally to the audience. The story of Walter's character, Hannah Wake, ran through all three plays, from Brutus ('getting power') to Henry IV ('holding on to power') to Prospero ('letting go of power'); Walter, *Brutus and Other Heroines*, p. 201. Based on the real-life American convict Judith Clark, Hannah had been given a life sentence over thirty years ago after driving the get-away car in connection with a bank robbery performed by a revolutionary group and refusing to take part in her own trial for political reasons. In prison, she had undergone a profound transformation and had started a drama group, where she directed plays by Shakespeare, as well as a mentor programme to help others, who, unlike herself, were able to make a new life for themselves in the outside world. See Walter, *Brutus and Other Heroines*, pp. 156-201.

all-female enterprise. If one were needed'.[51] Andrzej Lukowski called Walter 'one of the all time great Brutuses', and Libby Purvis thought Walter gave an 'unforgettable, marvellous performance', arguing that 'if this extraordinary human being gets shoved back full-time into frocks it will be a shocking crime against theatre. Harriet Walter could play Hamlet, Iago, Leontes, Richard III, Macbeth, in a mixed cast, without jarring'.[52] Clapp called *Julius Caesar* 'one of the most important theatrical events of this year', seeing it as proof that 'the stage has been starving itself by allowing only men to speak most of Shakespeare's lines'.[53] 'For large chunks of the evening you simply forget about the gender-bending casting', wrote Maxie Szalwinska: 'You're aware that Walter is a woman playing a man, but there is no doubt that she is Brutus'.[54] Dominic Cavendish was also impressed with the production: 'If it's empowering for a woman to play a man then it's also liberating for a man to watch a woman do so: the emphasis shifts to the similarities between the sexes, and the ubiquity of power struggles'.[55] The few 'bad' reviews, however, were full of disgust with the whole enterprise. Exclaiming 'what a load of old tosh', Tim Walker called the production of *Julius Caesar* '[g]immicky, humourless and strained'. He thought that Phyllida Lloyd had made 'fools' of 'the fine actresses that she has assembled for this vanity project' and taken an 'outrageous liberty' with the play. Walker also compared the production unfavourably to Mark Rylance's all-male productions, which had by then transferred to the West End:

> There is a certain poetic justice that Lloyd's effort should find itself in direct competition with the classy, respectful and hugely entertaining all-male versions of *Twelfth Night* and *Richard III*, which are running in rep at the Apollo. These productions would undoubtedly have met with Shakespeare's approval. Lloyd's, by contrast, would have appalled him as she has lost sight of the simple fact that the play ought to be the thing.[56]

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51 Susannah Clapp, *The Observer* 12 October 2014, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 2014, p. 1024.

52 Andrzej Lukowski, *Time Out London* 14 October 2014, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 2014, p. 1026; Libby Purvis, *The Times* 5 December 2012, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 2012, p. 1301.

53 Susannah Clapp, *The Observer* 9 December 2012, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 2012 (pp. 1302-03), p. 1302.

54 Maxie Szalwinska, *The Sunday Times* 9 December 2012, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 2012 (pp. 1303-04), p. 1303.

55 Dominic Cavendish, *The Daily Telegraph* 13 October 2014, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 2014, p. 1025.

56 Tim Walker, *The Sunday Telegraph* 9 December 2012, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 2012, p. 1304.

Lloyd Evans referred to the phenomenon of women in male roles as 'wrong-sex casting', and said about Walter's performance as Henry IV, 'She certainly doesn't look female which in this context is, I believe, a high compliment. (But she won't be pasting any production shots from this show into her personal scrapbook.)'.[57] Interestingly, the cross-gender casting was not the only feature of the productions that was deemed to be controversial: most of the reviews, favourable and unfavourable alike, commented at least as much on the variety of accents, ethnicities and builds represented in the cast, the abridgement of the plays and, not least, the substitution of hard plastic chairs for the comfortable cushioned benches normally found at the Donmar. It was not made clear if any one of these innovations was considered more shocking than the others.

Another type of cross-gender casting consists in casting a woman as the male main character in a mixed cast. Famous examples include Fiona Shaw's performance as Richard II in Deborah Warner's 1993 production at the National and Kathryn Hunter's as Lear in Helena Kaut-Howson's 1997 production at the Leicester Haymarket.[58] Another male leading role that has repeatedly been played by women is Prospero. In Julie Taymor's film from 2010, Helen Mirren plays the female Prospera. Here, Prospera's island is presented as a matriarchy where Prospera is free to pursue studies and witchcraft, an alternative to the oppressive patriarchal society that is shown in flashbacks of Prospera's life in Milan. She returns to her dukedom as a sacrifice for her daughter's sake. In preparation for the journey, she puts on her corset, which she has not worn while on the island and which will restrict her physically and symbolically when she returns to civilisation.[59]

57 Lloyd Evans, *The Spectator* 18 October 2014, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 2014, p. 1026.

58 Several actresses have played Lear. Most famously, the German actress Marianne Hoppe played the role in Robert Wilson's 1990 production in Frankfurt. In 2016, Glenda Jackson undertook the part in Deborah Warner's production at the Old Vic. Lear has also been regendered on several occasions and the play billed as 'Queen Lear', for example in Rachel McDonald's Melbourne Theatre Company production in 2012 and in Phil Willmott's 2016 production at the Tristan Bates Theatre. In Warner's production, Lear had not been regendered textually, and there was nothing to suggest femininity in Jackson's performance, but details such as a lady's cardigan indicated that she was not playing Lear 'as a man' either. According to Michael Billington, the performance 'transcend[ed] gender'; 'King Lear Review – Glenda Jackson Makes a Triumphant Return to the Stage', *The Guardian* 5 November 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/nov/05/king-lear-review-glenda-jackson-old-vic> [accessed 31 January 2017]. My own amateur production from 2019 regendered Lear completely but kept the 'King' in the title of the play.

59 According to Virginia Mason Vaughan, Taymor 'intended the corset to signify the confinement of patriarchy'; 'Miranda, where's your mother?: Female Prosperos and What They Tell Us', in *Women Making Shakespeare: Text, Reception and Performance*, ed. Gordon McMullan, Lena Cowen and Virginia Mason Vaughan (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 347-56 (p. 351).

Ten years before Taymor's film was made, Vanessa Redgrave had played Prospero at the Globe, but without any regendering of the character. Virginia Mason Vaughan characterises Redgrave's Prospero as 'a British landowner, who wore boots and patched shepherd's garb and spoke with a North Country accent'.[60] Both Mason Vaughan and Penny Gay note that many reviewers found fault with Redgrave for failing to appear sufficiently 'vengeful' in the role, and Gay comments that this shows how difficult it is for any actors, and more so than ever when cross-cast, 'to break the mould of accepted interpretation of major classic roles'.[61]

A very common, somewhat less controversial, practice is to cast women as one or two of the supporting characters, with or without regendering them. This often has no significance for the overall interpretation of the play, but is perhaps rather seen as a practical necessity owing to the surplus of female actors. Casting a woman as a powerful father figure such as Lear or Prospero, on the other hand, can be an effective way of inviting the audience to see the play in a new way. Such a casting choice does not necessarily entail a feminist reading of the play; on the contrary, it can be a way of disposing of any prejudice that may lead a present-day audience to interpret Lear and Prospero as symbols of patriarchy, and instead emphasise the universally human aspects of the characters and their stories.

The quantifiable fact that women are underrepresented in Shakespearean drama and the notion that Shakespeare's plays are often interpreted according to certain conventions that stereotype the portrayals of his characters in terms of gender expectations are two separate problems, one practical and actor-related and the other ideological and character-related, and must therefore be tackled in different ways. Equal representation and inclusiveness have their own value, but they must not be confused with the *ideologically* feminist agenda of drawing attention to the patriarchal structures in society and encouraging a desire to change these structures. In fact, in terms of conveying a feminist message, regendering can sometimes even do more harm than good. It is not unusual for Shakespeare's male characters to display misogynist attitudes and behaviour, and it is questionable whether anything is gained ideologically by transferring these types of character traits and actions onto a female character. It is not always the case that the venture of getting the onstage gender ratio as close as possible to

60 Mason Vaughan, p. 248.
61 Ibid., p. 248; Gay, p. 317.

50/50 goes hand in hand with representing the plays in ways that are likely to expose to the audience the discrimination against women and other structural gender-related problems that are part of many of Shakespeare's stories. In Josie Rourke's 2011 production of *Much Ado About Nothing* at Wyndham's Theatre, the character of Innogen, who appears in a stage direction to I.1 in the 1600 Quarto but has no lines, was reinstated, and all of Antonio's lines were reassigned to her. This created an extra female role and so promoted a more even gender balance. But this solution did not take into account the fact that Antonio – like all male characters in the play, with the possible exception of Benedick – displays misogynist attitudes in his speech. Women can of course be misogynists, but the routine reference to this kind of casting choice as feminist should be questioned. The reassignment of Antonio's lines to Innogen can be compared to a reading suggested by Catherine Alexander: Innogen enters with her husband in I.1 and is silent throughout the play, watching the atrocities that are committed against her daughter but unable to do anything about the situation.[62] A production with a silent Innogen, not instead of but in addition to Antonio, is something that has to my knowledge never been attempted; but though it would not affect the gender balance in terms of speech, it would be more firmly rooted in a feminist reading of the play.[63]

62 Catherine Alexander, lecture on *Much Ado About Nothing*, 6 August 2015, University of Cambridge Shakespeare Summer School 2015.

63 A silent Innogen was introduced in my amateur Shakespeare company's 2017 production. She did not, as Alexander suggested, stay on stage throughout the play but her presence in the family scenes added a certain poignancy. Two further examples can be mentioned. In reference to the regendering of Polonius in Frankcom's *Hamlet*, the reviewer Quentin Letts writes that '[t]o have a mother give all that fuss-pot advice to son Laertes […] rang truer to our family experience than having it delivered by an elderly father'; but Ian Shuttleworth, in his review, suggests that it is not feminist to portray Polonius as a woman, as he is a man with what may be perceived as negative stereotypically female traits; Quentin Letts, *The Daily Mail* 26 September 2014, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 2014, pp. 947-48; Ian Shuttleworth, *The Financial Times* 20 September 2014, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 2014, p. 946. The 2016 summer season saw productions of *Cymbeline* both at the Royal Shakespeare Company and at the Globe, and both productions boasted a feminist slant, but they had tackled the issue in different ways: Melly Still's RSC production regendered the eponymous character, Cymbeline (along with several other characters), so that she was queen rather than king and mother rather than father, whereas Matthew Dunster's Globe production – while it, similarly to Still's, regendered Pisanio – took as its starting point the fact that Shakespeare's play is not really about Cymbeline but about his daughter, and marketed the production under the name of *Imogen*, sometimes with the subtitle '*Cymbeline* Renamed and Reclaimed'. As early as 1936, George Bernard Shaw wrote *Cymbeline Refinished*, a version of Shakespeare's play where Innogen does not forgive Posthumus at the end. The idea that Innogen's quiet acceptance of what she has been put through is in fact unacceptable was also present in Dunster's production: Posthumus's line 'Kneel not to me: / The power that I have on you is to spare you: / The malice towards you to forgive you. Live, / And deal with others better' (V.4.497-500) was

What, then, *does* constitute a feminist production? There is of course no simple, all-encompassing definition. Both directors and actors are free to analyse Shakespeare, and the world, in feminist terms; but in order for a production as a whole to be understood as feminist, that dimension will usually be part of the director's underlying vision. A feminist intention may certainly lead to either a purely practical or a purely ideological approach; but a combination, where at least 50% of the actors are women (or at least 50% of the text is spoken by women) and the staging is based on a feminist reading of the play, is also entirely possible. In practice, the feminist approach is likely to be visible in a number of individual artistic choices besides casting and character interpretation, such as editing and blocking, both of which are opportunities to direct the audience's attention towards certain aspects of the text and certain characters at certain moments, as well as opportunities to adjust the extent to which the various actors are seen and heard. Cutting more male than female lines is a practical and quantifiable way of redressing the gender-balance.[64] Deciding *what* to cut, considering who says what, what attitudes it represents, what effect the cutting of a particular line may have on the audience's conception of the characters and the story in terms of gender, is an ideological, qualitative choice. For example, *Much Ado About Nothing* contains indications that the marriage between Claudio and Hero should not necessarily be seen as a desirable ending; but certain modern productions, notably Kenneth Branagh's 1993 film version, iron these doubts out, not only by acting choices but by cutting the most offensive of Claudio's and Leonato's lines and thus making them seem like essentially good people. Blocking is also significant, as it determines what the characters' physical relationships and statuses are. According to Gregory Doran, there is a tendency among male actors to spend a lot of time upstage on the RSC's thrust stages and

reassigned to Imogen, who spoke it having wrestled Iachimo to the ground, and changed to 'Kneel not to *him*! / *I* have the power to forgive you. / *I* have the power to spare you. Live, / And deal with others better' (quoted from memory). By comparison, regendering the relatively minor character of Cymbeline, while providing an opportunity of employment for an actress, may not have the significant impact on the interpretation of the play that it may at first appear to imply. (And as Cymbeline's wife was also regendered on this occasion, nothing was gained in quantitative terms.)

64 See Alan C. Dessen, 'The Director as Shakespeare Editor', in *Shakespeare Survey* 59, ed. Peter Holland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 182-92, on editing for performance to reduce running time, to reduce the number of actors needed, to eliminate obscure or politically incorrect words and phrases, to 'solve' perceived problems in the text or to adapt the text to staging and casting choices or a directorial concept.

so to force the actors they are playing opposite to turn their backs to most of the audience.[65] Careful (and gender-conscious) blocking minimises such bad habits and the extent to which audiences exit with the feeling of having seen many male faces and many female backs.[66] Even curtain-calls can be designed gender-consciously. For example, it is customary for Othello and Iago to be singled out at the curtain-call after *Othello*. While these two parts are of course by far the largest of the play and the actors' achievements should be recognised, including Desdemona and Emilia on the same terms would show awareness that *Othello* is also the women's story. Other aspects of a production, such as costume, may also be approached in a gender-conscious way.

One example of a production that has been called feminist is Jules Wright's 1986 *Macbeth* at the Lyceum Theatre in Edinburgh. Influenced by Marilyn French's *Shakespeare's Division of Experience*, Wright wanted to question the traditional perception of Lady Macbeth as the driving force behind Macbeth's murders and show that '[i]n Macbeth there is a complete denial of the feminine principle; all the women are wiped out'.[67] Although

65 Gregory Doran, master class, Big Amateur Theatre Makers Weekend, 25 October 2014, Courtyard Theatre, RSC, Stratford-upon-Avon.

66 Gay Gibson Cima describes an example of feminist blocking that goes a step further, developed as a group project by three of her students: during *The Merchant of Venice* I.2, it is implied that Portia and Nerissa are lovers by their position on Portia's bed at the beginning of the scene. When Portia moves offstage to change her clothes, Nerissa goes to the caskets, reads the inscriptions, opens the lead one and takes out Portia's portrait. That Nerissa can pick the right casket unassisted shows, without changing a word of the text, that she knows Portia better than any of her suitors and that Nerissa is a better match for Portia. In this staging, Gibson Cima argues, 'Portia and Nerissa share a comfortable, sustaining, playful love; they later marry best friends Bassanio and Gratiano in name only, in order to secure a continuing life together'; 'Strategies for Subverting the Canon', in *Upstaging Big Daddy: Directing Theater as if Gender and Race Matter*, ed. Ellen Donkin and Susan Clement (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2004 [1993]), pp. 91-105 (pp. 91-92).

67 Elizabeth Schafer, *Ms-Directing Shakespeare: Women Direct Shakespeare* (London: The Women's Press, 198), pp. 153-54. Marilyn French, in *Shakespeare's Division of Experience* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), argues that human experience has been culturally conditioned to be divided into 'the feminine principle' and 'the masculine principle', that the 'feminine principle' is in itself divided into an 'inlaw' and an 'outlaw' aspect, and that these 'gender principles' are reflected in Shakespeare's plays. The extreme of the masculine principle is 'the ability to kill', and the extreme of the feminine principle is 'the ability to give birth' (p. 21). The masculine principle is 'linear, temporal, and transcendent', is concerned with 'making permanent, fixing the flux of experience', 'exalts the individual', and 'values action over feeling, thought over sensation'; '[i]ts ultimate goal is transcendence of nature', and 'its immediate goal is the attainment and maintenance of power-in-the-world' (pp. 21-22). The feminine principle 'abjures power-in-the-world in favor of what may be called the quality of life' (p. 25). The inlaw feminine principle is 'benevolent', 'includes qualities like nutritiveness, compassion, mercy, and the ability to create felicity', is 'altruistic', 'values above all the good of the whole' and 'finds its pleasure in that good rather than in assertion of the self', 'exalts community above individual, feeling over action, sensation over thought' and 'requires volitional subordination, voluntary relinquishment of power-in-the-world'; these qualities

the production was consequently criticised for Julie Covington's allegedly pale Lady Macbeth, Wright's reading is based on evidence in the text. Presenting a Shakespeare play from a feminist angle is not usually a question of making changes to the play, but of deciding which of the dimensions in the text are to be foregrounded.

Naturally, a director has the possibility of implementing an integrated ideological reading of a play in a way that an actor does not. Sarah Werner claims that this discrepancy is connected to the focus on voice work, in the tradition of Cicely Berry, of Shakespearean actor training in Britain today:

> It is not that actors are unaware of the patriarchal implications of traditional interpretations of Shakespeare's female characters; many actors are explicitly interested in overturning those interpretations and replacing them with their own feminist readings […]. But the process of reading encouraged by voice work trains attention on character motive and emotion, rather than on playwright motive or ideological structure. By reading a play's language as revelatory of a character's feelings and thought processes, voice work ignores the representational and dramaturgical strategies of the text and withholds from actors the tools to deconstruct patriarchal character readings. It focuses on the character at the expense of the play.[68]

This is an apt observation, but what Werner claims about voice work is also true of the Stanislavskian tradition of focusing on character motivation and backstories that dominates ideas about acting more or less throughout the Western World.[69] I would also argue that the primary reason why actors prioritise character analysis above analysis of the play as a whole is simply the differing job descriptions of director and actor, at least as the concepts are understood in today's mainstream theatre.

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are 'connected to, and supportive of' qualities in the masculine principle, 'but always subordinate'; p. 24. The outlaw feminine principle, which is a threat to the masculine principle, 'has no goal beyond the pleasure of being' and 'is associated with darkness, chaos, flesh, the sinister, magic and above all, sexuality' – to be precise, 'sex as abandonment (as opposed to "masculine" sexuality, which is possession or aggression – rape) and a power like that of nature to destroy'; p. 23.

68 Sarah Werner, *Shakespeare and Feminist Performance: Ideology on Stage* (London & New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 34. One of the main functions of voice work is to explore how the clues about a character in the text on the page can be brought out by the voice in the actor's body. Cicely Berry, voice director at the RSC 1969-2014, has had an immense impact on the conception of voice work's prominent position in Shakespearean acting throughout the English-speaking world. See Cicely Berry, *Voice and the Actor* (New York: Wiley Publishing, 1973); Cicely Berry, *The Actor and His Text* (London: Virgin Publishing 1987); Cicely Berry, *From Word to Play: A Handbook for Directors* (London: Oberon Books, 2008).

69 See Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work: A Student's Diary*, trans. and ed. Jean Benedetti (London & New York: Routledge, 2008 [1938]); Konstantin Stanislavski, *Creating a Role*, trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood, ed. Hermine I. Popper (London: Methuen Drama, 1981 [1961]).

The modern director is seen as someone who should make his or her own mark on a play, interpret the text for the audience and make definite choices. This kind of intermediary was of course not part of conditions in Shakespeare's theatre. According to John Barton, 'we […] know that direction in the sense of detailed analysis of the scene or play probably didn't exist [in the Elizabethan theatre]'.[70] Christopher Innes and Maria Shevtsova state that the modern director as a phenomenon did not emerge until the end of the nineteenth century.[71] The closest function to that of a director in the Elizabethan theatre was the playwright-manager. The writing of the play was where choices were made; and, if he was part of the company that performed the play, the dramatist could explain his intentions to the cast. The practice of providing actors with cue scripts rather than the full play-text lasted until the end of the nineteenth century.[72] This, coupled with the fact that rehearsals were minimal in the Elizabethan theatre, meant that actors had no possibility to analyse the play as a whole prior to performance. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, one actor in a company would often have the opportunity to create and project a personal vision of a play, as the actor-manager became the closest equivalent of a director; but this was a privilege reserved for one (male) member of a cast.[73]

Modern actors may have more of an overview of the play as a whole than Elizabethan players did, but the prevailing understanding of the responsibilities of an actor is that s/he should focus on the character's intention and motivation and leave the overarching vision of the project to the director. According to Lennart Nyberg, the director has during the course of the twentieth century 'slowly but surely taken the place of the actor as the foremost interpretative agent in the theatre'. This is connected to the tendency to view a theatrical production as an autonomous work of art, where all the different components are 'united according to one single vision'. One result of this is that 'original interpretations of classical plays' are 'deliberately sought'.[74] However, the modern director as the visionary

70 John Barton, *Playing Shakespeare* (London & New York: Methuen: 1984), p. 12.

71 Christopher Innes and Maria Shevtsova, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Directing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 36.

72 Ibid., p. 15.

73 Ibid., pp. 18-23.

74 Lennart Nyberg, *The Shakespearean Ideal: Shakespeare Production and the Modern Theatre in Britain* (Uppsala: Studia Anglistica Upsaliensia, 1988), p. 122.

agent behind a production is not *per se* incompatible with actors analysing the play as a whole or conveying a message through their performance. In *The Empty Space*, Peter Brook explains the Brechtian idea of the 'intelligent actor' who understands 'his' role in relation to the play as a whole and the effect of his contribution on the entire production, which enables him to make the choices that best serve the play rather than the character-orientated choices that 'he made when he thought "identifying" with the character was all that mattered'. Still, Brook argues, there must be a balance: 'No actor can play a cipher: however stylized or schematic the writing, the actor must always believe to some degree in the stage life of the odd animal he represents'.[75] An important distinction is that Brecht's idea does not advocate actors bringing their own artistic ideas or political agendas to the production; rather, they should share and align themselves with the playwright's and/or director's idea and agenda.

In certain kinds of theatrical productions, however, actors have more influence than in others. While directors and actors have clearly separated functions in mainstream theatre, political fringe theatre has sometimes attempted to discard the hierarchic structure of the modern theatre and to make actors more directly involved in conveying political messages. This applies particularly to devised or collaboratively written plays, such as those of the WTG. This kind of writing process seems apt for an adaptation of Shakespeare, who himself worked in an environment where collaborative writing was customary. Ironically, audiences are sometimes upset when Shakespeare is appropriated, because the appropriations are perceived as lacking in 'fidelity' to their sources; but it can be said that the best way to show fidelity to Shakespeare is to engage with him, adapting and appropriating his texts, since that is what he himself did, both to his own works and to other people's. When theatres adapt Shakespeare today, they are therefore close to his own working methods, and it could even be claimed that experimental fringe theatre has more in common with Shakespeare's own theatre than modern mainstream theatre has.

Even so, none of this means that it is not problematic that an actor who wants to adopt a feminist perspective on a play is usually restricted to concentrating on his or her own part, since patriarchal structures are precisely that – structures – and therefore cannot be discovered within single

75 Peter Brook, *The Empty Space: A Great Theatre Director Gives His Views on the Making of Drama* (London: Penguin, 1990 [1968]), p. 85.

characters. Therefore, choosing which projects and directors to work with is often one of an actor's most relevant choices in positioning him- or herself as a 'feminist' actor, though it may also be a question of resisting when required to conform to stereotype by a director. One example of an actor's feminist intent in a Shakespearean production is Frances Barber's portrayal of Ophelia in Ron Daniels' RSC production of *Hamlet* in Stratford in 1984 and at the Barbican in 1985. As described in her *Players on Shakespeare* essay, Barber saw Ophelia as a strong, intelligent, brave and independent woman with a sense of humour and a partly well-founded sense of guilt, and she did not want to depict her as a victim. The director did not agree with her reading, and though they compromised on some aspects of the part, a viewing of the recording of the performance in the RSC archive does not invite an understanding of the production as a whole as 'feminist'. What is interesting, however, is that both the actor's desire to portray Ophelia as strong and the director's desire to portray Lady Macbeth as weak are seen as feminist interpretations, in Barber's case by herself and by Daniels, and in Wright's case by Elizabeth Schafer in her scholarly work on women directing Shakespeare.

These two examples illustrate two different strategies in feminist readings and productions of Shakespeare, especially where the tragedies are concerned: on the one hand, to show a female character as strong and active and thereby to reject stereotyped portrayals of women as victims; on the other hand, to take advantage of the stereotype to expose patriarchal structures in society, by showing a female character as weak and passive. Both strategies can be seen as problematic: if a female character is shown as being partly to blame for her own destiny, the opportunity to demonstrate the structural oppression to which the women in the plays are subjected is missed, and representing her as a victim may reinforce gender stereotypes. Again, there is a discrepancy here between the desire to make sure that actresses have the opportunity to play varying and challenging roles and the desire to project an interpretation of a play that is supported by a close reading of the text from a feminist perspective, with the effect the performance is likely to have on an audience in mind. It may perhaps be said that depicting characters such as Ophelia and Lady Macbeth as strong and active is feminist from an actor-orientated point of view while portraying them as weak and passive is a feminist act from an audience-orientated point of view.

Another gender-related issue is the problem of identification. According to Purple Seven's 2012-15 survey, women make up 65% of theatre 'customers', [76] but only 39% of theatre actors.[77] As mentioned above, only 16% of Shakespeare's roles are female. If most main characters are male, and if drama is written in a way that invites identification and sympathy with male characters at the expense of female characters – this is true especially of Shakespeare's histories, but also of his major tragedies, which are among the plays most frequently staged by theatres and studied in schools – the result for female spectators/readers is either that they identify with the female characters and get used to thinking of themselves as belonging to the category of people who are not the main characters in life, or that they identify with the male characters and get used to identifying with men over other women. Gender is of course only one of many aspects of a character with which any given individual may identify; but since male characters tend to be more multi-dimensional than female ones, both men and women are more likely to feel they have something in common with male characters. This means that women are conditioned to identify and sympathise with people of the opposite sex (or indeed regardless of sex) in a way that men are not, and this is the reason why feminist theatre practitioners argue for the necessity of new writing with female characters that even male audience members can identify with.[78]

At least two appropriators of Shakespeare have mentioned the gender-related dilemma of identification as a contributing factor to the appropriative impulse. In 'Shakespeare in Iceland', Jane Smiley talks about her reaction to reading *King Lear* and identifying with Goneril and Regan rather than Lear: 'They were women, and the play seemed to be condemning them morally

76 It should be noted, however, that this figure refers to people booking tickets rather than actual, individual audience members. This may indicate that in many households, couples and groups of friends a woman is leading in making the decision to go to the theatre together.

77 'Gender in Theatre', Purple Seven <http://purpleseven.com/media.ashx/gender-thought-leadership.pdf> [accessed 14 September 2016].

78 This argument was, for instance, made by Harriet Walter in response to an audience question at 'Few Roles for Women' (lecture), moderated by Erica Whyman, 7 September 2014, Swan Theatre, RSC, Stratford-upon-Avon. At the same event, the RSC's deputy artistic director, Erica Whyman, said that after a performance of John Webster's *The White Devil*, directed by Maria Åberg for the RSC in 2014, in which the character Flamineo had been regendered and was played by a woman, Whyman had received a comment from a male audience member to the effect that the regendering made it impossible to see the character as 'everyman'. The way this man felt sitting in the audience – unrepresented on stage and estranged from a driving character by their differing genders – is arguably the way women feel watching almost any play – except that most women get accustomed at an early age to identifying with men.

for the exact ways in which they expressed womanhood that I recognised. I was offended'.[79] Smiley further says that *King Lear* has the capacity to 'induce' 'guilt about proper daughterhood'.[80] Jean Betts, by contrast, read *Hamlet* at school and experienced 'identifying with [Hamlet] and finding Ophelia alien'. According to her, many girls experience the 'trauma' of 'being aware' of being 'judged' in comparison to Ophelia rather than Hamlet.[81] If reading or watching plays like *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, which are apparently written to inspire identification with the male main character, can induce feelings of 'guilt' and 'trauma' in young women, it is indeed important to introduce Shakespeare's plays to young people in a gender-conscious way, whether the approach is practical and/or ideological.

Trusting and Resisting Shakespeare

It is a commonplace that Shakespeare's plays portray patriarchal societies, and that the society he wrote in and for was patriarchal.[82] Furthermore, certain aspects of his plays can be construed as reproducing a patriarchal thought system. But it is debatable to what extent Shakespeare himself challenges gender stereotypes and societal conventions in his plays, and to what extent this was something extraordinary for the time. This is an area where critics' opinions diverge dramatically. It is, indeed, possible to see Shakespeare's plays as being proto-feminist in themselves, as several critics have done. In her seminal work *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, Juliet Dusinberre claims that '[t]he feminism of Shakespeare's time is still largely unrecognised', but that '[t]he ideology, the literature, the social reform, the activism, and the increased awareness necessary to all of them dominated the society for which Shakespeare and his contemporaries wrote their plays'.[83] Phyllis Rackin also argues that present-day critics are stuck in a conventional understanding of Shakespeare's time that is not

79 Jane Smiley, 'Shakespeare in Iceland', in Marianne Novy (ed.), *Transforming Shakespeare: Contemporary Women's Re-Visions in Literature and Performance*. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 159-79 (p. 161).

80 Ibid., p. 173.

81 Jean Betts, 'Writer's Note', in *Ophelia Thinks Harder* (Wellington, New Zealand: The Play Press, 2001 [1994]), p. ii.

82 Even though England was ruled by a queen, the rhetoric surrounding Elizabeth I did not present her as proof that any woman could do a man's office but rather as the exception, a unique woman with 'the heart and stomach of a king'.

83 Dusinberre, p. 1.

necessarily correct and that women in early modern England had more power and independence than present-day people generally assume.[84] Dusinberre goes as far as saying that '[t]he drama from 1590 to 1625 is feminist in sympathy', and that, while 'Shakespeare's modernity in his treatment of women has always attracted attention', 'it is not nearly so well known that his attitudes to women are part of a common stock to be found in the plays of almost all his contemporaries'.[85] She further claims that 'Shakespeare and his contemporaries could rely on their audience's alertness to controversy about women'.[86] 'Shakespeare's feminism', according to Dusinberre, 'consists of more than a handful of high-born emancipated heroines: it lies rather in his scepticism about the nature of women'.[87]

In the preface to the edited volume *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene and Carol Thomas Neely argue that late-twentieth-century feminist criticism was motivated by questions to which readers could not find an answer in the plays:

> In the early seventies, teachers and students began asking new questions about Shakespeare. Is Kate actually tamed? Should we join Cassio and Iago in mockery of Bianca? Why did Romeo leave Juliet behind when he fled Verona? Why do the strong articulate women in the comedies disappear from the tragedies? The traditional answers – that the author was bound by his sources or by the demands of genre or by the customs of his age – had begun to seem inadequate; yet most criticism offered no responses.[88]

Especially the endings of the comedies contain these kinds of questions. *The Taming of the Shrew*, with its from an even vaguely feminist standpoint

84 Rackin elaborates: 'We know now, for instance, that a great many women exercised their own choice in negotiating marriages for themselves and for other women as well, but we still tend to assume that patriarchal control was the norm. We also know that the majority of executors of wills in Shakespeare's England were women, but we still assume that most women were deprived of economic power and authority. We now have evidence of women's widespread participation in pre-Reformation drama, but we still tend to assume that women's exclusion from the London professional companies followed a long tradition of all-male performance. We know that in Shakespeare's London, women were a visible presence all over the city, including the playhouses, but we still tend to assume that Shakespeare's plays should be read from the point of view of a male spectator who would have responded to representations of women's power and autonomy as occasions for anxious hostility'; pp. 2-3.

85 Dusinberre, p. 5.

86 Ibid., p. 19.

87 Ibid., p. 305.

88 Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene and Carol Thomas Neely, 'Preface', in *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene and Carol Thomas Neely (Urbana, Chicago & London: University of Illinois Press, 1980), p. ix.

worrying ending, is a case in point, as are the sudden marriages in *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*.[89]

It is surely a mistake to pass these jarring conclusions off as simply being products of a different time with different values: the unsatisfactory and unsettling endings invite audiences to think and engage with the stories and with the questions implicitly raised; that seems to be an integral part of the plays. As Juliet Stevenson says in Rutter's *Clamorous Voices*,

> I don't think Shakespeare's plays ever attempt to answer questions. They *ask* questions, and they leave those question marks hanging over the heads of the actors and the audience at the end of the play. That's when the audience's work starts, because they have to go home with those questions unanswered.[90]

These 'unsatisfying endings' are most obviously in evidence in the comedies, with their apparently happy outcomes; but the same kind of unanswered questions can be found in the tragedies, and they are an important trigger of the 'appropriative impulse'. This does not mean, however, that the response is not culturally conditioned or particular to the historical moment of the spectator/reader.

The time in which the spectator/reader lives has an important impact on how s/he interprets Shakespeare's plays and their female characters, as Rackin points out:

> Our own experience of Shakespeare's women is conditioned not only by the accumulated tradition of Shakespeare scholarship and reception but also by the present history of the world in which we live: both of these histories help to shape our experience of the plays […]. Both of these histories will need feminist intervention in the twenty-first century.[91]

89 Shylock's forced conversion in *The Merchant of Venice* is an example of an unsatisfactory ending where a racial/religious problem is comparable the to gender issues in these plays. Marianne Novy claims that Shylock's conversion should be seen in parallel to the more or less enforced conversion from Catholicism to Protestantism that was common in Shakespeare's England: '*Merchant* adds explicitly anti-Semitic language to its sources, and also adds language humanizing Shylock' – many people in the audience could probably sympathise with him, 'especially because of the similarity of his situation to that of Christians who converted under pressure'; *Shakespeare and Outsiders* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 11. This makes it unlikely that Shylock's baptism should be seen as a happy ending. This was made very clear in Jonathan Munby's 2015-16 production at the Globe and on tour.

90 Stevenson, in Rutter, *Clamorous Voices*, p. 120.

91 Rackin, pp. 5-6.

Feminist engagement with Shakespeare and with society, then, may be able to affect how future spectators/readers perceive Shakespeare's female characters, just as the kinds of engagement with Shakespeare and society that have been prevalent in the recent past have influenced present-day spectators/readers perception. According to Dusinberre, Shakespeare had a more 'feminist' view of women than many present-day critics, which means that these critics' construction of the characters is clouded:

> Shakespeare saw men and women as equal in a world which declared them unequal. He did not divide human nature into the masculine and the feminine, but observed in the individual woman or man an infinite variety of union between opposing impulses. […] Where in every other field understanding of Shakespeare's art grows, reactions to his women continually recycle, because critics are still immersed in preconceptions which Shakespeare discarded about the nature of women.[92]

The first edition of Dusinberre's book was published in 1975, and most of the existing feminist Shakespeare criticism has happened after that. But the idea that interpretations of Shakespeare say more about the time in which he is interpreted than about Shakespeare's own time is still valid; and the conventional interpretations of some of his female characters are extremely tenacious, even when they have little basis in the text. In the same vein, it can be claimed that recent feminist Shakespeare appropriations do not criticise Shakespeare or find anything wrong with his works; they find something wrong with their own society, see an ally in Shakespeare, and turn to him for help.

According to Marianne Novy, feminist re-visions 'let [female] characters escape plots that doom them to an oppressive marriage or to death' and 'imagine stories for figures who are silent or demonized in Shakespeare's version'.[93] Feminist re-visions of Shakespeare's works exist in a relatively small number, and they make no claim to be able to replace Shakespeare's plays or to be of comparable quality. Thus, they do not in themselves constitute a solution to the problem of the gender imbalance of Shakespearean drama; but they may function as a complement to other solutions. Feminist re-visions should not be understood solely as a response to Shakespeare. Above all, as has already been stated, they use Shakespeare

92 Dusinberre, p. 308.

93 Marianne Novy, *Transforming Shakespeare: Contemporary Women's Re-Visions in Literature and Performance* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), p. 1.

and his iconic status for their own purposes, to give a greater impact to the message they want to convey or the story they want to tell. To the extent that 'Shakespeare' is criticised in these appropriations, the target is often the romanticised image of the male genius rather than the texts themselves.

Judith Fetterley uses the term re-vision, as Adrienne Rich originally did, to denote an aspect of feminist criticism, and connects it to her own term 'the resisting reader'. In the following passage, Fetterley is not referring to feminist critics of Shakespeare but to those of American literature; but the attitudes of 'resisting' and 're-viewing' may equally well be applied to the former category:

> [T]he first act of the feminist critic must be to become a resisting rather than an assenting reader and, by this refusal to assent, to begin the process of exorcizing the male mind that has been implanted in us. The consequence of this exorcism is the capacity for what Adrienne Rich describes as re-vision.[94]

When re-vision is applied, Fetterley argues, male-authored literary texts will 'lose their power to bind us unknowingly to their designs':

> While women obviously cannot rewrite literary works so that they become ours by virtue of reflecting our reality, we can accurately name the reality they do reflect and so change literary criticism from a closed conversation to an active dialogue.[95]

It is a fascinating coincidence in view of how the term re-vision has later come to be used that Fetterley should claim that 'women obviously cannot rewrite literary works so that they become ours by virtue of reflecting our reality', since that is literally what authors of re-visions do. In fact, Mark Fortier uses the character Constance Ledbelly in Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* as an example of a resisting reader who develops a 'feminist perspective' in such as way that it 'both changes Shakespeare's work and maintains a dialogue with it'.[96] Adapting the concept of the resisting reader, Elaine Aston invites feminist actors to become 'resisting performers', 'empowered as the feminist critic (rather than female victim) of the "master" text'.[97]

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94 Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington, IA: Indiana University Press, 1978), p. xxii.

95 Ibid., pp. xxii-xxiii.

96 Mark Fortier, *Theory/Theatre: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 108-10.

97 Elaine Aston, *Feminist Theatre Practice: A Handbook* (London & New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 83.

Aston cites Kathleen McLuskie as an example of a resisting reader of Shakespeare. Werner, too, makes this connection in a comparison of the differing interpretations of the 'erotic' aspects of the dialogue between Isabella and Angelo in *Measure for Measure* by McLuskie (who finds it indicative of the play's objectification of Isabella) and Juliet Stevenson (who sees it as an indication of Isabella's inner strength):

> An important aspect of the difference between Stevenson's focus on character emotions and McLuskie's on dramaturgical devices is not methodological but ideological: while Stevenson trusts Shakespeare, McLuskie does not.[98]

Werner notes that while '[b]oth Stevenson and McLuskie define themselves as feminists concerned with Shakespeare's female characters', Stevenson believes that in Shakespeare's text it is possible to find 'strong women that have been hidden by years of theatrical and interpretative tradition', but 'McLuskie is profoundly suspicious of any attempt to recuperate Shakespeare as a feminist'.[99] Werner analyses this difference between trusting and resisting as being bound up with '[t]he tension between the views espoused by academia and theatre';[100] but, although this is a general tendency, both attitudes can be found among both scholars and theatre practitioners. Feminist re-visions, like feminist performance and criticism, combine or choose between ideological and practical approaches. Some 'trust' Shakespeare and some 'resist' him.

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It is clear that there is a quantitative gender imbalance among Shakespeare's roles in that the female parts are smaller and fewer than the male ones; opinions on whether there is also a qualitative imbalance are divided. The most probable reason for the quantitative imbalance is that the female parts were originally played by boy actors; however, this creates a problem in today's theatre, where at least half the acting workforce is made up of women. Since the 1970s, there has been a great deal of work to increase

98 Werner, p. 41.

99 Ibid.; Rutter, *Clamorous Voices*, pp. 40-52; Kathleen McLuskie, 'The Patriarchal Bard: Feminist Criticism and Shakespeare: *King Lear* and *Measure for Measure*', in Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (eds), *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 88-108.

100 Werner, p. 42.

gender equality in the theatre, though this development has been slow. Ways in which Shakespeare's unfavourable impact on gender equality is targeted include all-female Shakespeare productions, regendering and cross-gender casting certain parts in Shakespeare's plays, gender-blind casting and replacing some productions of Shakespeare with new writing. Appropriations of Shakespeare may be seen as a way of combining new writing with the casting-based approach to Shakespeare.

The quantifiable problem that women are underrepresented on the stage needs a practical, casting-related approach; however, the idea that conventional interpretations and portrayals of Shakespeare's characters stereotype women cannot be approached through casting, but is dependent on gender-conscious analyses of the plays, for example in a way that brings out the oppression of women depicted in the tragedies. Editing and blocking can be done in a gender-conscious way and can be useful from a practical as well as an ideological perspective. According to the modern understanding of the division of labour between director and actor, these are primarily the director's concerns, while feminist actors tend to focus on 'discovering strong women' in Shakespeare's texts. This may be felt to have a limited impact on the audience's perception of the play as a whole. An alternative, found in particular within fringe theatre, is collaboratively written or devised work. There are also productions of existing plays, including Shakespeare, that apply this kind of collaborative approach to a greater or lesser extent. Phyllida Lloyd's all-female Shakespeare project, for example, shared many of the characteristics of feminist fringe theatre, but used Shakespeare's texts.

An additional problem of Shakespeare's tragedies is that they seem to invite sympathy with the male characters at the expense of the female ones – a problem which appropriators, as female spectators/readers, have reported that they experienced as disturbing, and which gave them the impulse to write their own versions of the story, seen from a female perspective. Feminist responses to Shakespeare can be divided into those that trust Shakespeare and those that do not. The resisters see Shakespeare as expressing patriarchal values, whereas the trusters see him as challenging and subverting received notions about women.

This chapter has put feminist re-vision, and, by extension, the wider genre of Shakespeare appropriations written for the stage, into the contexts of the gender-political climate in the late twentieth and early twenty-first

centuries, especially the influence of the second wave of feminism, and the practical challenges that the gender distribution among Shakespeare's characters involve for present-day theatre practitioners. In the following chapters, contemporary Shakespeare appropriations are investigated as *one* way of coming to terms with, on the one hand, those nagging aspects of Shakespeare's plays that convention has taught many spectators/readers that they must not question, and, on the other hand, aspects of the appropriators' own time and society that they regard as problematic.

2.
King Lear and His Daughters' Missing Mother 'Why did it happen?'

Why do Lear and his daughters act as they do during the first scene of Shakespeare's tragedy? This question has occupied directors, actors, readers, theatregoers and scholars for centuries. Four theatrical appropriations of *King Lear*, written between 1987 and 2007, all try to find an answer to the question 'Why did it happen?' Specifically, they offer suggestions for the reasons behind the 'love test', ponder who is to blame for the outcome, and try to imagine the woman who is missing from the family drama: Lear's wife and his daughters' mother. But while they are all driven by the same aspects of Shakespeare's play – the lack of explanations of why the love test turns out the way it does and of what has happened to the mother – these are four very dissimilar plays: *Lear's Daughters* (1987), by the Women's Theatre Group and Elaine Feinstein, Howard Barker's *Seven Lears: The Pursuit of the Good* (1989), Jules Tasca's *Prince Lear* (2007), and Perry Pontac's *Prince Lear: A Prequel* (one of three Shakespeare parodies written by Pontac for the radio but performed on stage several times, broadcast in 1994 and published in the volume *Codpieces* in 2011).

In *King Lear*, everything goes wrong without any one cause. While the play would perhaps originally have invited explanations connected to Lear's failure as a ruler, this kind of explanation seems to suggest itself less obviously to present-day audiences. This chapter investigates how appropriations search for or invent an explanation for the tragic events in Shakespeare's play and someone on whom the tragedy can be blamed, from a more family- and gender-oriented point of view. *Lear's Daughters* will be the primary focus, but connections will also be made among the different appropriations; between the appropriations, criticism on *King Lear* and *King Lear* in performance; and between the appropriations and the sourc-

es of *King Lear*. I will also draw on a student production of *Lear's Daughters* that I directed in 2010, and on questionnaires and an interview with members of the cast of that production.

'Why, this is not Lear': *King Lear* as Appropriation and Source of Appropriations

The legend of Leir, a king in prehistoric Britain, first appears in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c. 1140), later to be retold in *Holinshed's Chronicles* (1577).[1] According to Geoffrey Bullough, Geoffrey of Monmouth based the love-test story on the type of folktale in which a daughter tells her father that she loves him 'like salt'. Taking the name of Leir from a 'Celtic seagod', Geoffrey of Monmouth made Leir the founder of Leicester.[2] While the Gloucester subplot in *King Lear* is taken from Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*,[3] Shakespeare's primary source for the main plot is Holinshed, whose beginning of the story he follows, but where 'Cordelia' and her army are, at least temporarily, victorious:

> This Cordeilla after hir fathers decease ruled the land of Britaine right worthilie during the space of five years […] [but] hir two nephewes Margan and Cunedag, sonnes to hir aforesaid sisters, disdaining to be under the government of a woman, levied warre against hir, and destroyed a great part of the land, and finallie tooke hir prisoner, and laid hir fast in ward, wherewith she tooke such griefe, being a woman of manlie courage, and despairing to recover libertie, there she slue hirself, when she had reigned (as before is mentioned) the tearme of five yeeres.[4]

Another difference from Shakespeare's play is that, in Holinshed's version, the Dukes do not marry Gonerilla ('Goneril') and Regan until after the

1 Geoffrey Monmouth, 'From HISTORIA ANGLICANA', trans. Aaron Thompson (1718), in Geoffrey Bullough (ed.), *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. VII: 'Major Tragedies: *Hamlet*; *Othello*; *King Lear*; *Macbeth*' (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), pp. 311-16; R. Holinshed, 'From THE SECOND BOOK OF THE HISTORIE OF ENGLAND' (1587 edn.), in Bullough, vol. VII, pp. 316-19.

2 Geoffrey Bullough, 'Introduction' to *King Lear*, in *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. VII, pp. 269-308 (pp. 271-72).

3 Sir Philip Sidney, 'From THE COUNTESS OF PEMBROKE'S ARCADIA' (1590), in Bullough, pp. 402-14.

4 Holinshed, in Bullough, vol. VII, p. 319. Geoffrey of Monmouth's story is the source for the versions of the Lear story found in Holinshed, *The Faerie Queene*, *The Mirror for Magistrates* and *King Leir* (see below).

love test, where they have been given only half the kingdom to share between them with immediate effect, and proceed to forcibly deprive Lear of the remaining half.

Other influences on the main plot of *King Lear* include Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and the then topical Annesley case, which bore a striking resemblance to the Lear story, down to the detail of the name of Brian Annesley's youngest daughter, Cordell.[5] In his will, Annesley left the bulk of his fortune to the youngest of his three daughters. When he became senile, his eldest daughter contested the will, but Cordell supported her father (which is hardly surprising, since she was the main beneficiary of the will). Bullough argues it to be possible that Shakespeare derived additional inspiration for his play from these real-life events, and they may have contributed to the audience's interest in the Lear story. The main-plot story of *Lear* also circulated around the same time in *The Mirror for Magistrates*, which puts less emphasis than Holinshed on Cordelia as an unusually strong woman and more on her virtuousness:

> Both nephews mine, yet wolde against me Cordel fight,
> Because I lovde always that seemed right:
> Therefore they hated me, and did pursue
> Their aunte and queene as she had bene a Jewe.[6]

The version of the story that Shakespeare's first audience was likely to be familiar with, however, is the anonymous play *King Leir*. The anonymous *Leir* was published in 1606 but believed to have been first performed some ten years earlier and to be an additional source for Shakespeare's play. [7]

In *Leir*, the king, being old and tired, decides to retire and divide the power equally among his three daughters. The wicked courtier Skalliger, however, suggests an unequal division determined by their declarations of love for their father. Leir ('Lear') initially refuses, as he wants to be fair; but when pressed by Skalliger, he realises that this is the perfect opportunity

5 Edmund Spenser, 'From THE FAIRIE QUEENE' (1596 edn.), in Bullough, vol. VII, pp. 332-34; 'CORDELL ANNESLEY DEFENDS HER FATHER'S SANITY AND PROPERTY', From Salisbury MSS, Historical Manuscript Commission, Vol. XV, 1930, in Bullough, vol. VII, pp. 309-11.

6 John Higgins, 'From THE MIRROR FOR MAGISTRATES' (1574), in Bullough, vol. VII, pp. 323-32 (p. 329).

7 Anon., 'THE TRUE CHRONICLE HISTORIE OF KING LEIR *and his daughters*' (1605), in Bullough, vol. VII, pp. 337-402. See also Anon., *King Leir*, ed. Tiffany Stern, Globe Education (London: Nick Hern, 2002).

to make his daughters – especially the youngest, Cordella ('Cordelia') – marry the suitors he has chosen for them, using emotional blackmail. In this version, the daughters are all unmarried at the beginning of the play. Cordella has made it clear that she will never accept a proposal from a man she does not love, and that she does not love any of her suitors. Leir's plan is to wait until Cordella has told him how much she loves him, and then say, 'then […] grant me one request […] accept a husband [of my choice]'. After she has claimed to love him so much, she will hardly be able to refuse, Leir reasons. Also, he is genuinely anxious to find out which of his daughters loves him most. Skalliger secretly goes to Gonorill and Ragan ('Goneril' and 'Regan'), and tells them of Leir's plan to enable them to prepare suitable answers. They plan to say that they love Leir so much that they will agree to marry anyone he chooses – which they can do safely, because Skalliger has already told them of Leir's choice, and they know they are happy with it. In the love test itself, there is more focus on marriage than in Shakespeare's play, and, significantly, it is Gonorill and not Leir who first responds to Cordella's speech. Before Leir has said anything, Gonorill, with feigned abhorrence, asks her sister how she dare answer her father like that. She thus suggests to Leir that he should interpret Cordella's answer unfavourably.

Gonorill and Ragan are jealous of Cordella because she is more beautiful than they are and is favoured at court.[8] Their excessive declarations of love are part of their plan for revenge on their younger sister – they do not extemporise or act out of desperation to ensure that they are given their fair share of land and power, which is arguably the case in *Lear*. In a way, their actions are more understandable in *Leir*, because they have more to lose: in Shakespeare's play, they are already married and have comfortable homes, whereas in *Leir* they are still unmarried and dependent on their father; if they do not please him sufficiently, they could end up homeless or married against their will. However, they already know Leir's plan and find his choice of husbands for them satisfactory. They also know that

8 Claudette Hoover argues that Shakespeare's appropriative choices show that he 'reject[s]' the 'cliché' that 'women are by nature competitive and jealous' by refraining from referring to Cordelia's beauty and from stating that Goneril and Regan hate their younger sister or have any 'petty feelings' towards her. It is often assumed that Shakespeare's Cordelia is beautiful and that her sisters are jealous of her, but this is not clear in the play. As Hoover points out, Goneril refers to Cordelia's being Lear's favourite child to underscore how uncharacteristic an act is was to banish her; 'Goneril and Regan: "So Horrid as in Woman"', *San Jose Studies*, 10:3 (Autumn 1984), 49-65 (pp. 51-52).

more is at stake for Cordella than for them, since she will not be happy with the chosen suitor. They deliberately keep the knowledge of the forthcoming love test from her and answer their father in a way they know she will not be willing to replicate, and then guide Leir's response to what she says. Their sole motive for this is revenge.

In *Lear*, on the other hand, Goneril and Regan are apparently just as unprepared for the love test as Cordelia is; they have had no time to confer, and the text does not in any way imply that they do not assume that Cordelia will react to their father's prompt in the same way as they do – that is, by professing her love as eloquently as she can. In *Leir*, Gonorill and Ragan know that Cordella will not follow their strategy – that is, to say she loves her father so much that she would marry anyone he wanted her to – because they know she 'will rather die than [marry] the Irish King'. By refusing to grant Leir's wish, Cordella does not forfeit a marriage that she can be interpreted as having wanted (like Shakespeare's Cordelia) – on the contrary, she is saved from a marriage that she feared. Her actions make more sense in this way, but it makes the question of unexaggerated truth, raised by Shakespeare's Cordelia's blank refusal to humour her father, less central than it is in *Lear*. In Shakespeare's play, the fact that Cordelia apparently does not have any pragmatic reason for her action, such as a wish to avoid being married off against her inclination, turns her answer into an insistence on absolute integrity and thus presents a moral dilemma that is not present to the same extent in any other version of the story.

Shakespeare's text presents the love test itself as the source of suffering in the play, and as an idea of Lear's own contriving, apparently based on vanity, conceit and a mind already about to disintegrate. Leir's folly, on the other hand, is simply the patriarch's wish to force his daughter to marry regardless of her own wishes; Leir is conscious of and articulate about his motives, as well as aware of the shortcomings of the love-test plan. Just before the love test, he meditates on the fact that parents always love their children more than the reverse and that he cannot expect his love to be fully requited. He does not appear to be as unreasonable in his demands on his daughters as Shakespeare's Lear. But when Gonorill and Ragan exaggerate their love, his expectations are raised. The fact that the audience is privy to Leir's motivation and expectations before the love test makes it obvious that his expectations change throughout the scene and that Gonorill and Ragan influence this change. Shakespeare is more ambiguous

about Lear's motivation and expectations when it comes to the love test. Shakespeare's Lear is furthermore a more flawed character than Leir. In the anonymous play, the suffering comes from Skalliger, Gonorill and Ragan, who express an active wish to harm Leir and Cordella; in Shakespeare's play, the suffering is created by Lear himself. He has no one but himself to blame for instigating the love test, nor for reacting the way he does to Cordelia's response.

Some of the aspects of *Leir* that differ most significantly from Shakespeare's play in terms of the relationships between the father and daughters are that Leir is reluctant to go ahead with the love test, that Skalliger warns Gonorill and Ragan of the plan, that (once she meets him) Cordella explicitly wants to marry the King of Gallia ('the King of France'), that Gonorill and Ragan try to have Leir murdered, that it is Gonorill who interprets Cordella's answer for Leir, and that Leir realises that he cannot expect his children to love him as much as he loves them. Towards the end of the play, Perillus ('Kent') says to Leir, 'She sayd, her love unto you was as much, / As ought a child to beare unto her father', and Leir replies, 'But she did find, my love was not to her, / As should a father beare unto a child'.[9] This means that Leir has learnt his lesson: he understands where he went wrong, and now repents. Shakespeare's Lear, on the other hand, never realises that it was wrong of him to demand unconditional love from his daughters or to play his daughters off against one another, nor does he perceive the validity of Cordelia's answer. All he has learnt by the end of the play is that it was Cordelia who loved him the most after all, and that he therefore should not have disowned her. It never appears to dawn on him that he should not have asked the question in the first place.[10]

In terms of stage-time, *Leir* sees the story more from the daughters' point of view than Shakespeare's play does – Gonorill and Ragan repeatedly appear on stage in conference with each other without their father, and Cordella is not absent from the story for as long as Cordelia is in *Lear*

9 Scene 19, lines 1776-78 , in Bullough, vol VII, p. 380.

10 Lynda E. Boose remarks that in his fantasy of living alone with Cordelia in prison, Lear 'extracts from his daughter at the end of the play the same price he demanded in the opening scene – that she love her father all'; 'The Father and the Bride in Shakespeare', *PMLA*, 97:3 (May 1982), 325-47 (p. 335). According to Kathleen McLuskie, 'Cordelia's saving love, so much admired by critics, works in the action less as a redemption for womankind than as an example of patriarchy restored'; 'The Patriarchal Bard: Feminist Criticism and Shakespeare: *King Lear* and *Measure for Measure*', in Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (eds), *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), pp. 88-108 (p. 99).

– but, as an appropriation, Shakespeare's *King Lear* takes Goneril and Regan's side more than its predecessor. Appropriations of Shakespeare often start with an implicit 'What if?', and it is not difficult to see *King Lear* as having its roots in 'What if?' questions to *Leir*: what if Gonorill and Ragan were also victims of the love test, and not only Cordella? What if the love test had been Leir's idea? What if Leir had not realised that he cannot expect unconditional love from his children? What if we did not know whether Cordella wanted to marry the King of Gallia?[11] What if Gonorill and Ragan's treatment of Leir could in fact be seen as perfectly reasonable under the circumstances? What if Leir had not understood what he had done wrong? What if it were Leir who started all the misery? Shakespeare's play can be seen as an exploration of all these hypotheses; the result is, unlike *Leir*, a tragedy where no character is entirely good or entirely bad, and a much more ambiguous text, which is more remarkable for raising new questions than for answering old ones.

Perhaps the most striking difference between *Leir* and *Lear* is that the anonymous play has a happy ending: Cordella marries the King of Gallia for love, father and daughter are reunited and reconciled, and they both survive. Shakespeare, on the other hand, kills both Lear and Cordelia, when either's demise would have been sufficient to give the play a tragic structure. Indeed, many spectators/readers over the years have felt, with Samuel Johnson, that this ending is too horrible to bear. It is noteworthy that Johnson would have encountered Shakespeare's play only as a published text – the version he would have seen performed is Nahum Tate's appropriation from 1681, which held the stage for 150 years.[12]

In Tate's version, as in the anonymous *Leir*, the ending is happy: Cordelia, Lear and Gloster ('Gloucester') all survive, and Cordelia and Edgar are to be married. Here, Cordelia's reason for wanting to reserve some of her love for her future husband, and consequently for failing the love test, is unambiguously that she is in love with Edgar. The inclusion of a romantic love story for Cordelia and the emphasis on Cordelia's wish to marry a

11 As Claudette Hoover points out, 'Cordelia's silence in response to France's offer of marriage and to his lyrical expression of joy at having won her, [*sic*] is striking'; '"The Lusty Stealth of Nature": Sexuality and Antifeminism in *King Lear*', *Atlantis*, 11:1 (Autumn 1985), 87-97 (p. 96). In Trevor Nunn's 2007 RSC production, Romola Garai's Cordelia obviously wanted to marry Burgundy and was disappointed when she ended up with France.

12 Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier, 'Introduction' to Nahum Tate, 'The History of King Lear', in *Adaptations of Shakespeare: A Critical Anthology of Plays from the Seventeenth Century to the Present*, ed. Fischlin and Fortier (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 66.

man of her own choice constitute another similarity between Tate's version and *Leir*. Though Tate's *Lear* was very popular with audiences in its day, the cheery ending has often been criticised and ridiculed during the last century – but in fact Shakespeare's play was unique among the Lear stories extant at Tate's time of writing in killing Lear and Cordelia. Consequently, it is Shakespeare and not Tate who is the more radical appropriator.

After Tate's appropriation of *King Lear*, there have been many others. The preoccupation with the missing mother has been around at least since the beginning of the twentieth century, when Gordon Bottomley wrote a one-act verse drama called *King Lear's Wife* (1913). Like the appropriations studied in this chapter, Bottomley's play is a prequel that tries to find a cause for the characters' actions and reactions in *King Lear*. The play takes place in the bedroom of Lear's queen, Hygd, during her final illness. Lear barely conceals from her his adulterous affair with one of her waiting-women, Gormflaith, whom Goneril subsequently stabs to death out of loyalty to her mother. Hygd has given in to Lear's insistence to try to beget a son in a vain attempt to stop him from being unfaithful to her, and she hates the result, Cordeil ('Cordelia'):

> HYGD Go, go, thou evil child, thou ill-comer.
> [---]
> Because a woman gives herself for ever
> Cordeil the useless had to be conceived
> (Like an afterthought that deceives nobody)
> To keep her father from another woman.
> And I lie here.[13]

The focus of *King Lear's Wife* rests squarely on giving an answer to those questions left open by *King Lear*. The play was generally very well received when it was performed in 1915-16, but soon fell into relative oblivion after that.[14]

Edward Bond's *Lear*, first produced in 1971, has become one of the most famous modern Shakespeare appropriations written for the stage. Yet, apart from the name of the main character and a few other circumstances

13 Gordon Bottomley, *King Lear's Wife; The Crier by Night; The Riding to Lithend; Midsummer-Eve; Loadice and Danaë*, Project Gutenberg <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/37446/37446-h/37446-h.htm> (2011) [accessed 8 November 2016].

14 See Lynne Bradley, *Adapting* King Lear *for the Stage* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 99-100; Richard Foulkes, '"How Fine a Play was Mrs. Lear": The Case for Gordon Bottomley's *King Lear's Wife*', *Shakespeare Survey* 55 (2002), 128-38 (pp. 129-30).

– his being the ruler of a country and the father of daughters, one character's name being Cordelia, and the torturing and blinding of one elderly male character, in this case Lear himself – Bond's play has little or nothing in common with Shakespeare's in terms of plot. True, both plays are about good and evil and, specifically, about how not to govern. But there the similarity ends. Bond's *Lear* has often been called 'a *Lear* for our time', and his play constitutes an alternative vision of Shakespeare's story rather than an addition to it. Far less domestic and far more political than Shakespeare's tragedy, Bond's three-act play is a deeply socialist work about the horrors of war. Critics have often recoiled from the extremity of the violence portrayed in Bond's writing. But the violence of Bond's plays is far from gratuitous. His depicting of violence is an integral aspect of his ideological stance, as he explains in his preface to *Lear*:

> I write about violence as naturally as Jane Austen wrote about manners. Violence shapes and obsesses our society, and if we do not stop being violent we have no future. People who do not want writers to write about violence want to stop them writing about us and our time. It would be immoral not to write about violence.[15]

Shakespeare, on the other hand, revels in onstage violence less than some of his contemporaries; and though the blinding of Gloucester constitutes one of the most gruesome scenes in the whole canon, it has been pointed out that the abundance of violence in Bond's *Lear* can perhaps be matched by *Titus Andronicus* rather than by *King Lear*. According to Lynne Bradley, Bond's *Lear* negates Shakespeare's play, while Bottomley's *King Lear's Wife* affirms it:

> [T]he imagined or remembered narrative is at odds with the real, adapted one. In Bond's *Lear*, this dissonance is reinforced by language, themes and imagery that are harshly antithetical to Shakespeare. Here, the adaptor evokes Shakespeare only to reject him in a complex double gesture that is more destructive than constructive, more renunciative than nostalgic.[16]

King Lear's Wife, on the other hand, is, according to Bradley, 'intended to enhance Shakespeare's narrative, to validate his work and to reinforce his status'.[17]

15 Edward Bond, 'Author's Preface', in *Lear* (London: Methuen, 1991), p. lvii.
16 Bradley, *Adapting* King Lear *for the Stage*, p. 106.
17 Ibid.

Peter Brook's RSC production from 1962 and the subsequent film version from 1971 were innovative enough in terms of style and textual changes to constitute appropriations, and they have exercised a palpable influence on creative re-imaginings of Shakespeare throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. In later years, several novels have been based on *King Lear*, notably Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* (1991), a modernised American re-vision told from the perspective of the Goneril character.[18] There are many connections between *A Thousand Acres* and *Lear's Daughters*, and they were written only a few years apart. *Lear's Daughters* and *Seven Lears* also have a good deal in common, both being British stage plays written and performed within the last three years of the 1980s. Although their similarities do not involve ideological perspective or literary style, these two plays have both become core texts within the field of theatrical appropriations of Shakespeare.

'He always loved our sister most': Goneril, Regan, Cordelia and Their Father

The view that Lear is at least partly to blame for the outcome of Shakespeare's *Lear* story is certainly not a new one and is arguably invited by the play itself. From a Renaissance perspective, it is Cordelia and not Lear who behaves correctly in I.1, and Cordelia was long celebrated as the ultimately good heroine. Over time, however, a sentimentalised image of the foolish king developed; and in recent years, certain critics have blamed Cordelia for not humouring her old father by playing along in the love test and for valuing her strict principles more highly than his feelings. Marvin Rosenberg, for example, calls Cordelia's reply 'cold-blooded' and claims that '[n]o amount of explanation can make anything kind, charitable, or loving of an answer, to the offer of love, of *Nothing*'.[19] (The obvious objection here is that Lear does not offer love; he demands it. Only after he has rejected Cordelia's answer does he say that he 'loved her most'.[20]) When *Lear's Daughters* presents its take on Lear as the culprit in the story as a revolt against prevalent ideas, it is therefore not merely a case of battering

18 Jane Smiley, *A Thousand Acres* (New York: Anchor Books, 2003 [1991]).

19 Marvin Rosenberg, *The Masks of* King Lear (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1972), p. 58 [emphasis original].

20 *King Lear*, ed. R. A. Foakes (London: Methuen Drama, 1997), I.1.124. Subsequent references will be to this edition (unless otherwise stated) and given parenthetically in the text.

at an open door, but of responding to an attitude that had gained ground over the past couple of centuries.

Furthermore, a distinction must be made between blaming Lear or Cordelia on the one hand and blaming Lear or Goneril and Regan on the other. The two elder sisters have conventionally been interpreted as the villains of the play and condemned for their hypocritical declarations of love and their disrespect for their father once he has surrendered his power to them. This tendency is especially marked in the theatre. But feminists have argued that Goneril and Regan respond in a reasonable way both to the love test and to Lear's subsequent behaviour, and it is in the context of this feminist discourse that the Women's Theatre Group's re-vision must be understood.[21] Cordelia's status as Lear's favourite daughter is of course relevant for interpreting not only the relationship between Lear and Cordelia, but also the actions of the two less appreciated daughters.

Brook's production in 1962 constituted a paradigmatic shift in the perception of Lear in the theatre. According to Kenneth Tynan, Brook directed the play 'from a standpoint of moral neutrality', with the 'revolutionary' result that '[i]nstead of assuming that Lear is right, and therefore pitiable, we are forced to make judgments – to decide between his claims and those of his kin'.[22] This is indicative of the extent to which it was the practice in the mid-twentieth century for productions to align themselves with Lear and his statement that he is 'a man more sinned against than sinning' (III.2.60), specifically 'sinned against' by his daughters – who for once were not, Tynan states, 'fiends' in Brook's production. Brook himself comments on the tradition of condemning Goneril and Regan as stock villains from the start of the play:

> How often have Goneril and Regan been reduced to comic-strip caricatures, as two slinking, evil sisters? Are we sure that they are not proud of their father on this great day? When called upon to declare in public their devotion, is it all scheming hypocrisy? Is there not a reflection on what every loyal courtier constantly tries to

21 According to Ann Thompson, there is a tendency among critics to whom she refers as 'cult-historicists' to pay little or no attention to the female characters in *King Lear*, a neglect against which feminist critics have reacted; 'Are There Any Women in *King Lear*?', in *The Matter of Difference: Materialist Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. Valerie Wayne (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp. 117-28.

22 Kenneth Tynan, 'The Triumph of Stratford's Lear', *The Observer* 11 November 1962, republished in *The Guardian* 24 January 2014 <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/jan/24/kenneth-tynan-paul-scofield-peter-brook-king-lear> [accessed 27 January 2017].

> express in well-educated elegant terms? When Prime Ministers go to visit the Queen, do they not leave their homes with prepared words of homage which, at the moment, are sincerely meant?[23]

Carol Rutter calls Brook's version a 'landmark production' that 'discovered daughters who were not Ugly Sisters but abused children'.[24] She sees Irene Worth's performance as Goneril in particular as ground-breaking: 'Worth laid claim to Goneril's play by claiming authority for Goneril's lines equal to Lear's for his. "[Y]our insolent retinue / Do hourly carp and quarrel" (199-200) weighed the same as "Detested kite, thou liest" (260)'.[25] According to Brook, Worth 'made Goneril unforgettable by entering deeply into her from Goneril's own point of view'[26] – a matter of course for an actor, it might be supposed, but apparently not in this role. Rutter points out that Goneril and Regan are sometimes condemned even by actors playing them.[27] Brook continues to explain how Worth portrayed Goneril in a way that made her plight possible to relate to for a modern audience:

> She showed a Goneril misunderstood and maltreated who always knew she was in the right. She made us sympathise with a daughter who has invited her father to stay and discovers the price she and her household have to pay. She sees a rabble of drunken knights ruining her home and humiliating the servants. Every daughter in the audience who has had a difficult father for a long stay will understand this at once.[28]

Reviewers of subsequent productions have been known to trace any tendencies to present Goneril and Regan sympathetically back to Brook's production. In response to David Hare's 1986 production at the National Theatre, Victoria Radin sarcastically states that '[f]ollowing the Brook production of 1962, Hare seems to posit the notion that Lear was a pretty terrible guy anyway', while 'Goneril and Regan are nice girls to begin with who quite rightly, apparently, feel put upon by their father's insistence on the trappings of grandeur after he has acceded his reign'.[29] Michael Billing-

23 Peter Brook, *The Quality of Mercy: Reflections on Shakespeare* (London: Nick Hern, 2013), p. 53.
24 Carol Rutter, 'Eel Pie and Ugly Sisters in *King Lear* (Part One)', *Essays in Theatre / Études Théâtrales*, 13:2 (May 1995), 135-58 (p. 137).
25 Ibid., 148.
26 Brook, *The Quality of Mercy*, p. 58.
27 Rutter, 'Eel Pie and Ugly Sisters' 1, 137.
28 Brook, *The Quality of Mercy*, p. 58.
29 Victoria Radin, *The New Statesman* 19 December 1986, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 1986, p. 1373.

ton, in a review of the same production, claims that '[y]ou can certainly see the influence of Peter Brook's legendary 1962 version in Mr Hare's determination to suspend moral judgment and not, for instance, to present Goneril and Regan from the outset as a pair of overt villains'.[30] Rutter argues, however, that some late twentieth-century productions went back to sentimentalising Lear and villainising Goneril and Regan.[31]

On other occasions, a production's invitation not to judge the daughters has been perceived as a failure rather than a conscious take on the play. Jack Tinker thinks that 'perhaps the only thing' that is certain about Jonathan Miller's 1989 production at the Old Vic is that Lear must have been 'a rotten father', and adds that '[i]t is, perhaps, a measure of the production's slack hold on the narrative and our emotion that we have time to pause and ponder such background psychologies'.[32] For Tinker, speculating about the nature and quality of Lear's parenting is a mere waste of time or a distraction from the real story. But *King Lear* is nothing if not a story about fathers and daughters. In addition to the actresses' need to consider the backstories of the characters they play, especially in a play that begins with actions whose motivation is not made explicitly clear in the text, the relationships between Lear and his daughters are undeniably central to the plot.

In connection with several productions from the last few decades, reviewers comment that Goneril and Regan's evil is developed unusually slowly. It appears that it has in fact become usual either for productions to defer the sisters' wickedness until they have been given some incentive for it within the play or for critics to perceive their wickedness in this way. However, these critics seem not to be aware of that tendency, as they refer to each instance of it as a departure from the norm. Another common practice is to depict one of the sisters as neurotic and the other as sensual, one of them speaking and acting with more confidence than the other. It varies, however, which character is endowed with which characteristic. According to Rutter, Sally Dexter's Regan in Nicholas Hytner's 1990 RSC production was 'vulnerable, hunched, and mentally brittle' and 'had, it seemed, perfected the middle child's tactic of keeping her head down': 'She was clearly a pawn

30 Michael Billington, *The Guardian* 13 December 1986, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 1986, p. 1379.

31 Rutter, 'Eel Pie and Ugly Sisters' 1, 152.

32 Jack Tinker, *The Daily Mail* 29 March 1989, in *Theatre Record* Jan-June 1989, pp. 381-82 (p. 381). Maureen Paton said of the same production that Lear is such a 'pig of a man' that '[i]t is a measure of Eric Porter's magnificent performance as the demented old bully […] that he manages to gain our sympathy very early on'; *The Daily Express* 30 March, in *Theatre Record* Jan-June 1989, p. 381.

between her father and her equally formidable elder sister', who was 'smart, sharp, curt'.[33] In Adrian Noble's 1993 RSC production, by contrast, Jenny Quayle's Regan seemed to be the leader of the two, exuding more confidence and awareness of being attractive than her more vulnerable and obviously jealous elder sister, played by Janet Dale. In Richard Eyre's 1997 production at the National, Amanda Redman's Regan tried to cajole Lear into seeing sense, while Barbara Flynn's Goneril and Ann-Marie Duff's Cordelia were too angry to be diplomatic. In Trevor Nunn's 2007 RSC production, by contrast, Monica Dolan's hard-drinking Regan seemed very nervous as soon as Lear was on stage – a less marked version of Judi Dench's stammering Regan in Nunn's 1976 production. In the 2007 production, Frances Barber's Goneril seemed more self-assured and was the one who tried to be diplomatic and coaxing when dealing with Lear and Cordelia. According to Billington, 'Gina McKee's calculating Goneril [was] excellently contrasted with Justine Mitchell's manic Regan' in Michael Grandage's 2010 production at the Donmar Warehouse. Sam Mendes's 2014 production at the National Theatre showed an uptight Goneril and a flirty Regan; and in Deborah Warner's 2016 production at the Old Vic, Billington remarks that 'Celia Imrie's grimly determined Goneril and Jane Horrocks's sexually excitable Regan are sharply distinguished'.[34] It has become an especially prominent performance trope that Regan is sexually aroused by the eye-gouging. This, too, is sometimes mentioned in reviews as an innovative take, whether it is striking in the actual production or not.

Another prevalent but somewhat less frequently commented-on practice is to have Goneril cry when Lear curses her, either standing with her back to him during his speech or bursting into tears after his exit. Barber's Goneril struggled with her tears during the speech, and when Lear had left she broke down crying and had to be comforted by a female servant. Dale's Goneril let out a scream after Lear had gone, and Flynn's, McKee's and Fleetwood's Gonerils all cried during or after the speech. It seems unusual for Gonerils to stand indifferent in the face of Lear's curse. Nunn's 2007 production offered yet another glimpse of a Goneril who is not merely ruthless and callous: at the end of I.1, she seemed to be genuinely con-

33 Carol Rutter, 'Eel Pie and Ugly Sisters in *King Lear* (Part Two)', *Essays in Theatre / Études Théâtrales*, 14:1 (November 1995), 49-62 (p. 52).

34 Michael Billington, 'King Lear Review – Glenda Jackson Makes a Triumphant Return to the Stage', *The Guardian* 5 November 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/nov/05/king-lear-review-glenda-jackson-old-vic> [accessed 31 January 2017].

cerned for the welfare of Cordelia, and rather than sternly admonishing her, Goneril spoke to her gently, hugged her and did her best to mediate between her two troublesome family members. Despite these apparently humanising traits in the production's Goneril, several reviews compared her to Cruella de Vil. One critic wondered if Barber and Dolan did not 'overdo the malevolence', and another called Goneril 'luridly wicked and pantomimic'.[35]

Rosenberg argues that it makes a difference in performance how young Goneril and Regan are, among other things for Goneril's possibilities to bear a child.[36] That she has no children so far may suggest that she is young, especially as Lear seems to consider the prospect of future grandchildren likely, or at least possible, when he refers to 'thine and Albany's issues' (I.1.66) and when he later asks Nature to 'Suspend thy purpose if thou didst intend / To make this creature fruitful' (I.4.268-69). If she is old enough for it to be unlikely that she will have children, on the other hand, that could be interpreted as involuntary childlessness, which would aggravate Lear's curse.[37] Rutter points out that in Brook's 1971 film, Irene Worth's Goneril starts at Lear's hesitating reference to her 'issues' and that the same word, spoken with sarcasm by John Wood's Lear, made Estelle Kohler's Goneril stop smiling in Hytner's production.[38] Rosenberg suggests a different staging: Goneril 'may be obviously pregnant at the outset. Whatever her age, this would certainly add a special tension to her relations with Lear, Albany, and Edmund […] and compound her suicide with infanticide'.[39] This interpretation was implemented in Rupert Goold's 2008-09 production at the Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse Theatres and at the Young Vic, where Caroline Faber played Goneril as heavily pregnant. This choice makes a significant difference for Lear's curse, since there is an actual child which he prays will either die or be 'a thwart disnatured torment to her' (I.4.275).

35 Quentin Letts, *The Daily Mail* 1 June 2007, in *Theatre Record* Jan-June 2007, p. 641; Nicholas de Jongh, *The Evening Standard* 1 June 2007, in *Theatre Record* Jan-June 2007, p. 642.

36 Rosenberg, *The Masks of* King Lear, p. 46.

37 This is the case in Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*, where chemicals used in Larry's ('Lear's') farming have caused Ginny ('Goneril') to miscarry every time she has been pregnant. In this way, the father's 'curse' of his daughter's fertility is effectual. In *King Lear*, Lear apparently believes in the powers he invokes, and his speech is therefore not merely rhetorical but an actual attempt to affect his daughter's life adversely through prayer.

38 Rutter, 'Eel Pie and Ugly Sisters' 1, 154.

39 Rosenberg, *The Masks of* King Lear, p. 47.

A suggestion made by *Lear's Daughters* is that one possible reason for Cordelia's disinclination to tell her father that she loves him more than anything could be that she has been sexually abused by Lear, which would make her attitude understandable. The idea of an incestuous relationship between Lear and Cordelia can also be found in criticism on *King Lear*, as well as in performances of the play. The imagined relationship is thought to be consensual by some, while others perceive it as abuse. Evidence suggested for this has included Lear's objection to Cordelia's wanting to love her husband as much as she loves her father, his acceptance of being imprisoned for life as long as he is with Cordelia, his sexual language when speaking to Goneril, as well as certain phrases, including 'darker purpose' (I.1.35) and 'thou similar of virtue / That art incestuous' (III.2.55). As early as 1935, James Bransom suggested that an 'incestuous passion' was at the bottom of Lear's behaviour in the love test, and Sigmund Freud supported this interpretation.[40] Dennis M. Welch argues that Lear is in love with Cordelia and deliberately devises the love test so that she will fail it and he can refuse her a dowry and keep her to himself.[41] In 'The Absent Mother in *King Lear*', Coppélia Kahn similarly deduces from Lear's 'manipul[a-

40 Dennis M. Welch, '*Christabel*, *King Lear* and the Cinderella Folktale', *Papers on Language and Literature* 32 (1996), 291-314 (p. 294). Hoover, on the other hand, argues that '[o]ne need not resort to Freudian cries of "incest" to explain Lear's disillusionment [with his daughters, caused by their lack of feminine behaviour]. In his plans to abdicate he had relied on the humane characteristics of self-sacrifice and gentleness which the patriarchy had long demanded of women'; '"The Lusty Stealth of Nature"', 88. Still, interpretations of Lear's love for Cordelia as incestuous have gained ground. In a reading of *King Lear* in the context of the incest prohibition, Shellee Hendricks argues that Lear hinders Cordelia's marriage, sees her as a wife and mother, feels sexually rejected by Goneril and Regan, and is united with Cordelia in a marriage-like union in death; '"The Curiosity of Nations": King Lear and the Incest Prohibition' (doctoral dissertation), McGill University, Montreal, 1999. Marinella Rodi-Risberg discusses incest and trauma in *A Thousand Acres* in relation to *King Lear*, the fairy-tales behind *King Lear* and other contemporary re-writings by female authors in 'Writing Trauma, Writing Time and Space: Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* and the Lear Group of Father-Daughter Incest Narratives' (doctoral dissertation), University of Vaasa, 2010.

41 Welch, 295. In Welch's reading, everything goes according to Lear's plan until France offers to marry Cordelia. This is nonsensical, however, since Lear tells Cordelia to go '[h]ence and avoid my sight' (I.1.124), effectively throwing her out, even before he knows that France is prepared to marry her dowerless. As A. C. Bradley points out, it was Lear's initial plan to live with Cordelia: he 'thought to set his rest / On her kind nursery' (123-24). When, in his eyes, she rejects him, he invents the new plan of dividing his time between Goneril's and Regan's houses. Bradley's claim that Lear 'meant to live with Cordelia, and with her alone' has sometimes been interpreted as supporting the idea that he wanted to keep her unmarried; but Bradley clearly means 'with Cordelia alone' as opposed to 'sometimes with Cordelia and sometimes with her sisters'. It must be supposed that Lear and Cordelia would both have resided with her husband. *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on* Hamlet, Othello, King Lear *and* Macbeth, 2nd ed. (London & New York: Macmillan, 1905), p. 250.

tion]' of the love test that 'the emotional crisis precipitating the tragic action is Lear's frustrated incestuous desire for his daughter'; Kahn, however, argues that Lear's desire is replaced by his 'deeper emotional need' for a mother and that he casts Cordelia in this role as well.[42]

In performance, as in criticism, incest between Lear and one or more of his daughters has been a recurring feature in later years. When Michael Attenborough's 2012 production at the Almeida Theatre was in rehearsal, Jonathan Pryce, who played Lear, kissed Zoe Waites, who played Goneril, during a run-through. The backstory Pryce had invented was that Lear had sexually abused Goneril and Regan, but not Cordelia, who was unaware of what had happened to her elder sisters. This interpretation had not been discussed in rehearsal and the rest of the cast were genuinely shocked, but the director decided to go with Pryce's idea.[43] In Mendes's production, Anna Maxwell Martin's Regan sat on Simon Russell Beale's Lear's lap and kissed him during the love test, and he slapped her bottom as she walked off. There was no sense of abuse, however. Maxwell Martin explains in an interview that she sees Regan as a sensual character who wants to please men and who uses her sexuality to get what she wants, even from her father.[44] This ties in rather well with the Regan character in *Lear's Daughters*, who is the tactile one (her hobby of choice is woodcarving as opposed to the visual Goneril's painting and the verbal Cordelia's reading) – the teenager who manages to become pregnant during her search for herself, even

42 Coppélia Kahn, 'The Absent Mother in *King Lear*', in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Margaret W. Fergusson, Maureen Quilligan and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 33-49 (pp. 39-40). Janet Adelman, too, argues that Lear sees his daughters as his mothers. Both Kahn and Adelman note that there are no 'literal' mothers in *King Lear*, which seems significant as it is a change from *King Leir*, which begins with Leir giving a speech about the recent death of his wife; *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays,* Hamlet *to* The Tempest (New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, 1992), p. 104; Kahn, p. 35.

43 Digital Theatre <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cjUBQCcE710> [accessed 7 November 2016].

44 National Theatre Discover <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IV7KFy8I39w> [accessed 7 November 2016].

while locked up in the castle.[45] In Noble's production, Robert Stephens' Lear kissed Goneril on the cheek and Regan lingeringly on, or very near, the mouth. In Nunn's production, on the other hand, Lear kissed Goneril briefly on the lips and then did the same with Regan but wiped his mouth with a handkerchief afterwards, a gesture that stressed his rejection of his middle-daughter, who, like Regan in *Lear's Daughters*, was not even his second favourite.[46]

45 Another performance aspect of *King Lear* that can be connected to *Lear's Daughters* is the fool's gender. Shakespeare's fool was cut in Tate's version; when he reappeared in 1838, he was played by a 19-year-old woman. In two twentieth-century theatrical appropriations, Robin Maugham's *Mister Lear: A Comedy in Three Acts* (London: English Theatre Guild, 1963 [1956]) and Ronald Harwood's *The Dresser* (Charlbury, Oxon: Amber Lane Press, 2005 [1980]), the (male) character equivalent to the fool is described as 'effeminate'. In Akira Kurosawa's film adaptation *Ran* (1985), the fool is played by the Japanese actor and entertainer 'Peter', who is famous for his androgynous appearance. In *Lear's Daughters*, the fool, originally played by a woman in a costume designed to look androgynous, claims not to care what gender it is (scene 4, p. 221). In 1990, two out of three major British productions of *King Lear* had a female fool: Linda Kerr Scott in Nicholas Hytner's RSC production, and Emma Thompson in Kenneth Branagh's Renaissance Theatre production. Later, the fool has been played by, among other women, Kathryn Hunter (who has incidentally also played Lear). One reason for casting a woman as the fool is the possibility of doubling the fool and Cordelia. The two characters are never on stage at the same time, and both parts are fairly small in terms of text amount and stage time. It has often been suggested that the fool and Cordelia were played by the same boy actor in Shakespeare's company; but there is also evidence indicating that the part of the fool was perhaps written for Robert Armin (see, for example, R. A. Foakes, 'Introduction', in *King Lear* [London: Methuen, 1997], pp. 1-151 [pp. 50-51]). In modern productions, however, Cordelia and the fool have sometimes been played by the same actress, for example in the Globe's touring production in 2013, where both parts were played by Bethan Cullinane (see the Globe Discovery space <http://www.shakespearesglobe.com/discovery-space/adopt-an-actor/archive/cordelia-lear-s-fool-played-by-bethan-cullinane> [accessed 9 January 2017]). The main argument for Shakespeare's alleged intention of doubling Cordelia and the fool is the fool's absence from the first few scenes of the play and his conspicuous disappearance after III.6 – giving the actor a reasonable time gap for a costume change before reappearing as Cordelia in IV.7. Lear's phrase 'my poor fool is hanged' (V.3.304), though it of course refers to Cordelia, creates a further connection between the two characters. In fact, productions have sometimes interpreted the line as referring to Lear's fool and even included a scene where the fool is hanged. According to Foakes, 'fool' is in this context 'a term of endearment referring to Cordelia […] but also recalling Lear's other favourite, the Fool […]. The double reference, making us suppose the Fool dead too, gives a special poignancy to these six short words'; p. 390, n. 304. Even when the two parts are played by two different actors, these characters are sometimes connected in some way, as in Adrian Noble's 1982 RSC production, which showed Alice Krige's Cordelia and Antony Sher's fool sitting together on a throne with one noose around both their necks. If the parts were indeed played by the same actors, a line like 'Since my young lady's going into France, sir, / the fool hath much pined away' (I.4.71-72) could be read as a gag. But there is also a more serious connection between the two characters, as they are the only two people who are honest with Lear.

46 Confusingly, the promptbook that was used at the Courtyard and on tour says that Lear 'hug[s] [Regan] first + kiss[es her] on [the] cheek', and does not specify how he thanks Goneril. The stage business described above is clear on the archived recording and has been retained in the film version of the production.

Whether Lear's relationship with any of his daughters is regarded as sexual or not, and whether or not his treatment of them is seen as amounting to abuse, it is surely not an exaggeration to claim that what Lear does to his daughters is worse than what they do to him. Goneril and Regan have often been seen as the ultimate evil women – Marilyn French notes that '[i]n the rhetoric of the play, no male is condemned as Goneril is condemned'.[47] Goneril and Regan do unquestionably commit some atrocious acts; but the audience's opinion of them is also shaped by their father's account of their characters, and the atrocities are preceded by Lear's exaggerated response to the perfectly reasonable action of exercising the power he himself has granted them.

In *Shakespeare and the Shrew: Performing the Defiant Female Voice*, Anna Kamaralli makes two lists, one of 'Lear's crimes against Goneril' and one of 'Goneril's crimes against her father (as distinct from those against her husband, sister or Gloucester)'. According to Kamaralli, Goneril's crimes against Lear are constituted by 'instructing her servants to be careless in their attendance on him', 'telling Lear that the behaviour of his men is unacceptable, that she is disappointed that he is encouraging them instead of curbing them, and that his own behaviour is making it impossible for her to run an orderly household', 'refusing to continue to house his retinue of a hundred men', and 'choosing not to go after him when he leaves Gloucester's home'.[48] 'Anything else she is reported as doing', Kamaralli states, 'is sheer misreading on the part of the critic, or embellishment on the part of the director'. This enumeration deals only with Goneril; it should be noted that Regan is additionally guilty of putting Lear's servant in the stocks and of advising Gloucester to 'shut up [his] doors' during the storm (II.2.494). The latter does not actually make any difference, however, since Lear does not in fact attempt to return. Kamaralli points out that critics 'speak routinely of Goneril and Regan in II.2 expelling Lear from the castle', and give as an example David Mann's statement that '[t]he

47 Marilyn French, *Shakespeare's Division of Experience* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), p. 233. French goes on to say that '[w]omen's misdeeds, regardless of the dimension in which they occur, are always interpreted as *fiendish* (superhumanly evil), as participating in the worst ugliness and terrors of nature, and as sexual – sexuality being seen as loathsome, disgusting'; p. 235.

48 Anna Kamaralli, *Shakespeare and the Shrew: Performing the Defiant Female Voice* (Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 130.

wicked daughters in *King Lear* cast out their father and drive him mad',[49] when in Shakespeare's text Lear in fact 'storm[s] out of his own volition'.[50] Goneril and Regan can hardly be blamed for the storm, and it is arguably an understandable decision not to go after an adult who has insulted them profusely, who will obviously not be reasoned with, and who has just taken himself off in a rage. And not being followed when going for a walk in bad weather after not being allowed to keep a retinue of a hundred men has surely never driven anyone mad.

The crimes against Goneril with which Kamaralli charges Lear are 'making a public statement that he loved Cordelia more than her', 'treating her like a servant', 'hitting and swearing at her servants', 'encouraging those under his control to be disrespectful to her household', and 'several sustained abusive tirades that include, but are not limited to, calling her a "degenerate bastard", a "detested kite", a disease, a boil, a plague-sore, with a face like a wolf, and expressing the hope that her womb will shrivel up, and that her life will be miserable'.[51] It is sometimes suggested that Goneril exaggerates the debauchery of the hundred knights; this is a question left open by the text, and it is up to the director to decide whether to show Lear's entourage on stage or not (not a solely artistic decision, as a large number of walk-ons is both resource- and space-consuming). If the knights do not appear on stage, as Kamaralli points out, the audience has to decide for themselves whether Goneril is speaking the truth. When they are shown, they are sometimes represented as a drunken rowdy lot and sometimes as a quiet, well-behaved group of people.[52] However, as Kate Fleetwood, who played Goneril in Mendes's production, points out, suddenly having a hundred people in your house, whatever their behaviour, would be inconvenient.[53]

It can of course be argued that Lear is not himself when he does and says these things: in recent years, his madness has often been read as demen-

49 David Mann, *Shakespeare's Women: Performance and Conception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 154. Mann further refers to Goneril and Regan as 'She-wolves', by which he means female characters who 'lack normal affections', are 'aggressive adulteresses' and commit 'acts of physical aggression', such as 'kill[ing] children', pp. 154-55. The other 'she-wolves' he mentions are Tamora and Queen Margaret.

50 Kamaralli, p. 130.

51 Ibid., pp. 129-30.

52 Ibid., p. 132.

53 National Theatre Discover <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IV7KFy8I39w> [accessed 7 November 2016].

tia.[54] Regan calls it 'the infirmity of his age', and Goneril says that 'his age' is 'full of changes' – but they also say that 'he hath ever but slenderly known himself' and that '[t]he best and soundest of his time hath been but rash' (I.1.290-97). Personal characteristics and flaws becoming more pronounced is a well-known effect of dementia, and this seems to be what Goneril and Regan are describing. However, that does not mean that Goneril and Regan should be read as not being hurt by what their father says or not finding his behaviour intolerable. In Mendes's production, Russell Beale based his performance as the 'mad' Lear on an article he had read analysing Lear's madness as Lewy body dementia. The geriatrician Debbie Finch, who helped Russell Beale research the disease for his performance, describes Lewy body dementia as 'characterised by visual hallucinations, fluctuating confusion […], and movement problems', as well as a loss of inhibition which may lead to, for example, 'taking clothes off in an inappropriate place' or making uncharacteristic 'sexual comments'.[55] These symptoms do fit Lear's behaviour peculiarly well. Russell Beale concludes that 'Shakespeare, being the observer that he was, must have seen somebody, must have known somebody, who suffered from what we would now call dementia'.[56] If Lear is read as suffering from dementia, even the evil for which he is not to blame comes from his own mind. Though Geoffrey Bullough claims that the king 'is nearer to dotage in *Leir* than in Shakespeare's play'[57] – a highly questionable statement – Gonorill and Ragan only briefly refer to him as senile and childish, and he never 'goes mad'. The madness is what makes Shakespeare's Lear a victim after all, but a

54 In the appendix to 'Shakespeare in Iceland', Jane Smiley explains how her perception of *King Lear* changed at a seminar on 'twentieth-century women's rewritings of Shakespeare plays' after she had given a talk on *A Thousand Acres*: 'an older English scholar whose name I do not know said, "I don't think you can understand *King Lear* until you have seen your parents go into decline. Shakespeare's father was in decline for a long time, possibly with Alzheimer's or something like it." At that very moment, I felt my interpretation […] shift. Whereas I had interpreted *King Lear* as a brief for the patriarchy, with the author identifying with Lear himself, and allowing him all sorts of leeway as a father in comparison to the daughters […], I now felt that perhaps in looking at his father's troubles and his responsibilities as a son, Shakespeare was identifying with the daughters [.] [---] My interpretation shifted from a political one to a psychological one that I felt was truer and more subtle, in the process answering the question of why Cordelia is an impossible character to play sympathetically – she is a projection of ideal virtue that even the author didn't understand'; in *Transforming Shakespeare: Contemporary Women's Re-Visions in Literature and Performance*, ed. Marianne Novy (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 159-79 (pp. 177-78).

55 Interval feature for the NT Live screening of *King Lear*, 2014. National Theatre Archive.

56 Ibid.

57 Bullough, vol VII, p. 324, n. 4.

victim primarily of an evil coming, medically, from within himself. It is interesting to note that while studies on incest in *King Lear* are by literary scholars, studies on dementia in *King Lear* tend to be by scientists who do medical research on dementia and who recognise the symptoms in Shakespeare's text.[58]

It can be argued that things only start to go really wrong in *King Lear* when the sisters turn against one another: Cordelia's refusal to play along in the love test – not only with her father but with her two sisters – leads to the disintegration of the family, and can, from a present-day feminist perspective, be seen as refusing to show solidarity with her sisters. It is Goneril and Regan's fight over Edmund that leads to the blinding of Gloucester – the ultimate horror – and to Goneril's murder of Regan. It is interesting that the two truly evil deeds they commit are a result of the inclusion of the subplot. They are not crimes against Lear or Cordelia, but against Gloucester and against each other; and they are both connected to Edmund and to the sisters' jealousy over him. The other supremely evil act – the execution of Cordelia – is Edmund's doing. In addition, Edmund is given the opportunity to repent and to define what has happened to Goneril and Regan, a privilege they do not share. But Edmund's evil is not entirely innate either: just as Lear openly favours Cordelia above his other daughters, Gloucester gives Edgar preferential treatment as his legitimate son and publicly calls Edmund a 'whoreson' (I.1.22). It is implied that Edmund's background and his father's treatment of him are at least partly responsible for his flawed character, in the same way that Lear's treatment of Goneril and Regan can account for their attitude and some of their actions.[59] On the surface, *Lear* may be a play about old parents being

58 See, for example, John Pearce, 'The Extrapyramidal Disorder of Alzheimer's Disease', in *European Neurology* 12:2 (1974), 94-103; Alexander M. Truskinovsky, 'Literary Psychiatric Observation and Diagnosis Through the Ages: *King Lear* Revisited', *Southern Medical Journal* 95:3 (March 2002), 343-52. One literary study that mentions dementia, albeit briefly, is Lesley Kordecki and Karla Koskinen's *Re-Visioning Lear's Daughters: Testing Feminist Criticism and Theory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). Kordecki and Koskinen connect Lear's dementia to his misogyny, which is according to them the primary reason behind the tragedy of the play: 'Why do we not find questionable Lear's intense hatred of strong women (first Cordelia, then Goneril and Regan), an animosity compounded by his manly support system of the Fool and Kent and a prominent aspect of his dementia? Critics have seen the character flaw inherent in his possibly incestuous demands on his daughters, his mistaking them for both wives and mothers. But until recently, they have regularly failed to recognize Lear's pointed misogyny, buttressed by Kent, Edgar, Albany, and more blithely, the Fool, as the tragic flaw of Lear and, perhaps, of the whole kingdom'; p. 9.

59 Goneril and Regan's backstories and possible reasons for their wicked deeds have received more attention than Edmund's, not least from appropriators. This may be indicative of a prevalence of the

treated cruelly by their children; but the play also contains a great deal of criticism against fathers.

'I cannot heave / My heart into my mouth': Lending a Voice to Silenced Women

First performed in 1987 by the feminist fringe-theatre company the Women's Theatre Group (now the Sphinx Theatre Company), *Lear's Daughters* is, in Lizbeth Goodman's words, 'a landmark in feminist "reinventing" of Shakespeare'.[60] The play, in line with the ideology of the WTG, questions the authority of author and director, the hierarchic structure of the theatre, and the concept of a literary canon. *Lear's Daughters* takes its starting-point in the view that Shakespeare's play sees Lear's daughters only in relation to him, as vehicles for his tragic end, and plays with questions such as 'What have the daughters got to be grateful for?' and 'How has their father treated *them*?' Goodman points out that '[e]ach sister symbolically insists upon her right to her own vision and version of the story', which reminds the audience that every story has more than one side to it and that the prevailing version is often a man's.[61] On a more practical level, *Lear's Daughters* offers more substantial and central parts for women than they are afforded in *King Lear*.

The original idea for a prequel to *King Lear* focusing on why the three daughters had turned out so differently was Elaine Feinstein's. She cannot remember if she approached the WTG or the other way around, or if this was before or after receiving the Arts Council grant which was to fund the writing and producing of the play.[62] This was Feinstein's first stageplay, and she was not particularly familiar with the theatre, especially the 'stylised' kind of theatre of the WTG. She joined the cast and the director, Gwenda

attitude that it is 'natural' for men simply to be evil, while unwanted behaviour in women must be psychologised and/or sexualised.

60 Lizbeth Goodman, 'Women's Alternative Shakespeares and Women's Alternatives to Shakespeare in Contemporary British Theatre', in *Cross-Cultural Performances: Differences in Women's Re-Visions of Shakespeare,* ed. Marianne Novy (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p. 220. On the Sphinx Theatre Company, see also Elaine Aston, *Feminist Views on the English Stage: Women Playwrights, 1990-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 14-17. On *Lear's Daughters*, see also Lesley Ferris, 'Lear's Daughters and Sons: Twisting the Canonical Landscape', in *Feminist Theatrical Revisions of Classic Works: Critical Essays*, ed. Sharon Friedman (Jefferson, North Carolina, & London: McFarland, 2009), pp. 97-112.

61 Goodman, 'Women's Alternative Shakespeares', p. 222.

62 Elaine Feinstein, personal interview, 25 April 2014.

Hughes, for a series of workshops.[63] According to Feinstein, there was not, as rumour has it, a first version of the play, written by her and rejected by the WTG. Her recollection is that she entered into the collaboration with a project proposal, she participated in all the workshops, and the play contains a few short pieces of text written by her, but she never got to write the play she had initially intended to write. The project evolved into something else in the hands of the WTG, and while Feinstein thinks that some of the finished play is good and original, she does not feel it is her work. In programmes and on posters, the play has sometimes been attributed to Feinstein and sometimes to the WTG; the copyright is held by 'The Women's Theatre Group and Elaine Feinstein'.[64] But Feinstein was for a time reluctant to accept royalties, as she did not feel she owned the final version of the play,[65] and the extent of her involvement in the writing of the play has been veiled in mystery. According to the administrator for the second tour of *Lear's Daughters*, Feinstein's original version of the play 'is not available as it was very much a work in progress and fed into the collaborative script',[66] and Goodman calls the play 'unattributable', or at least 'difficult to discuss in the context of any standard notion of "authorship"'.[67] This is partly connected to what Goodman refers to as the WTG's 'sense of solidarity, centred around the concept of the integrity of "collective authorship"':

> In the case of *Lear's Daughters*, company members were agreed that the script had been the result of a collective effort, and were hesitant to take individual credit (even when credit was due). Yet it seemed clear from the polished finish of the piece – both the written script and the production – that at some point someone must have shaped the individual contributions and devised images into the polished play.[68]

In a public discussion following a performance of *Lear's Daughters* in 1987, it transpired that that 'someone' to whom credit was due was Janys Chambers, who played the 'Nurse/Nanny'.[69]

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63 Cf Lizbeth Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each Her Own* (London & New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 97-100; Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier, 'Introduction' to *Lear's Daughters*, in *Adaptations of Shakespeare*, pp. 215-16.

64 Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres*, p. 98.

65 Elaine Feinstein, personal interview, 25 April 2014.

66 Quoted in Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres*, p. 98.

67 Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres*, p. 98. Incidentally, this is also true of much early modern drama.

68 Goodman, *Contemporary Feminist Theatres,* p. 97.

69 Ibid., pp. 98, 256 (n. 25).

Interviewed by Goodman, Chambers gives a description of the company's writing process: they first decided which characters they wanted to be in the play, then told one another memories from their own childhoods and wrote down these memories, and then 'pulled names out of a hat as to who should play what'. They then wrote down their own characters' childhood stories, based on titles given by the director, such as 'The night before the wedding' and 'The first time you went downstairs'. In these fictional stories, some of the experiences from the actors' real-life stories turned up again, which means that the story of *Lear's Daughters* is partly based on the actors' personal experiences. Certain elements in the play were suggested by the director, and some scenes in the play were in fact not collaboratively written or devised but written by Chambers on her own. Other scenes 'were heavily re-written […] to make them tie in to the scheme of the play'. Certain texts, however, were incorporated in the play exactly as they had been written by the actors, because 'some bits were just magically right'.[70]

In *Adapting* King Lear *for the Stage*, Bradley identifies four strategies which are often used in feminist appropriations: 'giving voice to silenced female characters, writing around the original story, challenging representations of gender identity and female sexuality, and using metanarrative qualities to thematize the woman writer'.[71] All these strategies can to some extent be found in *Lear's Daughters*. Bradley also argues that audiences get a new perspective on *King Lear* after watching *Lear's Daughters*, which makes them 're-see and re-evaluate Shakespeare'[72] and which may 'have a lasting effect on [their] perception of the original'.[73] The circumstance that female characters are given the opportunity to change an audience's perception of a classic is significant. Bradley speaks of the female characters in *Lear's Daughters* as being 'empowered' by controlling both 'the dialogue' as a whole and 'the audience's impression of Lear':

70 *Shakespeare: Text and Performance*, 19: *Lear's Daughters*, produced by Jenny Bardwell, with academic advisors Katherine Armstrong and Lizbeth Goodman (Milton Keynes: The Open University, 2000) [on CD].

71 Bradley, *Adapting* King Lear *for the Stage*, p. 186. Bradley includes 'metanarrative qualities' among the feminist strategies because feminist appropriations sometimes 'dramatize how story-telling contributes to the creation and understanding of the self, and of the self as a writer' and 'fore[ground] women reading, writing and rewriting, and the importance of entering into a story with our own critical perspective'; p. 216.

72 Ibid., p. 223.

73 Ibid., p. 224.

> With no direct exposure to Lear, the audience must base its opinion of him solely on the way he is described by the women in the play. Lear, and any understanding of Lear, is filtered through the female characters. The effect of this filtration is that audiences see his character in a new light; they see a Lear who does not accord with Shakespeare's representation.[74]

In addition to being exposed to a new, female perception of Lear, the audience may realise that Shakespeare's play has given them a male perception of Goneril, Regan and Cordelia. In *Lear's Daughters*, they hear versions of these women speaking the truth as they see it, directly to the audience, unfiltered. According to Fischlin and Fortier, *Lear's Daughters* 'asks us not to disregard the Shakespearean source text, nor even to judge it as flawed, inferior, or politically incorrect'. Instead, Fischlin and Fortier argue, it 'asks us to consider narrative alternatives that disrupt the sedimentation of convention gathered round its source'.[75]

An additional effect is that some of Goneril and Regan's guilt is transferred onto their father.[76] As pointed out in the preceding chapter, Marianne Novy states that feminist re-visions let female characters 'escape plots that doom them to an oppressive marriage or to death' and 'imagine stories for figures who are silent or demonized in Shakespeare's version'.[77] Feminist re-visions tend to shift sympathy from male to female characters and blame from female to male characters. *Lear's Daughters* invites sympathy for Goneril and Regan, and blames Lear for his daughters' downfall rather than the other way around. To adopt Novy's words, the re-vision silences and demonises Lear instead of his daughters.[78] It may also be said that all characters in *Lear's Daughters* to some extent represent structures in society rather than individual personalities: Lear represents patriarchy, his

74 Ibid., p. 225.

75 Fischlin and Fortier, 'Introduction' to 'Lear's Daughters', in *Adaptations of Shakespeare*, pp. 215-16 (p. 216).

76 See Anna Lindhé, *Appropriations of Shakespeare's* King Lear *in Three Modern North-American Novels* (Lund, Sweden: Lund Studies in English, 2012) on the redistribution of guilt in Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*.

77 Marianne Novy, 'Introduction', in *Transforming Shakespeare: Contemporary Women's Re-Visions in Literature and Performance*, ed. Marianne Novy (Basingstoke & London: Macmillan, 1999) pp. 1-12 (p. 1).

78 In *Lear's Daughters*, Annamária Fábián argues, 'the figure of Lear is hidden, his person avoided, and his authenticity and diversity is veiled. His *presence* is denied. The *Daughters*' play diminishes their 'creator' and fails to acknowledge him'; 'The "Unfinished Business": The Avoidance of *King Lear* by the Prequel *Lear's Daughters*', *TRANS – Revue de littérature générale et comparée*, No. 12: La Trace (Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2010), 1-9 (p. 5).

hidden oppression of his daughters represents men's more or less covert oppression of women in society, and the daughters' experiences represent the unwritten stories of women.

The idea of giving voices to fictional women who have been silent through history, so-called 'herstory',[79] is central in feminist re-vision; but it is particularly relevant in appropriations of *King Lear*, with its notoriously silent female protagonist:

LEAR	[…] [W]hat can you say to draw
	A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.
CORDELIA	Nothing, my lord.
LEAR	Nothing?
CORDELIA	Nothing.
LEAR	How, nothing will come of nothing. Speak again.
CORDELIA	Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
	My heart into my mouth. I love your majesty
	According to my bond, no more nor less. (I. 1. 85-94)

Cordelia is determined to speak nothing but the truth and consequently says nothing (or rather 'Nothing').[80] Her sisters both give eloquent speeches, but they do not reveal their true opinions or personalities. That Lear's love test and subsequent division of his kingdom are ill-advised and that he is at least in part to blame for his daughters' development are not controversial opinions, and this interpretation of the play recurs in creative appropriations and productions of *King Lear*, as well as in scholarly criticism. Iska Alter suggests that 'Regan's and Goneril's frightening power resides as much in Lear's demonizing rhetoric of characterization as in their own conduct' and that Cordelia as the '"good" daughter' and Goneril and Regan as the '"wicked" sisters' are both 'creature[s] of [their] father's fantasies'.[81] It can thus be said that Lear's unreasonable demand on his daughters silences

79 See Gabrielle Griffin and Elaine Aston (eds), *Herstory: Plays by Women for Women* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), pp. 7-18; Lizbeth Goodman, '*Lear's Daughters* on Stage and in Multimedia and Fiona Shaw's *King Lear* Workshops as Case Studies in Breaking the Frame', in *Languages of Theatre Shaped by Women*, ed. Jane de Gay and Lizbeth Goodman (Bristol: Intellect, 2003), pp. 37-47 (p. 38).

80 In fact, Cordelia displays standard rhetoric behaviour when she says that she loves her father but cannot express it in words.

81 Iska Alter, '*King Lear* and *A Thousand Acres*: Gender, Genre, and the Revisionary Impulse', in *Transforming Shakespeare: Contemporary Women's Re-Visions in Literature and Performance*, ed. Marianne Novy (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), p. 147.

them all, as it prevents them from saying that which they personally feel is most relevant. The three of them find different ways of dealing with this: Goneril and Regan lie; Cordelia first refuses to answer her father's question, and when she does speak the king does not deem her words to be adequate.

Cordelia's reticence and her sisters' untruthfulness are an intrinsic part of the *King Lear* story. But Lear's three daughters, and Cordelia in particular, are also quite literally characters of few words. According to Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen, Cordelia only has 3% of the lines in *King Lear*. Regan has 5%, Goneril 6% and the fool 7%. Only Oswald speaks less than Cordelia (2%; Cornwall also speaks 3%), and Oswald is a purely functional character, whereas Cordelia is the female protagonist. These percentages can be compared to Lear's 22%, Edgar's 11%, and Kent's 11%.[82] The two other characters from *Lear's Daughters* are totally absent from *King Lear*: any princesses may be supposed to have had a nursemaid, but she does not figure and is not mentioned in the play; the queen is dead and is only mentioned once in passing.

In *King Lear*, the female characters spend much less time on stage than their male counterparts, and when they do appear they tend to be mostly concerned with the goings-on of the male characters. In contrast, all the characters in *Lear's Daughters* have a more or less equal amount of stage time, and the action continues to put the women centre-stage throughout the play. Chambers sums up the need that the WTG felt for women to be central to the onstage action for a change, and how that drove them in writing *Lear's Daughters*:

> The important thing about the play is […] that it puts women in the centre […]. [When I act in mainstream theatre] I feel I am on the edge of something, that the play is about something which is happening over there somewhere in the distance, and I'm on the edge of it.[83]

Hazel Maycock further states that in *Lear's Daughters* the WTG wanted to give servants more complex lines than 'Yes, my lord' and 'No, my lord', and it is also pointed out that all the parts include soliloquies, which never happens in Shakespearean tragedy.[84]

82 Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (eds), *The RSC Shakespeare Complete Works* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2007), p. 2007.

83 *Shakespeare: Text and Performance* [on CD].

84 Ibid.

By giving all its characters soliloquies, *Lear's Daughters* breaks the silence and marginalisation of actresses as well as of Shakespeare's female characters. Cordelia, the most silent of them all, is here made more verbal than her sisters and endowed with a special love of language: she always weighs her words carefully and is therefore unwilling to abuse language by uttering words she does not fully mean. The respect she has for words helps explain Cordelia's reluctance in *King Lear* to use too high-flown language, but according to Chambers it also makes her story more tragic:

> I remember thinking […] that the two liars in [*King Lear*] were articulate and fluent and verbal, and that the one woman who was absolutely committed to truth was therefore rendered almost speechless. She could hardly say anything to her father, she couldn't say the words that he wanted to hear, so I made Cordelia, ironically, be very wedded to words and to the use of words, and that that was her passion, because it made it then all the more cruel that the one speech she had for her father would not be accepted.[85]

In the first scene of *Lear's Daughters*, Cordelia, who is at this point a child, has the following soliloquy:

> I like words. Words are like stones, heavy and solid and every one different, you can feel their roughness and smoothness, and when I am silent, I am trying to get them right. Not just for beautiful things, like the feel of old lace, but for the smell of wet soil, or the tug of the brush through my hair. I learnt to read by myself. The first thing I ever did on my own. And the voices were so rich and strong that now, I read all through the summer in a garden den of raspberry canes and blackberries, and I look up at the sky, and it's full of words.[86]

If Cordelia in *King Lear* would not declare her love for her father in words that suited him, here the Cordelia character eloquently declares her love of words. She is given power over her own words and a space where she can utter them, free from the constraint of other people's expectations of her. In the final scene, she has grown older and become aware of those expectations. In a soliloquy echoing the previous one, she says,

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85 Ibid.

86 The Women's Theatre Group and Elaine Feinstein, 'Lear's Daughters', in *Adaptations of Shakespeare: A Critical Anthology of Plays from the Seventeenth Century to the Present*, ed. Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 217-32 (scene 1, pp. 217-18). Subsequent references will be to this edition and given parenthetically in the text.

> Words are like stones, heavy and solid and every one different. I hold two in my hands, testing their weight. 'Yes', to please, 'no' to please myself, 'yes', I shall and 'no', I will not. 'Yes' for you and 'no' for me. I love words. I like their roughness and their smoothness, and when I'm silent I'm trying to get them right. I shall be silent now, weighing these words, and when I choose to speak, I shall choose the right one. (Scene 14, p. 232)

Cordelia finally decides to break with her abusive father and no longer do whatever it takes to please him, regardless of her own wishes and sense of integrity. She has realised that her love of words is an unrequited love; but her respect for the value of words is, in the WTG's re-vision of *King Lear*, her reason for deliberately failing the love test.

'Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?': Appropriating the Lear Family

'Then let them anatomize Regan', Lear exclaims in III.6, 'see what breeds about her heart. Is there any cause in nature that make these hard hearts?' (73-75): Lear wants to know why his daughters are so cruel to him, whether it is innately in their natures to be unfeeling or how their hearts have come to harden. Prequels seem to be overrepresented among appropriations of *King Lear*: all four prequels studied in this thesis are backstories that lead up to I.1. Like Lear, they look for an explanation and seek to 'anatomise' the characters. In addition to Lear's question, 'Why did Goneril and Regan turn out to be so wicked?', the appropriations try to answer questions such as 'What happened to the queen?', 'Why does Lear instigate the love test?' and/or 'Why will Cordelia not flatter her father?' But the different plays offer very different explanations, and very different characterisations of the three princesses. In Pontac's and Barker's plays, Goneril and Regan are lumped together as an indistinct pair, whereas the WTG and Tasca portray them as two separate characters. In *Seven Lears*, they are barely characters at all but a sort of generic girls, and often speak with one voice:

REGAN	Boys we hate
GONERIL	But horses!
REGAN	We're giggling!
GONERIL	We're frothing!
GONERIL / REGAN	WE EMBARRASS HIM![87]

87 Howard Barker, 'Seven Lears: The Pursuit of the Good', in *Plays Five* (London: Oberon, 2009), pp. 95-167 ('Fifth Lear', p. 147). Subsequent references will be to this edition and given parenthetically

In Pontac's parody, Goneril and Regan are stereotypically and exaggeratedly bad, and Cordelia is stereotypically and exaggeratedly good. When asked by her father about Cordelia's whereabouts, Goneril replies,

> She is now in the country, noble Father,
> Smiling at all the peasants, giving alms,
> Helping them plough their fields and grind their grain,
> Toiling and singing with a merry heart,
> Tending to sickly babes and visiting
> The dead and dying with a cheery word.[88]

Regan, on the other hand, is

> Also in rural byways, mighty Father,
> Taunting fair virgins with vile epithets,
> Roistering with uncouthest bastardy,
> And setting fire to peasants' straw abodes:
> Such is her custom in the afternoon.
> We oftimes [*sic*] work together. (50)

In Tasca's play, by contrast, Regan, like Cordelia, is depicted as a good, empathetic character. Tasca's Goneril, however, like Pontac's, is ambitious and potentially very cruel.

In *Lear's Daughters*, the WTG have made a point of presenting the three sisters as three different personalities with dissimilar preoccupations and interests: Goneril paints, Regan carves and Cordelia is interested in language and literature. As Annamária Fábián argues, the sisters 'gain certain distinctive features which create their own, separate identities', and Goneril and Regan's '"wicked sisters" collective image is deconstructed right from the beginning'.[89] The three sisters are, however, slightly stereotypical in that they conform to what is commonly seen as 'typical' behaviour and personality traits in the eldest, middle and youngest sibling. In fact, birth order can be said to be an important theme in the play. Regan expresses the typical middle-child feeling of not having as fixed a role in the family as the other siblings when she says to Goneril,

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in the text. See also Howard Barker, *Seven Lears: The Pursuit of the Good / Golgo: Sermons on Pain and Privilege* (London: Calder, 1990).

88 Perry Pontac, 'Prince Lear, A Prequel', in *Codpieces: A Triple Bill* (London: Oberon, 2012), pp. 39-62 (p. 50). Subsequent references will be to this edition and given parenthetically in the text.

89 Fábián, 4.

> You, you've always been the first, the cleverest, the best, and Cordelia, she's the, the pretty, the loveable, Lear's darling. Then there's me, in the middle, neither fish nor fowl, do you see? I've had nothing that's, that's for me, just for me. I've been number two, between one and three, but nothing. (Scene 12, p. 229)

Regan is also the most rebellious of the children, which is sometimes thought to be a typical middle-child trait, while Goneril, as the firstborn, is the most ambitious, with a strong sense of responsibility, and the one to conform to her parents' expectations, and Cordelia, the lastborn, is an attention-seeker who is perceived as a baby far into adolescence.[90]

Fleetwood remarks that Shakespeare's Goneril never speaks in metaphor.[91] This is also the case in *Lear's Daughters*, where Goneril is less articulate than her sisters, sometimes not even speaking in complete sentences. Fleetwood further speculates that Goneril has grown up in a patriarchal society, and that she conforms to the values of that society until she meets Edmund. This also fits in well with *Lear's Daughters*, where Goneril, as the eldest daughter, takes on her father's patriarchal values even when they run against her own interests and tries to teach Regan the same way of thinking. As the eldest sister, Fleetwood argues, Goneril has probably had to

90 Birth order has long been believed to affect personality, and the many popular books and articles on the subject appear to come close to a consensus about what constitutes 'typical' personality traits for someone born first, last or somewhere in the middle or as an only child. Many readers also seem to recognise themselves and their family members in the descriptions. See, for example, Kevin Leman, *The New Birth Order Book: Why You Are the Way You Are*, revised ed. of *The Birth Order Book* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1998 [1985]). Yet, birth-order studies has not managed to confirm many of these theories conclusively, and for a time it seemed as if the field had closed itself down, as its major works showed that there was little or no evidence that birth order did in fact influence personality. For example, in *Birth Order: Its Influence on Personality* (Berlin, Heidelberg & New York: Springer-Verlag, 1983), Cécile Ernst and Jules Angst compare a large number of studies on firstborns versus laterborns and come to the conclusion that there is no conclusive evidence that the hypotheses of these studies are generally correct, partly because some of them contradict one another and partly because many do not take other variables than birth order into account. The most serious fallacy in quantitative results regarding birth order is the inherent problem that it is impossible to know to what extent the results are affected by family size rather than birth order: since all families, even small ones, contain firstborns, traits that have been connected to firstborns might actually be characteristic of people who grew up with few or no siblings. According to Joshua K. Hartshorne, however, there has been some evidence in later years that birth order does influence personality in terms of intelligence and choice of partner, which opens up the possibility that there are correlations between birth order and other personal characteristics, even if these correlations are difficult to prove: 'the evidence seems to be shifting back in favor of our common intuition that our position in our family somehow affects who we become. The details, however, remain vague'; Joshua K. Hartshorne, 'Ruled by Birth Order?', *Scientific American Mind*, 20:7 (January/February 2010), 18-19.

91 National Theatre Discover <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IV7KFy8I39w> [accessed 7 November 2016].

take on a lot of responsibility and feels neglected by her father – this is also how Goneril is portrayed in *Lear's Daughters*.

The two shorter appropriations discussed in this chapter are both called *Prince Lear*. In Tasca's version, 'Prince Lear' refers to Lear's son and heir. The new condition here is that the mother died giving birth to a son, whom, it is implied, Goneril subsequently killed. Tasca's Goneril is acutely aware that her father is disappointed that all his children are girls and that their society values men more highly than women: 'To be born of our sex is a curse by the gods. Why should we pray to them that made us so deformed in our father's eyes?'[92] She has been told by her mother that Lear saw her birth as a punishment, and she consequently 'grew up guilty of [her] own nativity' (35). Goneril refers to Lear's attempt to beget a son as 'stabbing away at mother until… until…' (36); and claiming that childbirth is too great a risk at the queen's age, Goneril thinks that her mother should have turned to home remedies to prevent another pregnancy (35). However, her reason for wishing the conception undone is clearly her fear that the child will be a boy. Regan also fears this but does not share Goneril's hope that if it is a boy he will be stillborn (34). She thinks that if the queen gives birth to a boy, the three sisters 'will be forever as servants in [their] own castle' (36). The answer to the question 'Why did it happen?' in this play is that Lear's daughters had a younger brother who died, causing Lear to have to come up with an alternative plan for how to dispose of his kingdom, and that Regan suspects the brother was killed by Goneril, who desperately wanted to be queen, all of which creates suspicion and animosity among the sisters.

In Pontac's play, 'Prince Lear' is Lear himself, before he is crowned. In this version of the story, Lear's own father has just died, and Lear gives away his kingdom on the day of his coronation. Pontac's parody makes use of several different Shakespearean tropes: Lear jealously suspects his wife of infidelity, whereupon she loses her mind and drowns herself, after giving a parody of Ophelia's mad speech: 'There's rosemary, that's for remembrance. There's fennel, that's for forgetfulness. There's basil, that's for spaghetti Bolognese' (51).[93] Perhaps the most significant use of a Shakespear-

92 Jules Tasca, 'Prince Lear', in *Shylock's Daughter and Other Small Chips From Great Gems of Shakespeare: Four One-Act Plays* (New York, Hollywood, London & Toronto: Samuel French, 2007), pp. 31-52 (p. 35). Subsequent references will be to this edition and given parenthetically in the text.

93 In the original radio recording from 1994, John Moffatt imitates John Gielgud's voice as Lear. Claire Skinner's Goneril, however, has a soft, high-pitched, very young-sounding voice – not the voice of a conventional Goneril.

ean trope, however – and the most innovative change in relation to the *Lear* plot – is that Kent turns out to be a woman in disguise.

In this version, Kent sought employment as a page at Lear's court when she was a young girl, and has since risen through the ranks, all the time in disguise and all the time in love with the king – much as if Viola had never had the opportunity to reveal to Orsino that she is a woman. But when Lear says he wishes he could be married to his trustworthy companion Kent – preferring him to the, as Lear thinks, unfaithful queen, Eudoxia – Kent finds a perfect opportunity to reveal her secret, and Lear, though incredulous at first, is delighted:

PRINCE LEAR Thou art a woman, Kent? But I've beheld
Thy manly garb […].
EARL OF KENT Bought from a man's outfitter, greatest lord.
[---]
PRINCE LEAR But then thy voice: rich, deep, reverberate,
Sounding the compass mellow to profound,
Not piping squeaks that pierce the aching ear.
EARL OF KENT True, good my lord. *My voice was ever low,*
An excellent thing in woman, as you know.
And years of drinking sack and heavy mead
Have delved for me a deeper voice indeed.
[---]
PRINCE LEAR Then Kent, come to my arms.
The quest for faithful love concludeth here.
Fling off thy guise, thy manly false attire,
That I may thee embrace.
(45-47) [emphasis added]

Goneril, however, reminds Lear that a mere earl, female or otherwise, is hardly a suitable match for a king, and Lear decides to renounce his power. It is Goneril who sets up the love test, by manipulating Lear into the scheme and deliberately tricking Cordelia into saying the wrong thing:

GONERIL […]
I shall proclaim the rules to dear Cordelia –
My father's favourite, gem of all our land,
[…]
Open and generous, trusting… gullible.
(*Aside*.) I'll cram her credulous ear with counsel, thus:
Our father yearns for plainness in his speech,

> For rough-tongued, blunt, unflattering honesty,
> Even unto rudeness. O her words will bring
> Ruin to her, confusion to the King.
> (*She throws back her head and laughs wickedly and loudly.*) (60-61)

The answer to the question 'Why did it happen?' supplied by Pontac's play is thus that Goneril is inherently villainous and plots to ruin Cordelia's life and gain power for herself and Regan. In this version, Cordelia says what she thinks her father wants to hear, and is thus aware neither of being disobedient nor of renouncing her inheritance. This plot twist is reminiscent of how the love test is represented in *Leir*, where Gonorill and Ragan are notified of Leir's plan in advance and plot to make Cordella fail. It is as if the elder sisters' wicked scheme, omitted by Shakespeare, had made its absence felt in Shakespeare's play and regained its logical place in the appropriation, without Pontac's being aware of its presence in the source.[94]

In contrast, the answer to the question 'Why did it happen?' offered by *Lear's Daughters* is that Lear treated his daughters badly, including sexually abusing Cordelia and neglecting Goneril and Regan. The sexual abuse is metaphorically implied primarily in the following dialogue between Cordelia and her father:

FOOL (LEAR)	Cordelia, where's my Cordelia?
CORDELIA	Here Father – here I am.
FOOL (LEAR)	Oh, see my pretty chick.
	Come my pretty, dance for Daddy.
CORDELIA	For you, only for you?
FOOL (LEAR)	Of course for me.
CORDELIA	But everyone is watching.
FOOL (LEAR)	Don't be silly.
CORDELIA	I'm shy.
FOOL (LEAR)	You're not trying.
CORDELIA	I'm too big.
FOOL (LEAR)	Spin for Daddy.
CORDELIA	I can't.
FOOL (LEAR)	Spin! (CORDELIA *picks up skirt*) Gather round gentlemen, please. Show them Lear's baby.
CORDELIA	I'm not your baby.
FOOL (LEAR)	What? Pardon?
CORDELIA	I'm… (*she going to repeat above* [*sic*]) I'm tired, Daddy.

94 Perry Pontac, personal correspondence, 17 March 2014.

	Cordelia tired.
FOOL (LEAR)	Spin. Spin. Spin.
CORDELIA	Spin for Daddy. (*begins to spin*)
FOOL (LEAR)	Don't let me down, darling. There's my peach.
CORDELIA	There's my peach.
FOOL (LEAR)	Such lovely hair and lips.
CORDELIA	And tongues
FOOL (LEAR)	Spin.
CORDELIA	and bulging eyes,
FOOL (LEAR)	Spin.
CORDELIA	shouting and cheering.
FOOL (LEAR)	Shouting and cheering.
CORDELIA	I'm falling. No. I don't want to. Cordelia not want to be Daddy's girl. (CORDELIA *collapses on floor*)

(Scene 10, p. 227)

The child abuse implicit in this scene was, according to Chambers, inserted by the director (and – unlike many other elements in the play – not, as far as Chambers knew, part of the experience of anyone in the cast).[95] Elaine Feinstein remembers writing the line 'Look, Daddy, look!', but not with any thought of abuse. The idea of 'an Oedipal relationship' between Cordelia and her father was Feinstein's, but she thought of it as a reciprocal relationship, not an abusive one, and not necessarily sexual in nature. What she wanted to say was that it can be destructive to adore one's father too much, but she had the idea at a time when paedophilia was not so much part of the public's consciousness as it was by the time *Lear's Daughters* was produced.[96] As for the mother's part in the situation, Graham Saunders paraphrases Hughes' conception of the her as 'a person so paralysed with fear of her husband that she is unable to act on behalf of her daughters'.[97]

It bears mentioning that *Lear's Daughters* casts Cordelia as Lear's victim, while Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* imagines 'Lear' to have abused his two elder daughters but not necessarily the youngest. This difference is all the more noteworthy because *Lear's Daughters* and *A Thousand Acres* are two re-visions of *King Lear* with the idea of child abuse at their core, written only four years apart. The choice of Cordelia as the victim of sexual abuse,

95 *Shakespeare: Text and Performance* [on CD].

96 Elaine Feinstein, personal interview, 25 April 2014.

97 Graham Saunders, '"Missing Mothers and Absent Fathers": Howard Barker's *Seven Lears* and Elaine Feinstein's *Lear's Daughters*', *Modern Drama* 42 (1999), 401-10 (p. 403) [based on Saunders' interview with Gwenda Hughes].

rather than Goneril and Regan, is in line with criticism on *King Lear* which interprets Lear's favouring of Cordelia as romantic and/or sexual, and his actions as suggesting that he wants to keep her for himself rather than marry her off. However, Goneril is also a potential victim of child abuse in *Lear's Daughters*:

> GONERIL He shut the door and bent down to me and whispered, 'When you are Queen, this [gold] will all be yours. This will be our secret – just you and me – and you mustn't tell.' And then he put his hand (*silence*) on my shoulder.
>
> (Scene 10, 228)

This speech can be interpreted metaphorically, similarly to the scene between Cordelia and Lear, or as Goneril not being able to put her traumatic experience into words or perhaps not wanting to upset the status quo by telling the truth. But now that incest and child abuse have become such a trope in *Lear*'s afterlife, the quoted speech can also be seen as playing with and thwarting the audience's expectations.

Lear's Daughters contains events that correspond to events in *King Lear* as well as allusions that have a foreshadowing effect. Eyes and blinding are central images in *Lear's Daughters*, a circumstance evoking the blinding of Gloucester in *King Lear*. In Shakespeare's play, it is Goneril who suggests '[p]luck[ing] out his eyes', while Regan initially thinks they should '[h]ang him instantly' (III.7.4-5) and later regrets not killing him at once. In *Lear's Daughters*, it is almost as if Goneril is punished before the fact when she herself is blinded at her wedding: 'Nanny! I can't see! The lace is scoring into my eyes. I can't see anything' (scene 13, p. 231). This takes place just after Goneril has, according to the stage directions '[gone] for LEAR's eyes with [a] knife'. A connection between Shakespeare's Goneril and vision is her appraisal of Lear as 'Dearer than eyesight' (I.1.56). In *Lear's Daughters*, references to eyes and (lack of) vision in connection with Goneril recur in her painting, and in her final soliloquy: 'Looking up, I can't see the sky. There's too much red. Red in my eyes. Red on my hands. [---] Blood in my eyes and lost to heaven' (scene 14, p. 232). Her blindness, albeit only temporary, is rendered a worse punishment by the fact that visual art has always been her greatest passion. When Goneril loses her sight she is about to jump out of the window. This is a reference to her suicide in *King Lear*, with additional echoes of Gloucester's suicide attempt.

Another area of concern in connection with Goneril and Regan in both *Lear's Daughters* and *King Lear* is fertility. In *King Lear*, Lear puts a curse on Goneril's offspring:

> Hear, Nature, hear, dear goddess, hear:
> Suspend thy purpose if thou didst intend
> To make this creature fruitful.
> Into her womb convey sterility,
> Dry up in her the organs of increase,
> And from her derogate body never spring
> A babe to honour her. (I.4.267-73)

In *Lear's Daughters*, Goneril speaks of her fertility as her only inherent value: 'It's what we're here for. To marry and breed' (scene 12, p. 229). But when she finds out that Regan has become pregnant before she is married she thwarts her sister's fertility by organising an abortion for her against her will. When Goneril utters the words 'Get rid of it!', Regan recognises that her elder sister has become similar to their father and has taken on his values. Regan looks at Goneril's face in the mirror and says, 'I can't see your features. […] Your face is blank. […] It's him. You've got his face' (scene 12, p. 230). In her final soliloquy, Regan revisits this incident and remembers, '"Get rid of it", she said, "Get rid of it", and that was all. The veil was pulled away from my eyes and I could see what he had done to her, had done to me' (scene 14, p. 232). As has already been pointed out, Goneril, as the eldest, adopts her parent's values and tries to instil them into her younger sisters. The curse of infertility that she receives in *King Lear* is passed on (once again before the fact) to Regan in *Lear's Daughters*. Another aspect of Regan's abortion is that it parallels her murder in *King Lear*, where she is poisoned by Goneril. In *Lear's Daughters*, Regan refers to the abortion as poisoning. The Nanny gives Regan a drink of '[r]ue and pennyroyal', two herbs that are indeed poisonous in doses high enough to work as abortifacients, and when the pain sets in Regan exclaims, 'I'm going to die. You've poisoned me', to which the Nanny replies, 'You're not going to die yet' (scene 12, p. 230). The word 'yet' is significant, as it foreshadows the fact that Regan will die, under similar circumstances, in *King Lear*.

Elaine Feinstein's original conception of *Lear's Daughters* was to include the mother as one of the characters; the mother would have been the moral

centre of the play, an aspect that Feinstein felt Shakespeare's *Lear* to lack. She wanted to explore her own relationship to her mother and father, as she felt she had had 'excessive reverence' for her father and had underestimated her mother's influence on her. In the same way, she felt that the influence of the absent mother in *King Lear* had been underestimated by spectators/readers in favour of the present father. In its finished state, *Lear's Daughters* is more about patriarchy than about relationships between children and parents; the mother is not a character of her own, but appears only as played by the Fool, when the children visit their mother in the parlour. She is also present in the stories the Nanny tells, but she dies offstage.

Seven Lears provides Lear's daughters with both a mother and a new father, as Lear's wife claims that her youngest daughter was fathered not by her husband but by Kent. According to Barker, Cordelia and Kent are the only two 'decent people' in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, so the idea that he is her father seemed natural. Another addition to the plot is that Lear had a relationship with his wife's mother prior to his marriage. Barker's inspiration for writing the play was that though it is a family tragedy, Shakespeare's *King Lear* does not mention the daughters' mother. Realistically, he argues, at some point during the arguments the characters have, the mother should have been mentioned. Barker calls the absence of such a mention 'extraordinary' and says it is as if the mother had been 'immaculately abolished'.[98] The other question *King Lear* made him ask was, why is Lear so 'stupid' in Shakespeare's play? Barker's Lear is extremely intelligent, but finds his cleverness so 'painful' that he 'wills himself' to 'abolish it'. He thinks he is pursuing 'the good', but he is more concerned with thinking about good than doing good deeds. His wife, Clarissa, on the other hand, is a very moral character, who is committed to honesty and kindness, though Barker finds her 'intolerable', 'horrible' and 'painfully good'. In this version, Cordelia inherits her moral nature from her mother. Both *Lear's Daughters* and *Seven Lears*, then, use the missing mother as a starting-point, even though she can be seen as having a limited impact on the finished plays. These two plays were written only two years apart, but according to Howard Barker he was not aware of the existence of *Lear's Daughters* when he wrote his play.

Seven Lears is an example of Barker's own theatrical poetics, the Theatre of Catastrophe, and was first produced by his own theatrical company, the

98 Howard Barker, personal interview, 2 April 2014.

Wrestling School.[99] Barker distinguishes between 'the theatre' and 'the art of theatre' and advocates the latter: '*The theatre* purports to give pleasure to the many. *The art of theatre* lends anxiety to the few'.[100] In *Arguments for a Theatre*, Barker positions himself against what he refers to as 'humanist theatre', which he claims has dominated the stage during the second half of the twentieth century and which he sees as 'the social hygiene of the gifted aching to illuminate the ungifted'. This kind of theatre, according to Barker, has 'the strictly utilitarian end of making us good and happy (happiness supposed to derive from "understanding one another") and turning theatre into sticking plaster for the wounds of social alienation'.[101] Where 'humanist theatre' believes that '[a]rt must be understood', '[t]he message is important', '[t]he production must be clear' and '[w]it greases the message', the 'catastrophic theatre' believes that '[a]rt is a problem of understanding'; '[t]here is no message'; the play itself, rather than any message, 'is important'; and neither the author nor the audience can understand the play entirely. Rather than 'happy or fortified', the audience should leave a 'catastrophic' play feeling 'disturbed or amazed'.[102]

According to Saunders, *Seven Lears* reverts the 'Aristotelian idea of the tragic hero being born with a mortal flaw, or being prey to an arbitrary fate' by showing Lear as '*knowingly* mov[ing] towards a state of moral stagnation and inertia'. The main way in which this 'moral decline' is depicted is, according to Saunders, Lear's 'illicit desire' for his mother-in-law, which replaces his 'incestuous' desire for Cordelia in Shakespeare's play.[103] However, Barker's Lear embarked on a relationship with Prudentia before he even met Clarissa. His 'moral decline' could therefore also be seen as springing from the dubious choice of marrying his lover's daughter. Saunders further claims that *Seven Lears* shows 'the benefits of maternal power', which can be seen as a reaction against Shakespeare's depiction of the

99 As Jim Hiley points out in a review of *Seven Lears*, the Wrestling School 'was founded by actors', who '[u]nlike the rest of us' must 'live night after night' with the plays they perform in. It is therefore not surprising that these actors 'craved' the challenge of Barker's 'moral fury and intellectual conundrums', even if they may strike audiences as inaccessible; *The Listener* 18 January 1990, in *Theatre Record* Jan-June 1990, pp. 22-23 (p. 22).

100 Howard Barker, *Death, The One, and the Art of Theatre* (London & New York: Routledge 2005), p. 1.

101 Howard Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, 3rd ed. (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1997 [1989]), p. 72.

102 Ibid., p. 71.

103 Saunders, 404 [emphasis original].

'chaos' of female rule and Bond's observation that powerful women quickly adopt the 'brutal' strategies of men. According to Saunders, Barker advocates matriarchy as an alternative to patriarchy by showing that Clarissa would have made a better leader than Lear.[104]

It has been pointed out by other critics, however, that for a play that sets out to invent a missing character, Barker's play gives surprisingly little room and voice to that character. According to Bradley, '*Seven Lears* begins with the false promise to reinstate the missing mother from *King Lear*': it 'promises to rewrite what is often regarded as a misogynistic story from a woman's perspective' but 'delivers only violence'.[105] The perspective of *Seven Lears* rests more continually with Lear than in Shakespeare's play. According to Susan Bennett, 'the title to Barker's play appears as a promising strategy to proliferate the tragic hero, to destabilize a traditional focalization on a single and exemplary male character'; however, Bennett expresses disappointment that the seven Lears of the title are 'the seven ages of the one man' and that the play is not in fact primarily concerned with the mother but with 'her discipline and punishment'.[106] Barker's introduction to the play justifies the 'hatred' for Clarissa by calling it 'necessary':

> Shakespeare's *King Lear* is a family tragedy with a significant absence.
> The Mother is denied existence in *King Lear*.
> She is barely quoted even in the depths of rage or pity.
> She was therefore expunged from memory.
> This extinction can only be interpreted as repression.
> She was therefore the subject of an unjust hatred.
> The hatred was shared by Lear and all his daughters.
> This hatred, while unjust, may have been necessary.[107]

As Bradley points out, however, the play does not actually explain the mother's absence, why she is hated or why that hatred is necessary. Bradley interprets the discrepancy between what Barker says he will do and what he actually does in the play as a way of hindering the audience from making conventional narrative sense of the story by thwarting their expecta-

104 Ibid., 402-03.

105 Bradley, *Adapting* King Lear *for the Stage*, p. 185.

106 *Performing Nostalgia: Shifting Shakespeare and the Contemporary Past* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 50.

107 Barker, 'Introduction' to 'Seven Lears', in *Seven Lears: The Pursuit of the Good / Golgo: Sermons on Pain and Privilege*, no page number.

tions.[108] It is not clear, however, whether or how Barker's written introduction has been made available to the audience upon performance. It is included in the first published version of the play, but not in the collection of Barker's plays from 2009.

There was no consensus among reviewers of the original production, which played at the Sheffield Crucible and Leicester Haymarket Theatre in 1989 and at the Royal Court in 1990, as to whether what Michael Coveney calls 'Barker's flimsy intention of reinstating the lost Mrs Lear' was connected to the overall purpose of the play.[109] According to Lyn Gardner, 'this is no feminist rehabilitation but rather a crazy, confused but ultimately moving discourse on the impossibility of goodness in an imperfect world and the radical suggestion that virtue can be the greatest untruth of all'.[110] Paul Taylor shares Gardner's view that the reinstatement of the mother has no feminist effect, but thinks '[i]t is to Barker's credit' that 'he does not resurrect the wife simply in order to douse her in a warm jet of feminist compassion'.[111] John Haffenden, however, interprets the play as saying that mothers constitute too positive a force to be included in tragedy and that the world is too evil to tolerate women:

> Why are mothers so absent from Shakespeare's works, or silent and ineffectual when present? That question has troubled many critics of late, especially the feminist school. The answer, according to Howard Barker, is that they stand for unabashed decency, they speak the truth, they would do away with hate and war. Men need them, they breed by them, and abuse them. In a wicked world, honesty is an offence, goodness intolerable.[112]

Robin Thornber sees *King Lear* as discussing the same topic as *Seven Lears*: 'the possibility of goodness and its application to government', but thinks '[t]he difference is that where Shakespeare's tragedy is underpinned by a sort of optimism […], Barker's twentieth century argument is necessarily inconclusive'.[113] Billington, however, thinks that 'Mr Barker's play answers questions that scarcely need to be asked', and points out that it 'rests on

108 Bradley, *Adapting* King Lear *for the Stage*, p. 176.
109 Michael Coveney, *The Observer* 14 January 1990, in *Theatre Record* Jan-June 1990, p. 20.
110 Lyn Gardner, *City Limits* 18 January 1990, in *Theatre Record* Jan-June 1990, p. 23.
111 Paul Taylor, *The Independent* 19 October 1989, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 1989, p. 1501.
112 John Haffenden, *The Independent* 8 January 1990, in *Theatre Record* Jan-June 1990, p. 20.
113 Robin Thornber, *The Guardian* 19 October 1989, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 1989, pp. 1500-01 (p. 1500).

[the] dubious premise' that 'the absence of any reference to a mother in King Lear "can only be interpreted as repression"' when in fact 'mother-daughter relationships are very rare in all Shakespeare (possibly because they were beyond the scope of boy-players to embody)'.[114] While opinions about the usefulness of speculating about Lear's wife were divided, many reviewers were enthusiastic about the performances of the cast, especially that of Jemma Redgrave, who played Clarissa.

Reviews of *Lear's Daughters* have also been divided. In a review of the second London run of the original production, Paula Webb writes that even though she is 'a feminist', she 'was never really sure of what this […] group was trying to tell me, except that Lear was a letchy, selfish old bastard' who 'only valued' his daughters as a 'boost' for his 'ego' or as 'saleable property'.[115] Shirley Brown, on the other hand, calls *Lear's Daughters* 'both clever and significant: for the women dominated by and dependent on men, the tragedy had begun already, and continues'.[116] Jane Edwardes sees the appropriation in the context of the attempts of recent productions of *King Lear* to 'suggest that perhaps Goneril and Regan were not entirely to blame for their appalling behaviour towards their poor old dad'.[117] According to Barney Bardsley, the play made the audience 'realise exactly what Lear might have done to deserve such a horrible end', and an anonymous reviewer advised readers that '[w]hen you next see *King Lear*, it will make much more sense with this pre-history'.[118] In 1995, when the theatre company Belladonna staged *Lear's Daughters* as their debut production, Keith Stanfield wrote that the idea 'that Lear was a patriarchal bastard who thoroughly deserved his tragic comeuppance' is 'hardly original'.[119] In response to an even later revival, Yellow Earth Theatre's 2003 production, Billington insists that '[y]ou can't "explain" Goneril and Regan's evil by suggesting that the former was a victim of parental abuse and that the latter had to abort a child before marrying Cornwall', and that 'the play is as much of

114 Michael Billington, *The Guardian* 8 January 1990, in *Theatre Record* Jan-June 1990, p. 19.

115 Paula Webb, *What's On* 7 September 1988, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 1988, p. 1178.

116 Shirley Brown, 'Fine Show Packed with Fun and Feminist Fury', *Bristol Evening Post* 14 September 1988. Sphinx Theatre Company (formerly The Women's Theatre Group) archive. File '322. Bookings for 2nd Tour, *Lear's Daughters*'.

117 Jane Edwardes, *Time Out* 7 September 1988, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 1988, p. 1178.

118 Barney Bardsley, *City Limits* 8 September 1988, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 1988, p. 1178; 'Lear & Daughters', in *Everywoman* November 1987, no. 32. Sphinx Theatre Company (formerly The Women's Theatre Group) archive. File '322. Bookings for 2nd Tour, *Lear's Daughters*'.

119 Keith Stanfield, *Time Out* 6 September 1995, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 1995, p. 1216.

its time as Nahum Tate's sentimental 17th-century re-write'.[120] Jasper Bark, on the other hand, claims it is testimony to devised theatre as a working method that a play that was 'devised through workshops over 15 years ago' is 'every bit as relevant today, even though the political climate it was written to address has moved on in the interim'.[121]

In Pontac's and Tasca's plays, the inclusion of the mother is also a significant difference from Shakespeare's play. But as in *Seven Lears*, which focuses on the Lear character, and *Lear's Daughters*, where the queen does not appear herself but is played by the Fool, the mother is not a main character. In Pontac's play, she appears twice, once to be suspected of infidelity and once to demonstrate her madness. Lear's reason for suspecting Eudoxia is that he does not identify with Goneril and Regan, who he thinks are so unpleasant that they cannot be his daughters, whereas Cordelia shares his 'sunny disposition' (47). From what the spectator/reader sees, however, Eudoxia rather than Lear resembles his description of Cordelia. The implication is that Goneril and Regan take after him and that he lacks self-knowledge, much as is the case in Shakespeare's *Lear*. In Tasca's play, the mother performs her only actions – giving birth and dying – offstage. These two actions are also central for the queen in *Lear's Daughters*, whose doctor goes to great lengths to 'help her conceive', including 'putting live pigeons on her feet' (scene 3, p. 219), who is 'always in bed' (scene 6, p. 223) and who dies in connection with her third miscarriage after the difficult birth of her third child. In both *Lear's Daughters* and Tasca's *Prince Lear*, as in Bottomley's *King Lear's Wife*, the presence of three daughters and no sons is interpreted as problematic, and all three plays imagine that Lear not only wishes he had had a male heir and therefore makes his daughters feel rejected, but that Lear desperately tries to beget a son until his wife dies of pregnancy-related causes.

Lear's Daughters is more of a feminist play than Elaine Feinstein claims that she intended it to be; but can the other plays reinstating the mother be seen as feminist? Perry Pontac says that, while he is 'of course a feminist', he did not have 'a feminist agenda' when writing the play; on rereading it, however, he 'see[s] quite a bit of very bad behaviour towards women by men: […] Prince Lear's despicable treatment of Eudoxia […] with the completely innocent Eudoxia blaming herself somehow for his misogyny

120 Michael Billington, *The Guardian* 12 November 2003, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 2003, p. 1523.
121 Jasper Bark, *What's On* 19 November 2003, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 2003, p. 1523.

– indeed Lear's accusations driving her mad', and thinks that 'the gender-related ideas may go beyond comic purposes' after all.[122] According to Barker, it is 'impossible not to ask questions about the position of the female characters' in a society so influenced by feminism.[123] But, as has been discussed, *Seven Lears* in itself can hardly be called a feminist play. Indeed, such a straightforward ideological model would not be in line with Barker's views on the purpose of drama.

'[W]e / Have no such daughter': Cordelia, Cinderella and the Alleged Changeling

> I had a baby once. Did you know? I had to give my baby away so that I had milk for his. […] What to do? Eat farewell cake in the parlour? […] Leave him a note, 'Cordelia's mine – I swapped her at birth for your son. Love Nanny.' That would rock his little world. But is it true? You'll never know. I do. (*Lear's Daughters*, scene 14, p. 231)

These words, addressed to the audience, are spoken by Cordelia's nurse in the final scene of *Lear's Daughters*. Goneril and Regan have just entered into their respective arranged marriages and left home; the Nurse has been dismissed by Lear and will never again see the three girls that she has brought up from infancy. At this moment, she suggests to the audience that Lear's youngest daughter, his favourite, is not his daughter at all but the child of a servant.

Similarly, in Howard Barker's *Seven Lears* the queen, when pregnant with Cordelia, claims that the child is not Lear's but the result of an extramarital relationship with Kent. When Cordelia is born, Lear and Gloucester call her a '[b]astard' ('Sixth Lear', p. 160), potentially reminding the audience of the Gloucester subplot in *King Lear*, and try to drown her in a barrel of gin, but she miraculously survives. Cordelia, who is raised as the king's daughter and thinks that he is her real father, grows to be very fond of Lear, claiming to feel more akin to him than to her mother. Edward Bond's *Lear* follows the fate of Cordelia as told in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* and in *Holinshed's Chronicles* in that she deposes Lear's two eldest daughters and takes power over the country; but

122 Perry Pontac, personal correspondence, 17 March 2014.
123 Howard Barker, personal interview, 2 April 2014.

in Bond's version Cordelia is not Lear's daughter at all but the wife of a gravedigger's son, a young woman whom Lear meets by chance. It could be said that she is Lear's daughter in a metaphorical sense, as she takes his place as the country's feared dictator and leader of civil war after she has been the victim of war rape and miscarried her child; but there is certainly no intimation of a genetic kinship between them. It is striking that Cordelia's daughterhood should be negated in all three major stage appropriations of *King Lear* written between 1970 and 1990. One explanation could be that Shakespeare's Cordelia arguably does not behave like a daughter when she refuses to declare her love for Lear in the way he wants, and that it could be seen as only natural to try to find a reason for her detachment from her father. However, disputed kinship between Lear and Cordelia has never before been a central issue in the history of *King Lear* appropriations.

It has been well documented that the love test at the beginning of *King Lear* is a variation on the 'Love Like Salt' motif found in folktales of Aarne-Thompson type 923.[124] *King Lear* bears a particularly strong resemblance to the English version 'Cap o' Rushes', in which a father asks his three daughters how much they love him. The two eldest answer with conventional flattering analogues, but the youngest daughter replies that she loves her father as fresh meat loves salt, at which her father is affronted and disowns his daughter. They are finally reunited after he has tasted unsalted meat and come to realise her good intention. But before the happy ending is brought about, the daughter finds employment as a scullery maid; on three consecutive evenings, she puts on beautiful clothes and secretly goes to a dance, where no one recognises her and where she meets and dances with her master's son, after which she leaves without revealing her identity. The young man tries in vain to find the beautiful girl he has danced with and is finally taken ill when he thinks he will never see her again, but when he finds a ring he has previously given to the girl in a bowl of gruel which the scullery maid has made for him, he understands that she is the girl from the ball, and they marry.[125] Thus, within the 'Love Like Salt' tale, there is a Cinderella story embedded.

In his article '*Christabel*, *King Lear* and the Cinderella Folktale', Dennis

124 See, for example, Welch, 297.

125 Marian Roalfe Cox, *Cinderella: Three Hundred and Forty-Five Variants of Cinderella, Catskin and Cap of Rushes, Abstracted and Tabulated with a Discussion of Medieval Analogues, and Notes* (London: Publications of the Folklore Society, 1893), p. 264.

M. Welch points out that the premises of *King Lear* and *Cinderella* are similar in that they both start out with a widower who has one to three daughters, the mother's death being an important precondition in both cases.[126] However, Welch sees a connection between *King Lear* and those versions of the Cinderella story where a 'lecherous father' following his wife's death goes insane, develops a passion for his daughter to replace that for his wife, tries to force the daughter to marry him, and then, when she refuses, disowns her, after which the daughter flees to save herself from marriage to her father.[127] One such story is 'The King who Wished to Marry his Daughter', where a king vows at his wife's deathbed that he will only marry the woman whom his late wife's clothes fit, and later sees his daughter trying on her mother's garments.[128]

This is of course not the most widely spread understanding of the Cinderella story in modern times. A more plausible contemporary description of the story would be that it is about a motherless girl whose widowed father has remarried, only to die himself; the stepmother favours her own daughters and treats Cinderella badly, but although Cinderella is not given the chances in life that her spoilt stepsisters have, her beauty and sweet nature finally pay off when the prince falls in love with her, which enables her to leave her miserable existence in her father's house and find a better life than either of her stepsisters. Cinderella's position as stepdaughter is central to our understanding of the tale, as is her final marriage to the prince and the development from low to high status that this entails.

This story, like the 'Cap o' Rushes' and 'The King who Wished to Marry his Daughter' variations, has parallels to *King Lear*; but unlike the two earlier variants, it can be counted on to be present in the minds of a modern audience. From this perspective, Cordelia's fate can be seen as an inverted Cinderella story.[129] She is, like Cinderella, the kindest of three sisters and she too gets to marry royalty; but rather than being the mistreated anti-favourite who is exalted, she is the pampered favourite who is cast off. This parallel to

126 Welch, 293.

127 Ibid., 298.

128 Cox, p. 184.

129 Cf. Michael Bogdanov, *Shakespeare: The Director's Cut* (Edinburgh: Capercaillie, 2013), who says that *King Lear* has 'more than a passing resemblance to Cinderella minus the happy ending'; p. 159. Bullough notes that 'Cordelia has affinities with Cinderella, who suffered from her two ugly sisters' (p. 271), and Kamaralli points out that Goneril and Regan are interpreted as wicked sisters because that is the archetype that the fairy-tale structure leads the spectator/reader to expect (pp. 128-29).

the Cinderella story as a modern audience would know it, in combination with the emphasis which this version of the tale puts on Cinderella's stepdaughterhood, could contribute to the element of uncertainty as to whether Cordelia is Lear's biological daughter which has been added to the story of *King Lear* as it circulates in modern stage appropriations.

A difference between *King Lear* and the modern Cinderella tale is of course that Cinderella has a wicked stepmother while Cordelia's cruel parent is a father. However, besides the old folktale variants of the Cinderella story, there are also much more recent versions where Cinderella's (step-) parent is male. In Rossini's opera *La Cenerentola* (1817), it is Cenerentola's stepfather, Don Magnifico, who enslaves her, and in the British pantomime version of Cinderella, which follows Rossini's opera in several aspects (such as the inclusion of the prince's servant Dandini), Cinderella's father, Baron Hardup, is head of the household but too weak to stand up to his two stepdaughters, the Ugly Sisters.[130] These are versions of the Cinderella story that are perhaps more likely to occur to a contemporary British theatre audience than earlier versions of the folktale. It seems clear that the appropriations to some extent incorporate elements from the Cinderella myth as it has developed after *King Lear* was written, as well as elements from *King Lear*'s sources, as these both form part of the modern reception of *King Lear*.

So how can an audience interpret the Nanny's statement in *Lear's Daughters* that she could be Cordelia's mother? It is not claimed absolutely, only suggested, and, as the Nanny herself says, the audience will never know. But once the idea has been planted in the minds of an audience, it may stay with them in their future readings of *King Lear*, whether they choose to believe it in the context of *Lear's Daughters* or not. In a production of *Lear's Daughters*, a definitive decision has to be made as to whether the Nurse has actually made her alleged infant-swap, if for no other reason than the actress's need to make sense of her character's words. The choice will to some extent also influence the performance, which means that it will influence the production's (and the audience's) interpretation of *Lear's Daughters* and consequently the production's interpretation of *King Lear* and the modified view of *King*

130 Jonathan Cullen, the co-ordinator of the staged reading of *King Leir* at the Globe in 2001, remarks that '[an] unexpected success was the characterisation of the two Ugly Sisters, whom the audience immediately recognised as straight out of Panto, provoking several bold hisses and boos'; 'A Note from the Co-Ordinator', in Anon., *King Leir*, ed. Tiffany Stern, Globe Education (London: Nick Hern, 2002), p. v.

Lear that the audience will carry with them from watching *Lear's Daughters*. There are ways in which a director can make the choice more or less obvious, such as for example casting actresses with similar appearances in the roles of the Nurse and Cordelia, or having the Nanny use some stage business or an inflection that indicates that she is lying in the final scene. But the Nanny's soliloquy is probably more effective if it is ambiguous, and it is quite possible to play it in this way.

In the original production of *Lear's Daughters*, Janys Chambers kept the Nanny's secret even from the other actors and co-writers of the play. The story behind the Nanny's explosion in the final scene is that Gwenda Hughes had asked all the actors to write down on pieces of paper some things that their characters would never tell the other characters. One of the things that Janys Chambers wrote down involved Cordelia's parentage, and was for a long time 'kept hidden in rehearsals', but at some stage emerged in the Nanny's soliloquy. Chambers also remembers 'other secrets that we didn't share, and things that people didn't know when we said them whether they were true or not, and, to be honest, by the end I don't think we always knew […] either'. Chambers does not reveal exactly what was written on that slip of paper, but emphasises the flexibility of interpretation she experienced in *Lear's Daughters*: 'We had such a range of possibilities. You could literally play the character one way one night and one another. That's always the case, but more so than usual with this play'.[131]

When I directed *Lear's Daughters*, I wanted to keep the ambiguity of the text and leave the question open, and I told the student playing the Nurse that she was free to choose in which way she wanted to play the part, as long as she did not guide the audience too much in one direction or another. In her performance neither the rest of the cast nor I knew which interpretation she had opted for. In fact, she chose to think that Cordelia is not the Nanny's daughter, but that she has kept this thought with her during the years as a way of empowering herself and that the mere idea gives her a feeling that she has taken revenge on Lear, who has forced her to give up her own child. Considering that Cordelia is his favourite daughter and that in *Lear's Daughters* the king is presented as having tried to beget a son to the point of its finally killing his wife, the idea of not only taking away his favourite child but also keeping from him the fact that he has a male heir would indeed be severe punishment.

131 *Shakespeare: Text and Performance* [on CD].

In the questionnaires answered by the students on my course on 'Shakespeare's Women in Modern Drama', only one out of nine students in 2013 believed that Cordelia in *Lear's Daughters* should be read as the Nanny's daughter. That one student believed that '[i]f it was "real life", that would be most likely'. Some of the reasons given for answering the question negatively indicated that the students had perhaps not understood the implication in the play properly. One student, however, gave the explanation that in the play Cordelia feels that Nanny does not love her, and if the Nanny had been her mother (and, it may be added, had taken such a monumental risk for her sake), she would surely not have been able to hide her love all those years. Another student also pointed out that it does not seem as if the Nanny loves Cordelia more than Goneril or Regan. The objection could of course be raised that not all parents love their children; but in order for the idea that the Nanny is Cordelia's mother to make dramatic sense, the act of giving her to the king and queen must be understood as a sacrifice.

In 2015, the answers were more evenly distributed: seven students thought that Cordelia was Nanny's daughter, and five thought that she was not. Several students justified their response in terms of what they would 'like' to be the case – one student could not bear the Nanny and Cordelia to be mother and daughter unless they ran away together at the end, and another thought it likelier that Lear would be sexually attracted to Cordelia if she were not his daughter. Another student pointed out that it was 'meant to be ambiguous'. All students who explicitly considered the effect either reading would have on the play decided that Cordelia should be seen as the Nanny's daughter. One student responded 'yes' based on the Fool's reference to the Nanny as the paid 'mother'. Another answered 'no' based on the birth stories at the beginning of the play, where Nanny claims that Lear was present at Cordelia's birth. If he were there, he would have known what sex his child was and who had borne it.

As already established, the Nurse's suggestion in *Lear's Daughters* could influence how subsequent audiences watch *King Lear*; but it could also influence how subsequent productions stage *King Lear*. Without changing the text, a sense of estrangement between Cordelia and the rest of the family could very well be suggested – indeed, it would be supported by the text. And keeping the idea in mind that perhaps, just perhaps, Cordelia is

a changeling could very well inform the performances of Cordelia and her sisters as well as the performance of Lear.[132]

'For, as I am a man, I think this lady / To be my child Cordelia': Lear's Children

As an appropriation of *King Lear*, *Lear's Daughters* sides with women against men, showing the story from the women's perspective. But it also sides with children against adults, and shows the story from the children's perspective. This is one aspect of its status as an anti-patriarchal play. In a patriarchy, men have a superior position in relation to children as well as to women; the girl child, therefore, is at the very bottom of the hierarchy. According to Hattie Fletcher and Marianne Novy, 'emotions related both to having children and to having memories of childhood are central to the identities of many of [Shakespeare's] characters'.[133] These emotions are also at the core of *Lear's Daughters*, and, as in Shakespeare, they are presented from both the parent's and the child's perspective. Ideas and experiences related to caring for children and having (or not having) children – including parenthood, pregnancy, miscarriage and abortion – are highly significant, and ideas and experiences related to childhood and childhood memories are even more central. The significance of childhood has surprisingly often been neglected in criticism on *Lear's Daughters*. This section will show how *Lear's Daughters* focuses on children and childhood in order to

132 Productions do not have the same possibility as appropriations explicitly to suggest that Cordelia is not Lear's biological daughter, but in Michael Grandage's 2010 production at the Donmar one critic interpreted the casting of a black actor, Pippa Bennett-Warner, as Cordelia in an otherwise white family as suggesting that Cordelia was the result of an extramarital liaison between her mother and a black man and that this was one of Lear's motives for disowning her (Tim Walker, *The Sunday Telegraph* 12 December 2010, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 2010, p. 1382.) Another critic, however, interpreted the same casting choice in a different way: 'I have always presumed that Cordelia, Goneril and Regan were full sisters. […] [But] the non-politically correct among us will conclude that Lear was married more than once. […] Different mothers might explain why the older two are so unhelpful to Cordelia' (Quentin Letts, *The Daily Mail* 8 December 2010, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 2010, p. 1381). These are of course two possible ways – the latter, incidentally, made possible by the absence of the daughters' mother(s) – of accommodating racial difference within the Lear family; but a more obvious interpretation is simply that the production employed colourblind casting.

133 Hattie Fletcher and Marianne Novy, 'Father-Child Identification, Loss and Gender in Shakespeare's Plays', in *Shakespeare and Childhood*, ed. Kate Chedgzoy, Susanne Greenhalgh and Robert Shaughnessy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 49-63 (p. 49).

tell the background story to *King Lear* from a children's perspective, and argue that it is significant for *Lear's Daughters* as an anti-patriarchal play that it is the story of three *girls* rather than three women.

Lear's Daughters is of course not a children's adaptation in the sense that it is aimed at children. Such adaptations of Shakespeare's plays have long abounded and still do, from Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* to the BBC's *Shakespeare: The Animated Tales*. Generally speaking, they tend to present the stories in a more cheerful and uncomplicated way, omitting any 'indecent' elements in Shakespeare's plays. In their introduction to *Adaptations of Shakespeare: A Critical Anthology of Plays From the Seventeenth Century to the Present*, Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier write of the Lambs' *Tales* and Henrietta Maria Bowdler's *The Family Shakespeare*, both from the early nineteenth century, as being particularly intended for young women and purged of anything that would be thought improper for a young lady to read.[134] It is a way of introducing Shakespeare to children in a light-hearted and enjoyable manner; but, although the plots and the language may be simplified, the act of adapting Shakespeare for children augments rather than questions Shakespeare's authority and status as a canonical writer, as it implies that everybody should be conversant with his works. *Lear's Daughters*, by appropriating Shakespeare's story and giving the young female characters agency, questions Shakespeare's status, not as a great writer but as an unassailable icon.

Lear's Daughters not only problematises rather than simplifies Shakespeare, but dwells precisely on the dark and difficult experiences of women and children, such as child abuse, abortion and arranged marriage. The inclusion of child-related motifs, such as fairy-tales, children's games and nursery rhymes, is not for the benefit of a young audience, but have the effect of making the difficult themes that the play deals with all the more poignant. All the allusions to childhood serve the double purpose of reminding the audience that the adult actresses on stage in fact represent three children, and of giving associations to safety and comfort, standing in stark contrast to the vulnerable existence of the girls in the play. Conversely, it can also be said that the adult actresses playing children serve to remind the audience that women are treated as children in patriarchal societies.

Fairy-tales and storytelling are among the most important child-related motifs in *Lear's Daughters*. Bradley points out that '[t]he Fool's opening

134 Fischlin and Fortier, 'General Introduction' to *Adaptations of Shakespeare*, pp. 1-22 (pp. 17-18).

monologue establishes the play in the context of a fairy tale', and that '[f]airy tales in the nursery dominate the action and dialogue for the rest of the play'.[135] Storytelling is indeed central to *Lear's Daughters*, and every now and then throughout the play the Fool reminds the audience of the fairy-tale setting by including snatches of narrative such as 'Three princesses, living in a castle, listening to fairy-tales in the nursery' (scene 1, p. 218) and 'Three princesses all grown older, thinking about their father and counting the cost' (scene 10, p. 227). The stories that are told are predominantly about the three sisters and their parents. Bradley asserts that the girls 'use stories to understand the past, and these stories define and redefine who they have been', which shows how 'we define or limit ourselves through stories, and the extent to which stories can be changed, rewritten and retold'.[136] Not only does the Nanny tell the girls stories about their births and early childhoods (scenes 2, 7) – in response to Regan's request, 'Tell us about when we were little' – but the three sisters also contribute their own, sometimes colliding, memory stories (scenes 3, 5). It is when Regan asks Nanny for a story on a more serious note – 'What happened the night Mother died?' – that the stories finally become too irreconcilable. When Regan accuses her of lying, Nanny's response is 'It was a story. You were all upset. It was for comfort' (scene 10, p. 227). From this point, the Nanny does not tell stories for comfort any more, and her stories become increasingly unsettling. She now tells the story of how she used to hear Lear 'whining on at [his wife] to let him fuck her' (scene 10, p. 228), the story of the queen's miscarriages and subsequent death, the story of how the queen tried to escape with her children and how the king confined all the women and children in the household to the castle, and, finally, the story that she tells the audience rather than her three charges – the story of how the Nanny exchanged her own baby girl for Lear's newborn son and heir.

There is also one story that takes place outside the story world of *Lear's Daughters* – the story that the Nanny tells the Fool about the Pied Piper (scene 9). Even here, however, the story is not unrelated to the play: it would be difficult in this context not to see a connection to Lear's daughters' own story, in the prequel and beyond in Shakespeare's play, when the children in the fairy-tale turn into rats because the king refuses to assume

135 Bradley, *Adapting* King Lear *for the Stage*, p. 231.
136 Ibid., p. 232.

his responsibility. This connection is made clearer when Nanny refers back to the story of the Pied Piper and the rats gnawing 'at the king's throne' and then even 'gnaw[ing] the flesh from the bodies of the king and his men' (scene 9, p. 226) in her final soliloquy: 'Lear! There are rats gnawing at your throne and I'll not be in it but I'll watch the spectacle from afar, smiling, knowing it is what I've always wanted to happen' (scene 14, p. 231).

The three girls in *Lear's Daughters* lead a typical traditional nursery existence with an ever-present nanny and largely absent parents.[137] The Fool speaks of them as 'playing [with their nanny] in the nursery' and 'visiting [their mother] in the parlour' (scene 5, p. 222). This way of life – being confined to a nursery, looked after by a nanny in a starched apron, and allowed to visit one's parents in the drawing room before bed – which was once standard for many upper-class children, is probably not something that a theatre audience in 1987, let alone today, would have experienced themselves. The imagined Victorian/Edwardian childhood alluded to in the play is, however, something that many people are likely to have read about as children, and in that way the image of 'nursery life' may well evoke childhood memories for many spectators/readers. Children's games, such as blind man's buff, are also a prominent element in the play, as is the use of nursery rhymes. 'Sing a song of sixpence' features, both as a direct reference and as allusions interwoven into the story: not only does the Fool whistle the tune and sing the line 'Wasn't that a dainty dish to set before the King?' (scene 8, p. 225), but it counts money, speaks of the king and queen being in the counting house and the parlour, respectively, and refers to honey, pegs and birds. The Fool also sings a modified version of 'Polly put the kettle on' ('Nanny put the kettle on', scene 9, p. 225), and Cordelia hums the tune just before it is suggested that she is abused by Lear (scene 10, p. 227).

The childhood aspect of the play is reinforced by images and activities evoking an uncomplicated, idyllic childhood. Hair-brushing is one such activity that keeps recurring in the play. After Cordelia's mention of 'the tug of the brush through my hair' in her first soliloquy, Nanny brushes Cordelia's hair on the night of the queen's death. When Goneril takes over the brushing, it gives Cordelia an insupportable physical pain, which will

137 Saunders points out that in both *Lear's Daughters* and *Seven Lears*, the father as well as the mother is absent; in both plays, his daughters initially idolise him, miss him and try to get a chance to see him whenever they can; 405-06.

not go away even when Goneril has stopped brushing. The idyllic image of an elder sister brushing her younger sister's hair has here been transformed into something ominous, and Cordelia's desperate plea, 'Goneril, please, stop it, you're hurting me! Stop it, Goneril, stop it!' (scene 7, p. 224), is suggestive of abuse rather than of sororal affection. When Regan confronts Nanny about her stories, she connects the hair-brushing to Nanny's lies: 'I remember. You brushed our hair. […] You brushed our hair and you were lying' (scene 10, p. 227). The image of Cordelia twirling around in her skirt is also stereotypically idyllic, but acquires sinister connotations when Lear forces her to '[s]pin for Daddy'.

The 'Spin for Daddy' scene is also an instance of Cordelia's tendency to talk like a small child, to diminish herself, even when she is trying to show independence from her father: 'Cordelia not want to be Daddy's girl', she says, using a toddler's syntax. In the final scene, she has realised the dangers of this habit as well as where it stems from, and she confesses to Nanny: 'Ever since going downstairs and Daddy lifting me onto the table, I've talked like a child, used the words of a child. […] But I do have another voice' (scene 14, p. 232). This passage is reminiscent of 1 Corinthians 13:11: 'When I was a child, I spoke like a child'.[138] It may be inferred that Cordelia has found not only her adult voice, but her own principles as to the right way to feel and express love, the same principles that are to determine Shakespeare's Cordelia's actions when she is confronted with the love test at the beginning of *King Lear*. This connection is clearer if the above Bible chapter is considered in its entirety. In 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, the description of ideal Christian love is very close to Cordelia's ideal: 'Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant / or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; / it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. / It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things'. The love that should, according to the Bible, be avoided is the kind of love that Lear feels for his daughters and expects of them in return.

In *Love's Argument: Gender Relations in Shakespeare*, Marianne Novy observes that *King Lear* 'explores patriarchal behavior […] in the father', and that while many critics have remarked that Lear's 'initial lack of self-knowledge springs in part from the prerogatives of kingship', it 'has

138 *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 3rd ed. New Revised Standard Version. Ed. Michael D. Coogan (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

been less often observed that the play includes implicit criticism of the prerogatives of the father'.[139] She further claims that *King Lear* is concerned with aspects of the relationships between fathers and daughters that 'are also experienced by husband and wife in a patriarchal society, where the authority of fathers over their families, husbands over wives, and men in general over women are all related and analogous'.[140] Just like *King Lear*, *Lear's Daughters* points to the structures in patriarchy that are applicable to different situations and relations within a society or a family. As has been pointed out before, not only relationships between husbands and wives are relevant, but also between fathers and children. Girls are less valued than boys in patriarchal societies, not least for financial reasons. Goneril is acutely aware of this: 'It's our job. It's what we're here for. To marry and breed. […] Like dogs. Valuable merchandise' (scene 12, p. 229). After having had three daughters and more than one miscarriage, the queen is still pressed by Lear to try to have a son. Children are repeatedly referred to as 'investment', most noticeably when the Fool swallows a coin and gives birth to a doll (scene 10, p. 227). This disparaging attitude towards daughters might well occasion such resentment against the patriarchal figure as Lear's two eldest daughters display in *King Lear*. A difference between *King Lear* and *Lear's Daughters*, however, is that in *Lear's Daughters* Lear's patriarchal behaviour is presented as the reason for Goneril's and Regan's rebellion. This does not happen in *King Lear*, as Novy explains:

> Shakespeare gives [Goneril and Regan] no humanizing scruples like those provoked by Lady Macbeth's memory of her father. He does not allow them to point out wrongs done to them in the past as eloquently as Shylock does, or to question the fairness of their society as articulately as Edmund. If their attack on Lear can be seen as in part the consequence of his tyrannical patriarchy, they never try to explain it as an attack on an oppressor.[141]

139 Marianne Novy, *Love's Argument: Gender Relations in Shakespeare* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), p. 150. French, for example, writes, 'Cordelia, incapable of poetry and incapable of deceit, translates her feeling for her father directly into "masculine" language, claiming to love him in accordance with the bond between them. Although Lear should know how his favourite daughter feels about him, he takes her word for the thing itself, and banishes her disinherited. Lear identifies word and act. He is old and has been King since he was a boy: for him, statements have been tantamount to realities. What the King says, the court agrees with; what the King orders is performed'; p. 225.

140 Novy, *Love's Argument*, p. 151.

141 Ibid., p. 153.

The very things that Novy, in 1984, points out that Shakespeare does not do in *King Lear* are the things that are done in *Lear's Daughters* a couple of years later.

Fletcher and Novy state that in Shakespeare's time 'children began with a debt to their parents that they could never repay'.[142] Parents expected to be able to identify with their children, so that they could 'enjoy their children's youth as a kind of second youth of their own, and to take credit for their children's accomplishments'.[143] If, on the other hand, the child died, suffered, or did not live up to its parents' expectations, the identification would make this painful for the parent.[144] The sense of parental 'control' would, according to Fletcher and Novy, probably have been more important for fathers than for mothers, as the father was seen as the 'head of the family',[145] and 'the rebellion of a daughter' might have been seen as worse than a son's, 'since obedience was such an ideal for women'.[146] This partly explains the father Lear's outrage at his daughter Cordelia's refusal to please him in *King Lear*. He has lost control over her, which he, as the head of the family in a patriarchal society, should not have done, and she is disobedient, which she, as a woman, should not be. Because the father has such a strong sense of identification with his daughter, he feels this all the more acutely. Furthermore, Cordelia is indebted to Lear, simply because he is her parent. She has started her life with a debt of gratitude from which she will never escape. Lear will always be able to ask anything he chooses from her,[147] and she will not have the right to refuse, because no matter what happens she will always owe him. According to this view of parent-child relationships, this is her, and all children's, birth debt. Lear's daughters are commonly referred to as ungrateful. According to the traditional view, they should be grateful for having been born, but this interpretation is not altogether compatible with modern views on childrearing. *Lear's Daughters* poses the question, 'what have Goneril, Regan and Cordelia really got to be grateful for?' It counters the patriarchal view of parent-child relationships with alternative views, such as the child's right to parents and the concept of unconditional love.

142 Fletcher and Novy, p. 51.

143 Ibid.

144 This sounds remarkably similar to how parent-child relationships work in the present day.

145 Fletcher and Novy, p. 51.

146 Ibid., p. 62.

147 Within the bounds of propriety, of course. Also, her assurance that she loves her father 'according to [her] bond' should be a self-fulfilling realisation of her obligation towards him, but he does not recognise this.

As has previously been mentioned, the idea of childhood memories was the departure point when the WTG started their work on *Lear's Daughters*. Janys Chambers remembers how 'we talked about how we felt about our own fathers and mothers and sisters and brothers […] and we wrote it down. […] We were working in a huge rehearsal room, and I remember all the walls covered with stories about our childhood. It wouldn't stop coming'.[148] Chambers further relates that, partly because they realised that not everybody in the audience would be familiar with *King Lear*, and partly because 'it was [an] area of passionate interest to [them] all', the company decided to emphasise the parts of the story that had to do with 'ordinary human relationships, and particularly relationships within a family, to one's father, to one's mother, to one's sister', as this would feel relevant to everybody, regardless of their previous knowledge of Shakespeare.[149] It is clear that childhood memories played an essential part in the development of *Lear's Daughters*. Although Chambers never explicitly mentions childhood as a component of the play's message, there is a very strong emphasis on childhood when she talks about the company's working methods.

In the student production of *Lear's Daughters* that I directed, I presented a straightforwardly feminist interpretation of the play to the cast. But when, about two years after the production, I asked them about their memories of the rehearsal period and their own interpretations of the play, their answers were far more focused on childhood than on feminism. The following discussion will be based on a questionnaire that was answered by the students playing Goneril, Cordelia and the Nanny, and on an interview with the students playing Cordelia and the Nanny. The actors will be referred to by their characters' names in capital letters.[150]

The first question in the questionnaire was simply, 'What do you think *Lear's Daughters* is about?' GONERIL saw it as an explanation of why the

148 *Shakespeare: Text and Performance* [on CD].

149 Ibid.

150 Questionnaire, 4 February, 2013. Personal interview, 7 February, 2013. Unfortunately, the other three had moved away by then and were unable to take part. I sent the questionnaire to all five actors, but received only three replies. The response I did get is valuable enough to include, but it is a methodological weakness that I was not able to carry out this empirical study shortly after or even during the production, in which case I would have been able to procure answers from all five actors (and maybe also from some audience members), who would then have had the experience fresher in their memories. Quotations from the questionnaire answers and interview are in my translation from Swedish.

three girls develop as they do and how the pleasure the children take in pursuing their interests is 'destroyed as they grow up'. For CORDELIA, the play is about relationships between children, and between children and their parents. She particularly stressed 'jealousy' and birth order. NANNY's response was that the play is about children and growing up and shows the story from the children's perspective. Because there are no adults present, the characters do not have to act like 'well-behaved children' but can be themselves. The play presents the children's understanding of the adult world. NANNY and CORDELIA both wrote that in addition to the character they had played, they identified with the sister with whom they shared the position in the family's birth order (in NANNY's case the first-born, Goneril, and in CORDELIA's case the middle child, Regan). GONERIL identified with both Goneril and Regan, but did not specify herself as an eldest, middle or youngest child. CORDELIA added that in *King Lear* she could only identify with Cordelia, since Goneril and Regan 'are unsympathetically portrayed' in Shakespeare's play. All three agreed that Lear's two elder daughters are 'false', 'egoistical', 'hard' and 'evil' in *King Lear*, but that *Lear's Daughters* offers an adequate explanation of the reasons for this and makes it understandable.

When I asked open questions during the interview, such as 'How would you summarise *Lear's Daughters*?' and 'What are your associations to *King Lear*?',[151] both actors focused on the child's perspective and offered an abundance of ideas on the topic. They talked about 'sibling rivalry', 'absent parents', children with 'no contact with the adult world', poor relationships between parents and children, and how Lear's children are restricted in their movements and secluded from the outside world. NANNY, for example, remarked that 'since they don't have a lot of contact with their parents, they tend to compete for their attention when they do meet'. I tried to ask questions that would get them to talk about feminism, but they stayed with the subject of childhood and family dynamics. I then asked them explicitly to think about the play from a feminist perspective, and the conversation started to flow less easily. They agreed that *Lear's Daughters* is a feminist play and that it rehabilitates the female characters, whereas *King Lear* sees the women only in relation to men. They showed

151 Neither of the actors was familiar with *King Lear* prior to our production. NANNY read parts of the play and a plot summary before rehearsals began, and CORDELIA read the entire play during the rehearsal period. I also gave extracts from Shakespeare's play to the cast to read, and we incorporated some of the corresponding characters' speeches into a prologue in our production.

an understanding of this aspect of the play, but it was not their most spontaneous association. When I asked about the play's relevance in today's society, NANNY's immediate response was 'absent parents': in our society, she argued, many people work so much that, just like the king and queen in the play, they do not have time for their children.

When talking about *King Lear*, however, the interviewees did mention a couple of gender-oriented ideas: Lear thinks it is women's *raison d'être* to love: if his offspring had been boys rather than girls, they would have had to show how strong or skilled they were instead of being asked to express their love.[152] CORDELIA observed that in *King Lear*, Lear is presented as a victim, but *Lear's Daughters* turns this around and works as a chance to 'get back' at him. The actors agreed that Regan's and Goneril's development into Shakespeare's infamous hags is consistent with their equivalent girl characters in *Lear's Daughters* and what they are subjected to. They also saw search for identity as an important theme in *Lear's Daughters*. CORDELIA interpreted Regan in *Lear's Daughters* as self-destructive, as she does not seem to care about the consequences of her actions. NANNY added that Regan does not get the attention or love she needs from the adults around her, so she searches for it elsewhere. In our production, the student playing Regan decided to play her as being particularly close to her mother and not seeing herself as having a place in her father's affection, since she was neither the clever one (Goneril) nor the pretty one (Cordelia). If the adult Goneril and Regan have been reduced from the promising young girls they once were, Cordelia has, according to CORDELIA and NANNY, grown into an independent, strong woman in *King Lear*. In *Lear's Daughters*, she is childish; but in *King Lear* she is self-confident and has firm principles. Both student actors interpreted this as a favourable development. They speculated as to why Cordelia cannot declare her love for Lear in terms resembling those employed by her sisters, and unwittingly hinted at Nahum Tate's subplot where Cordelia is in love with Edgar. CORDELIA pointed out that the explanation offered by *Lear's Daughters* is that Cordelia cares so much about words that she chooses them very carefully and is on no account prepared to compromise or exaggerate her words. But this discussion also raised the question of whether Lear has somehow mistreated Cordelia.

152 This could possibly be seen as an anachronistic view: male characters in Renaissance drama often show no qualms about professing their love for one another.

CORDELIA saw her character's position as Lear's favourite daughter as central to her personality. She performs her spinning act to get attention, but it gets out of hand when he starts to demand it of her. CORDELIA speculated that Cordelia has probably reached puberty by this point, which makes her even more uncomfortable. I asked her if the spinning felt like abuse and she thought it did: it was physically disagreeable to spin around quickly throughout the dialogue, and she felt exposed doing something so silly in front of an audience – thus far, character and actor share the experience of discomfort and embarrassment. But CORDELIA also interpreted the event as a metaphor for sexual abuse. Even if she had not been quite clear in her own mind as to the extent and nature of the abuse at the time, she pointed out that once the idea has been planted it is hard not to think about it, so she had played the scene with the sexual allusions in mind. NANNY, on the other hand, did not think that the abuse is sexual, but that Lear is making fun of the fact that, as a child, Cordelia does not understand the double entendre. NANNY astutely remarked that ridiculing children and laughing at their ignorance in this way is a fairly common way of 'violating' children, often done without any form of sinister motive. In fact, master suppression techniques are often used against children, though they are not often recognised as such. In *Lear's Daughters*, there are several examples of Lear using these techniques on his daughters, notably objectifying, marginalising and ridiculing.

This line of thought leads to the issue of power and agency in relation to storytelling. The power over stories in literature has long been a predominantly male prerogative, as most canonical literary works through history have been written by men. During the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, women's 'hidden' stories have received an increasing amount of attention, not least through projects connected to feminist re-vision. However, it is still adults who have the power over stories in relation to children. It could be argued that children, as a minority group in society, are inadequately represented in canonical literature, perhaps especially in drama.[153] In *Lear's Daughters*, the child characters are empowered and given agency as they are given the space and time to tell their own stories. As Lear does not figure as a character in his own right, his story is silenced, and he be-

153 Most children's literature is of course about children, but it is almost always written by adults (as indeed is *Lear's Daughters*). However, drama for both children and adults, for obvious reasons, often features a large proportion of adult characters.

comes the object of the story rather than the subject. The Fool and the Nanny, however, are to a certain extent in command of the children's stories, in their respective capacities of narrator/stage-manager and the girls' primary adult authority figure. In this way, the children's stories are still controlled by their elders. It is never quite clear if the two servants are on the children's side or not, nor whether their stories are truthful. The power relations between adults and children are connected to the fact that children do not remember their births and early childhoods. Children are at a disadvantage because they are usually dependent on people who know things about them that they do not know themselves. They have to rely on adults' accounts of what happened to them and who they were during the first years of their lives, and there is always a risk that these accounts are not true. Nanny's stories are an example of this.

Lear's children, then, are confined to nursery stories in their search for the truth; but they are also physically confined to the nursery and secluded from other people and impressions. The king allows neither his daughters, nor his wife, nor the Nanny to leave the castle. As they grow older, Goneril and Regan start to talk of 'getting out': 'I have to get out of this place soon', Goneril says to Nanny (scene 10, p. 229), and Regan's first words after her abortion are, 'I'll get out of here soon' (scene 12, p. 230). Being locked up is often used as a metaphor for the oppression of women, but it could equally well apply to children. In real life, children are often literally locked up, for their own safety, in the sense that parents tend to lock the front door, without giving their children a set of keys, and tell them not to go out on their own, all of which means that children are not able to come and go as they please in the way adults are. Most adults would see this as a violation of their human rights, but children, for whom it is all they have ever known, take it for granted. Historically, this reasoning could also be applied to women: it has not always been regarded as respectable for a woman to go out on her own, and the concept of 'rape culture', a culture where rape is normalised to the extent that many women think twice before walking on their own in certain areas or after dark, could be applied to any country in the world today. In this way, women's movements are still restricted.

In plays such as *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline*, a man treats a woman badly because he mistakenly believes she has been unfaithful to him or does not love him. In the case of

King Lear, unlike the other plays, the man is not a husband but a father. Shakespeare's texts seem to imply that the man is only in the wrong provided that he is mistaken about the woman's actions or feelings. Only when it turns out that Desdemona, Hero, Hermione and Imogen are chaste, and when Lear finds out that Cordelia does love him after all, does the male character realise that he has wronged the woman. Feminist appropriations such as *Lear's Daughters* make the point that a man in such a situation would be wrong in his treatment of the woman regardless of her actions or feelings. A wife's infidelity does not justify her husband's killing her; a daughter's failure to love her father does not justify his disowning her. Where Shakespeare's texts raise these questions and make the audience engage with them, the appropriations offer a forceful answer to the questions posed. But in *King Lear* the crucial relationship is not only, perhaps not even primarily, between a man and a woman, but between a parent and a child. Lear's fundamental mistake is to demand unconditional love from his child and then to disown her when she does not meet his conditions. This may be seen as particularly inappropriate in a present-day context, where it is a prevalent view that the parent's love for the child should be unconditional.

Fletcher and Novy write about the 'lost' daughters in Shakespeare's plays, young women lost to their fathers through either death or marriage. Cordelia is special in that Lear loses her for the first time before she is married and subsequently killed, when she 'offends' him by 'emphasizing her autonomy and the potential limits of their relationship'.[154] Novy sees Cordelia's disobedience towards Lear in the light of his patriarchal status, and argues that 'Shakespeare's presentation of [Cordelia] shows sympathy for the woman who tries to keep her integrity in a patriarchal world. Refusing pretense as a means of survival, such women often try to withdraw from the coercive "mutuality" that patriarchy seems to demand'.[155] In choosing not to obey her father and place her relationship with him above all her other human relationships, it could be said that Cordelia rebels against patriarchal structures.[156] *Lear's Daughters* shows that there are parallels between men and women's power relations and the power relations

154 Fletcher and Novy, p. 56.

155 Novy, *Love's Argument*, p. 154.

156 In an early modern context, it could also be claimed that, by refusing his daughter a dowry, it is Lear who breaks the patriarchal contract, a contract which supposedly exists, among other things, to protect young women. None of the other men present supports Lear in his action: France and Kent both think he has acted unwisely and try to make him change his mind.

between adults and children in patriarchal societies. Patriarchal structures oppress both women and children, and girls are thus doubly exposed. It is therefore apposite to let an anti-patriarchal play be about young girls, and especially girls with such a patriarchal figure for a father. The love test in *King Lear* sets the scene for *Lear's Daughters*, a play that explores parent-child relationships, childhood and daughterhood. *Lear's Daughters* problematises Cordelia's daughterhood in a literal sense when asking the question posed by Nanny's soliloquy: is Cordelia in fact Lear's daughter?

*

King Lear is to a large extent about parents and children, and the fact that the appropriations are prequels enables them to explore childhood. *Seven Lears* begins with Lear as a child; but his own children are not given much focus and do not constitute mimetically realistic depictions of children – especially not Goneril and Regan, who speak before they are even conceived. Tasca's *Prince Lear* contains only Lear's three daughters, but their ages are not clear; they are perhaps very young women rather than children. In *Lear's Daughters*, however, childhood is central to the plot and the themes of the play.

Both incest and dementia have recently been popular perspectives through which to see *King Lear*, both in criticism and in performance. Incest between Lear and Cordelia is also implied in *Lear's Daughters*, but dementia is not presented as a factor in any of the appropriations. All four appropriations introduce the mother, but she is not a main character in any of them. Both *Seven Lears* and *Lear's Daughters* suggest that Lear is not Cordelia's biological father. It is interesting in this context to note Cordelia's similarities to Cinderella, who is rejected by her stepparent and disfavoured because she, unlike her two elder sisters, is not the wicked stepmother's own daughter.

King Lear blames the father for his own tragedy, but also to some extent for his daughters'. The idea that Goneril and Regan drive their father mad and are responsible for the tragedy of the play as a whole is often reproduced in criticism and performance. But Goneril and Regan are not held to be as responsible for what goes wrong by Shakespeare's text as conventional readings would imply. *Lear's Daughters* blames the father even more than Shakespeare's play does; but it is a reaction to the conventional reading more than it is a reaction to Shakespeare's text. In this version, the

implied reason that the love test turns out badly is that Lear has abused his children. Cordelia, who has always humoured her father by talking to him in a little girl's voice, answers as she does because she loves words and has promised herself to start to choose the right words rather than the words her father wants to hear. Goneril reacts the way she does because she is her 'father's daughter', and Regan, emotionally scarred and disillusioned after Goneril's reaction to her pregnancy, feels that she has nothing left to lose. *Lear's Daughters* is a deeply moral play, whereas *Seven Lears* is in a sense amoral; but it can still be said that *Seven Lears* implicitly blames the norms to which leaders of nations are expected to conform, as well as indirectly blaming Lear himself. Barker's Lear lives in a society which does not encourage goodness; but the choice to reject goodness, which his wife tries to discourage, is ultimately his own. Both Tasca's and Pontac's *Prince Lear* plays blame Goneril: in Pontac's play, the wicked Goneril tricks Lear and Cordelia; but in Tasca's play, Goneril is partly a victim of unfortunate circumstances and laws which disfavour women.

To conclude, a comparison of these appropriations with Shakespeare's *King Lear* and the anonymous play *King Leir* shows that Shakespeare did with *Leir* what the WTG did with *Lear*: he appropriated a well-known play in a manner which extended more in the way of potential sympathy to the female characters, and which transferred some of the responsibility for the tragic events from the women in the play to its patriarchal male characters.

3.
Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's Missing Child
'What "really" happened?'

In Penny Woolcock's 1997 television adaptation *Macbeth on the Estate*, the first scene of Act III takes place during a karaoke session in a local bar.[1] While Macbeth and Banquo are playing poker and alternating their respective soliloquies in voice-over, Lady Macduff and Lady Macbeth – the latter bouncing the Macduffs' toddler on her hip – are singing the 1970s disco anthem 'I will survive'. Quite apart from the irony of this choice of song, the Shakespeare-familiar viewer's likely reaction ('No you won't'), and the implications for the subsequent plot development of the suggestion that the Ladies Macbeth and Macduff are, as in this version, close friends, this scene foreshadows two of the main innovations in theatrical adaptations of *Macbeth* in the early twenty-first century: the connection between Lady Macbeth and the Macduff children, and the possibility that Lady Macbeth will indeed survive.

However, while *Macbeth on the Estate* is an updated version of Shakespeare's story, the tendency in recent theatrical appropriations of *Macbeth* is to root the story firmly in history – as it is put in the introduction to David Calcutt's *Lady Macbeth*, to '[move] away from Shakespeare's Macbeth and [take] us back towards the historical characters of 1040'.[2] The three *Macbeth* appropriations I will discuss – John Cargill Thompson's *Macbeth Speaks* (1984; 1991; 1997), David Calcutt's *Lady Macbeth* (2005)

1 *Macbeth on the Estate* was a follow-up of the documentary *Shakespeare on the Estate* (1994), also directed by Woolcock, in which Michael Bogdanov rehearses scenes from Shakespeare with inhabitants of an inner-city housing estate in Birmingham. Filmed on the Ladywood Estate and featuring a mixture of professional and amateur actors, *Macbeth on the Estate* uses Shakespeare's text to explore power struggles within a gang in a 1990s 'ghetto' environment, where the Weird Sisters are three 'weird', maladjusted children.

2 David Calcutt, *Lady Macbeth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 11.

and David Greig's *Dunsinane* (2010) – are all based on research about the historical people and facts behind Shakespeare's characters, using historical sources as jumping-off points for their own, sometimes highly imaginative, speculations about Shakespeare's play. The question these appropriations take as their starting-point is 'What "really" happened?', with particular reference to Lady Macbeth and her child.

'What's done cannot be undone': Re-Writing History in *Macbeth* and Its Appropriations

The historical Macbeth was king of Moray between 1032 and 1057; for the last seventeen years of that period he was also king of Alba, or Scotland. According to the *Oxford Companion to British History*, 'Macbeth's reputation as a tyrannous usurper is […] anachronistic', but 'his career is none the less the stuff of drama'.[3] There was an internal feud in Macbeth's family, which led to the death of his father, Findlaech. Macbeth took revenge by killing his cousin GilleComgáin, whose widow he married, according to the *Oxford Companion to British History* 'perhaps in an attempt at reconciliation, but probably also because she belonged to the Scottish royal kindred'. The historical Lady Macbeth was called Gruoch, sometimes spelt Gruach. She was the daughter of Boite, sometimes spelt Beodhe, and the granddaughter of Kenneth, sometimes spelt Cináed, III of Scotland.[4] GilleComagáin and Gruoch had a son, Lulach, who was brought up by Macbeth.[5] Around the time Macbeth lived, no other king reigned in Scotland for more than a matter of months; it can therefore be inferred that Macbeth was an able and well-liked ruler. His predecessor, Duncan I, who

3 'Macbeth', in *Oxford Companion to British History* (Oxford University Press, current online version 2009) <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199567638.001.0001/acref-9780199567638-e-2698?rskey=TxnOcw&result=12> [accessed 19 August 2014].

4 'Gruoch', in *Kings and Queens of Britain* (Oxford University Press, current online version 2009) <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199559220.001.0001/acref-9780199559220-e-180?rskey=3TO539&result=1 > [accessed 19 August 2014].

5 'Lulach', in *Kings and Queens of Britain* (Oxford University Press, current online version 2009) <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199559220.001.0001/acref-9780199559220-e-182?rskey=1egzIH&result=1> [accessed 19 August 2014]. See also Geoffrey Bullough, 'Introduction' to *Macbeth*, in Geoffrey Bullough (ed.), *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. VII (Major Tragedies: *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*) (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), p. 433.

was in his twenties, was killed in battle, possibly by Macbeth.[6] In 1057, Macbeth was killed in the battle of Lumphanan by Duncan's son, Malcolm Canmore. According to the *Oxford Companion to British History*, it is possible that Malcolm was in collusion with Lulach, who succeeded Macbeth but was also killed within a few months.

Shakespeare's main source for *Macbeth* is Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*. Other probable sources are George Buchanan's *Rerum Scoticarum Historia* and John Leslie's *De Origine, Moribus, et Rebus Gestis Scotorum*.[7] In many respects Shakespeare's story is very close to Holinshed. I.3, for instance, where Macbeth and Banquo meet the Weird Sisters, is closely based on Holinshed's text:

> It fortuned as Makbeth and Banquho iournied towards Fores, […] they went sporting by the waie togither without other companie, […] when suddenlie in the middest of a laund there met them thrée women in strange and wild apparell, resembling creatures of elder world, whome when they attentiuelie beheld, woondering much at the sight, the first of them spake and said; 'All haile Makbeth, thane of Glammis' (for he had latelie entered into that dignitie and office by the death of his father Sinell.) [*sic*] The second of them said; 'Haile Makbeth thane of Cawder.' But the third said; 'All haile Makbeth that héerafter shalt be king of Scotland.'
>
> Then Banquho; 'What manner of women (saith he) are you, that séeme so little fauourable vnto me, whereas to my fellow heere, besides high offices, ye assigne also the kingdome, appointing foorth nothing for me at all?' 'Yes (saith the first of them) we promise greater benefits vnto thée, than vnto him, for he shall reigne in déed, but with an vnluckie end: neither shall he leaue anie issue behind him to succéed in his place, where contrarilie thou in déed shalt not reigne at all, but of thée those shall be borne which shall gouerne the Scotish kingdome by long order of continuall descent.' Herewith the foresaid women vanished immediatlie out of their sight.[8]

6 'Duncan I, in *Oxford Companion to British History* (Oxford University Press, current online version 2009) <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199567638.001.0001/acref-9780199567638-e-1417> [accessed 19 August 2014].

7 See Bullough, vol. VII; R. Holinshed, 'THE CHRONICLES OF ENGLAND, SCOTLANDE [*sic*], AND IRELAND (1587 edn.), in Bullough, vol. VII, pp. 478-508; George Buchanan, 'From RERUM SCOTICARUM HISTORIA' (1582), trans. T. Page, in Bullough, vol. VII, pp. 509-17; John Leslie (1578), trans. Geoffrey Bullough, in Bullough, vol. VII, pp. 517-520.

8 Raphael Holinshed, *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, vol. V (Scotland) (London: 1808; New York: AMS Press, 1965), p. 268.

The most consequential differences from Shakespeare's story are these: Duncane and Makbeth are first cousins (of the same generation);[9] Duncane is not a strong enough leader to be a good king; Makbeth plans the murder in collusion with Banquho and some other friends; the murder does not take place at Makbeth's house; Makbeth is at first an exemplary king and only after a time becomes a tyrant; and Makbeth's wife has virtually no part in the story. It is noteworthy that Macbeth's wife is not named by either Holinshed or Shakespeare; she is never actually called 'Lady Macbeth' in either text. Holinshed only mentions Lady Macbeth in one single sentence: 'his wife lay sore vpon him to attempt the thing, as she that was verie ambitious, burning in vnquenchable desire to beare the name of a quéene'.[10] Nor does either Holinshed or Shakespeare mention Macbeth's stepson. Buchanan and Leslie follow the substance of Holinshed's account of Macbeth's reign. All three sources portray him as disposed to cruelty; none of them pays much attention to his wife or mentions any children.

The actual circumstances regarding the murder of Duncan in Shakespeare's play are taken from another part of Holinshed's history of Scotland: Donwald's murder of King Duff, which takes place before Duncan becomes king.[11] Donwald wants the king to pardon some of his friends and relatives who have been involved in a rebellion, but the king refuses. Don-

9 Shakespeare does not specify how they are related, but Duncan is always played as considerably older than Macbeth, and Lady Macbeth refers to him as 'the old man'. In Shakespeare Duncan's sons seem to be young adults, but in Holinshed Malcolm Canmore is not yet old enough to succeed his father at the time of the murder, which is in the sixth year of his reign. Bullough notes that 'Duncan was only young' and that his sons, 'Malcolm Canmore ('Bighead') and Donald Bane ('the fair')', 'must have been young children' (pp. 432, 433). In *Macbeth*, Duncan reminds Lady Macbeth of her father, which may be an indication that he is a full generation older than she is (but it could equally well be an old memory of her father – we do not know if Lady Macbeth's father has lived to old age, nor when she last saw him). It could also be that Lady Macbeth is much younger than her husband, in which case she could refer to Duncan as 'old' even if he and Macbeth are more or less the same age. In the *Macbeth* production that I co-directed, Duncan and the Macbeths were played as being all of the same generation, and it was implied that our unconventionally unpleasant Duncan thought himself irresistible to women and expected the thanes' wives to be at his command, at least if they wanted him to further their husbands' careers. This gave a new, sinister meaning to 'Herein I teach you / How you shall bid God yield us for your pains, /And thank us for your trouble', 'We are your guest tonight' and 'we love him highly, / And shall continue our graces towards him', as well as Lady Macbeth's reply, 'Your servants ever, / Have theirs, themselves, and what is theirs in count, / To make their audit at your highness' pleasure, / Still to return your own' (I.6.11-30). Lady Macbeth seemed very uncomfortable throughout this scene, and it was clear that she had additional reasons for wanting to get rid of the king. Macbeth, on the other hand, had never seen this side of Duncan but had a favourable opinion of him.

10 Holinshed, p. 269.

11 This story also has witches practising image magic on King Duff.

wald cannot forget his anger at this, and when he tells his wife about it she comes up with a plan to murder King Duff:

> [S]he as one that bare no lesse malice in hir heart towards the king, for the like cause on hir behalfe, than hir husband did for his friends, counselled him (sith the king oftentimes vsed to lodge in his house without anie gard about him, other than the garrison of the castell, which was wholie at his commandement) to make him awaie, and shewed him the meanes wherby he might soonest accomplish it.
>
> Donwald thus being the more kindled in wrath by the words of his wife, determined to follow hir aduise in the execution of so heinous an act.[12]

Donwald and his wife give the king's chamberlains plenty of food and wine, which causes them to fall asleep 'so fast, that a man might haue remooued the chamber ouer them, sooner than to haue awaked them out of their droonken sleepe'. Donwald 'though he abhorred the act greatlie in heart, yet through instigation of his wife' bribes four servants to cut the king's throat and bury him 'about two miles distant from the castell', because of the myth that a corpse would start to bleed in the presence of its murderer.[13] When the king's bed is discovered empty and covered in blood, Donwald acts as if he knew nothing about it:

> He with the watch ran thither, as though he had knowne nothing of he matter, and breaking into the chamber, and finding cakes of bloud in the bed, and on the floore about the sides of it, he foothwith slue the chamberleins, as guiltie of that heinous murther, and then like a mad man running to and fro, he ransacked euerie corner within the castell [.][14]

Apart from the murder motive and the fact that Macbeth kills the king himself and does not remove his body afterwards, this series of events bears a strong resemblance to those in *Macbeth*.

But it is not only the combination of two different stories from Holinshed that removes Shakespeare's Macbeth from his historical counterpart. Holinshed's version of the story could easily be mistaken for a more or less accurate description of historical events, but in fact it is just as fictionalised

12 Holinshed, p. 234.

13 It is strange that this belief is not a factor in *Macbeth*, where blood is such an important symbol. Cf. *Richard III*.

14 Holinshed, p. 235.

as Shakespeare's. Indeed, there is a much greater discrepancy between the historical events and Holinshed than between Holinshed and Shakespeare. As Macbeth was defeated, it was in the interest of historians to depict him as a tyrant, and chroniclers invented the character of Banquo to justify the Stuarts' claim to the English throne. According to Bullough,

> Fleance was said to have fled to Wales where he seduced the daughter of King Griffyth. She bore a son Walter, whose valour took him to Scotland. There he behaved so doughtily that he was made Steward of Scotland. His line took that name. The link with the Welsh royal house also provided an Arthurian flavour.[15]

Quoting St. Berchan, who praised Macbeth with the words 'Plenteous was Alban east and west, / During the reign of the fierce red one', Bullough argues that

> Macbeth, if a murderer, was a good king; but Malcolm's descendants and their court chroniclers would hardly think him so. Quite soon therefore he was treated as a villain, and since his good laws could not be ignored, he was said to have reigned well for ten years and then become a tyrant.[16]

The idea that Malcolm's narrative is not necessarily the 'true' story is in evidence in Malcolm's final speech in Shakespeare's play, where his description of the 'butcher and his fiend-like Queen' does not quite agree with the two characters the audience has followed throughout the play.

In modern times, several writers have shown a fascination with the historical person behind Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth character. As early as 1921, Gordon Bottomley wrote a verse drama called *Gruach*, and in more recent years a number of historical novels about Gruoch have been published. Despite this, the most famous theatrical appropriations of *Macbeth* – Barbara Garson's *Macbird!* (1966), Eugène Ionesco's *Macbett* (1972), Welcome Msomi's *uMabatha* (1972) and Tom Stoppard's *Cahoot's Macbeth* (1979) – have not had a historical perspective.[17] Towards the end of the

15 Bullough, p. 434, n. 1.

16 Ibid., p. 433.

17 *MacBird!* is a political satire on the murder of John F. Kennedy; *Macbett* is an absurdist farce about the destructiveness of power; *uMabatha* is a translation of Shakespeare's story into Zulu culture; *Cahoot's Macbeth*, the companion piece of Stoppard's *Dogg's Hamlet*, was inspired by the Czech playwright Pavel Kohout's pared-down 'Living-Room' version of Shakespeare's play from the late 1970s, designed to be performed in private homes by a small company of Czech actors who were for political reasons not allowed by the government to work in the theatre. *Cahoot's Macbeth* and *Dogg's Hamlet* both present shortened versions of Shakespeare's plays performed by native speakers

twentieth century, however, the historical dimension reappeared on stage with *Macbeth Speaks*.

The Scottish playwright John Cargill Thompson specialised in writing one-person plays. He wrote the first version of *Macbeth Speaks*, 'Macbeth: the Alternative Version', in 1984; but it was not performed until 1991, when it appeared as *Macbeth Speaks* at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. In 1995, the text was revised for publication, and in 1997 yet another version was published, under the title *Macbeth Speaks 1997*. Gerard M. Berkowitz, who saw the play in Edinburgh in 1991, writes that it is 'little more than a lecture by the historical Macbeth, wittily and convincingly explaining the errors and distortions Shakespeare inherited from his sources and those he added himself'.[18] This is an accurate description of the 1991 version of the play; but in the revised version *Macbeth Speaks 1997*, a new opening scene has been added, which engages with Shakespeare's play theatrically and sets up the audience's expectations in a certain way only to thwart them moments later.

The beginning of the 1997 version, unlike the earlier versions, is identical with the beginning of Shakespeare's play. A stage direction says that '[t]he play should be set and designed as for a production of Shakespeare's "Macbeth"', and the opening sequence is three 'witches' performing I.1.1-7, leading the audience to expect a play close to *Macbeth* in style. But as the witches then exit, Macbeth enters dressed in 'a simple monkish robe', and, surprisingly, tries to hand out stones to the audience. (This marks the beginning of the earlier version of *Macbeth Speaks*.) He then laughingly suggests that it is because of his 'bad reputation' that no one will accept his offer of a stone.[19] This Macbeth speaks modern English, his tone is mostly ironic, and , unlike Shakespeare's Macbeth, he is quite jovial. Throughout the play, Macbeth addresses the audience, creating a metatheatrical effect. Right from the start, he is obviously conscious of what he perceives as the

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of the fictional language Dogg, a language whose words sound like common English words but have different meanings from the ones they have in English. Barbara Garson, *Macbird!* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, & Ringwood, Victoria, 1967); Eugène Ionesco, *Macbett* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1972); Welcome Msomi, 'uMabatha', in *Adaptations of Shakespeare: A Critical Anthology of Plays From the Seventeenth Century to the Present*, ed. Fischlin and Fortier (London: Routledge, 2009), pp 168-87; Tom Stoppard, 'Dogg's Hamlet, Cahoot's Macbeth', in *Plays One* (London & Boston: Faber and Faber, 1996), pp. 139-211.

18 Gerald M. Berkowitz, 'Shakespeare at the Edinburgh Festival, 1991', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 43:2 (1992), 227-32.

19 John Cargill Thompson, 'Macbeth Speaks 1997', in *Macbeth Speaks 1997 / A Woman of Some Importance / Hello, Juno Speaking* (Edinburgh: Diehard, 1997), p. 1. Subsequent references will be to this edition (unless otherwise stated) and given parenthetically in the text.

audience's bewilderment at the discrepancy between his appearance and words and the image of Macbeth they are used to from Shakespeare's play: 'Macbeth has become a tradition… Come on, disappoint a tradition and anything can happen… oh yes, disappoint people in their expectations and what's left, eh?' (3). At the end of the play, he returns to this idea: 'Remember what I said about disappoint a tradition and nothing is left but fear and superstition' (21). He then asks the audience '[w]hich is the true tradition' – Shakespeare's play or himself, the historical Macbeth – perhaps suggesting that it is suppressing the truth about Scotland by reinventing history that has led to 'fear and superstition'.[20]

Macbeth sets out to persuade the audience of the superiority of Medieval Scotland (particularly over Medieval England and Rome, but perhaps also over modern Britain), as well as of his own right to the throne and the excellence of his reign, which he describes as '[t]wenty-three years of peace and prosperity' (18). He stresses that he was *elected* king – 'I did not succeed because I was someone's son… or because I killed someone's son… I didn't oppress, rape or interfere with people's sheep… I was elected to my place by men and women, ay women' (6) – but also that he descends from the High King MacAlpine, and therefore has a blood claim to the throne of Scotland (10). He furthermore denies any involvement in Duncan's death:

> Sorry, there is no mystery and no murder. Prince Duncan was killed by the Raven Feeder [Thorfinn, Macbeth's cousin, or, as some historians believe, his half-brother] in a rather scrappy sea battle off the coast of Fife. I wasn't within a hundred miles of the place. I get sea sick. I'd just have got in the way. (16)

In *Macbeth Speaks*, Macbeth's predecessor had wanted to be succeeded by Duncan, but Macbeth was elected instead ('We Scots don't like people who take elections for granted' [16]). To rebel with the law on his side, Duncan then invades England, claiming to be the king of Scotland. His son, Malcolm, is captured by the English, because 'as far as they are concerned Kings are succeeded by their eldest sons… They honestly believe they have captured the next King of Scots' (17). And, as Malcolm grows up in England, he grows to believe that he is the rightful heir to the Scottish throne ('They take their titles so terribly seriously' [17]). It is Malcolm, therefore, not Macbeth, who usurps the throne, and it is Malcolm, not Macduff, who kills

20 Unquestionably, there is a good deal of fear and superstition associated with *Macbeth*, not least in the theatre.

Macbeth. 'Poor Shakespeare', says Macbeth, 'he never really did understand why it was so important that I should be killed by Macduff and not Malcolm… to him it was just a name in the chronicles' (9). According to this Macbeth, the royal name of Macduff gives credibility to Macbeth's opposers.

In some respects, Cargill Thompson gives a more idealised image of Macbeth's life than what is suggested by contemporary historical research. Cargill Thompson's Macbeth loves his wife and talks of his marriage as particularly happy; but the historical Macbeth appears to have married Gruoch under less than idyllic circumstances, and probably out of political motives. In the play, he is also presented as being on very good terms with his stepson, while it is suggested in the *Oxford Companion to British History* that the historical Lulach may have conspired with Malcolm to kill Macbeth.[21] Like Cargill Thompson's Macbeth, the historical Macbeth apparently did not murder Duncan. He *was* a killer, but in the society he lived in he was no worse than anyone else in his position; in fact, he was probably not as bad as most. It seems to be true that the country was remarkably stable and peaceful during his reign. Most of the aspects of the play that could be considered to contradict history are not verifiable facts. Maybe Macbeth and Gruoch really did love each other, regardless of how their marriage came about, and maybe Macbeth had a happy family life and a good rapport with his stepson, regardless of later events. It may even be that Lulach had no hand in Macbeth's death.[22] *Macbeth Speaks* is a fictional lecture in which Macbeth tells what he calls the 'true story' and discards Shakespeare's version as lies. In a way, it can be seen as rather naïve in its insistence that historically verifiable facts that contradict Shakespeare's story on some level make *Macbeth* invalid. But it also encourages the audience to think more generally about history writing, fiction and adaptation: what is the 'true' version of any story? This can be connected to the poststructuralist tendency to question absolute truth.

In David Calcutt's *Lady Macbeth,* Gruach's Pictish origin is central. She is princess of an oppressed people in a country occupied by the Scots, who

21 'Macbeth', in *Oxford Companion to British History* (Oxford University Press, current online version 2009) <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199567638.001.0001/acref-9780199567638-e-2698?rskey=TxnOcw&result=12> [accessed 19 August 2014].

22 Not everything else seems to correspond to historical events as they are now believed to have occurred either, for example the circumstances of Duncan's death. Without knowing what sources Cargill Thompson consulted when writing his play, it is hard to say whether this is intentional. If he invented things of his own, as Shakespeare did, then the whole point of the play as presented by Macbeth (to discard Shakespeare's 'false' version and present the 'true' one) is severely undermined.

do not recognise her position. When her father, Beoedhe, is banished by King Malcolm and ordered by Malcolm's nephew Duncan to be blinded by soldiers,[23] Malcolm forces Gruach to marry Gillacomgain, his appointed heir, and in this way appropriates the land owned by Beoedhe. Gruach's response gives an indication as to why it will later be so important to her to be queen: 'Do you call this judgement? Where there's judgement, there's justice to be found, and I see no justice here. Only cruel vengeance, tyranny and persecution! If I had the power –'. She is interrupted by her father: 'You have none. Only that which you derive from your husband. […] Our people's time is past. You are all that remains. Accept what must be, and live, that some memory of them shall live in you'.[24] After her father's death, Gruach lives for the possibility to take revenge on those who caused her father's death, including Duncan: 'This Duncan must die. If not, then my father's death goes unavenged' (scene 17, p. 78). She is visited by Beoedhe's ghost, who says that his 'spirit has no peace' and encourages her to avenge him.[25] In this appropriation, then, Lady Macbeth's motive for instigating the murder of Duncan is to avenge her father. Macbeth becoming king is a by-product, but a welcome one, since it means that, with Lady Macbeth as queen, Pictish royalty will once more have power over Scotland, and maybe she will be able to implement the 'justice' that she has not seen under the rule of the Scots. The idea that Lady Macbeth has experienced political oppression gives her hunger for power a certain social pathos as well as making it comprehensible.

Calcutt chooses to introduce the historical Gruoch's father and son, but has changed the son's destiny and introduces the purely fictional idea that he is sent away while still an infant in an attempt to save his life when Macbeth comes to kill his father, Gruoch's first husband. Calcutt has also kept Lady Macduff, and her husband is mentioned, although he does not actually appear in the play. Macduff is a character from Shakespeare's sources, but he is not a historical person. The inclusion of him, therefore, removes the story even further from historical events.

Like *Lady Macbeth*, David Greig's *Dunsinane* is set against the backdrop of medieval Scottish politics, but it also has connections to more recent historical events. Most reviews of the 2010 production mentioned the par-

23 Cf. Gloucester in *King Lear*.

24 David Calcutt, *Lady Macbeth* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), scene 7, p. 40. Subsequent references will be to this edition and given parenthetically in the text.

25 Cf. the ghost in *Hamlet*.

allels to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.[26] This was no coincidence. Greig had noticed that shortly after the invasion of Iraq in 2003 many new productions of *Macbeth* appeared, and he felt there was a general preoccupation with 'the idea of the overthrow of a tyrant'. He was aware that Macbeth ruled for nearly twenty years at a time when 'kings were changing every […] six months since they all killed each other' and that Macbeth must therefore have been 'rather a good king'. This made Greig interested in looking at the political climate of eleventh-century Scotland through the parallels with the current situations in Iraq and Afghanistan, asking the question 'Is it possible that in trying to create peace you end up creating more war?'.[27] Roxana Silbert, who directed the original production of *Dunsinane*, says that it is 'very much a play about how an occupying force, who has the best intentions in the world, is trying to unite a country whose political systems are totally adverse to the idea of English democracy'.[28] However, the connection to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan was not indicated visually in the 2010 production. Rather, the Scottishness of the play was emphasised. The characters spoke in Scottish or English accents, and a recording of a performance at the Hampstead Theatre reveals that references to Scotland, such as its being cold and wet, received audience laughs. By drawing parallels between the American-British involvement in the situations in Iraq and Afghanistan and the English occupation of Scotland, the play can be seen as criticising both – as well as, by extension, the English dominance in the United Kingdom today.

Unlike David Calcutt, both John Cargill Thompson and David Greig are Scottish writers, and an undercurrent of Scottish nationalism is clearly discernible in their work. These two plays deal with the relationship between Scotland and England and raise the idea that the English do not properly understand Scotland and its internal goings-on. In *Macbeth Speaks*, Macbeth claims that an English writer has misrepresented Scottish historical people and events, and that English and global audiences have blindly accepted the English version. In *Dunsinane*, Siward and his conquering forces fail to understand the Scottish political system and culture, and they make assumptions about how societies work that turn out not to

26 *Theatre Record* Jan-June 2010, pp. 166-68.

27 David Greig, interview, The Royal Shakespeare Company <http://youtu.be/lZsAyyKuRzQ> [accessed 20 August 2014].

28 Roxana Silbert, interview, National Theatre of Scotland <http://youtu.be/TLq3lXsHDQs> [accessed 20 August 2014].

be applicable to Scotland. In *Lady Macbeth*, on the other hand, the political conflicts presented are between different Scottish tribes, and therefore there is no direct parallel to the idea of English discrimination against present-day Scotland.

In the case of *Macbeth*, an important source of the 'appropriative impulse' seems to be the discrepancy between the historical facts and Shakespeare's representation. However, *Macbeth* is not an appropriation of the historical events, but an appropriation of extracts from Holinshed's, largely fictional, chronicles. Even though the chronicles are history writing and the modern appropriations are fictional, these appropriations are more accurate in their historical detail than Holinshed. When it comes to the possibility of modifying the audience's conception of Shakespeare's play, the appropriations may be considered by the audience to have some legitimacy because they have some basis in true events. Therefore, the appropriations may influence the audience more than an appropriation that is based solely on the author's imagination.

'How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me': The Missing Child

When L. C. Knights presented his paper 'How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?' in 1932, his aim was to explain that such futile questions have no place in literary criticism, with A. C. Bradley as his main target. The phrase 'How many children had Lady Macbeth?' has since come to be seen as the epitome of the disdain in which literary criticism generally holds research that presupposes that fictional characters are people with lives outside the text in which they figure, exemplified by Bradley's Shakespeare criticism. But as John Britton points out, Bradley never actually asked that particular question.[29] What Bradley himself says on the subject is that '[w]hether Macbeth had children or (as seems usually to be supposed) had none, is quite immaterial', and that

> Lady Macbeth's child (I. vii. 54) may be alive or may be dead. It may even be, or have been, her child by a former husband; though if Shakespeare had followed history in making Macbeth marry a widow (as some writers gravely assume) he

29 John Britton, 'A. C. Bradley and Those Children of Lady Macbeth', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 12:3, 1961, 349-51 (p. 349).

> would probably have told us so. It may be that Macbeth had many children or that he had none. We cannot say, and it does not concern the play. [30]

Britton agrees with both Bradley and Knights that it would have been 'fool[ish]' to give the question 'serious consideration'.[31] Not all critics, however, agreed that children were insignificant to the interpretation of *Macbeth*: in his essay 'The Naked Babe and the Cloak of Manliness', Cleanth Brooks describes the 'babe' as 'perhaps the most powerful symbol in the tragedy'.[32] But, as has been remarked by Carol Chillington Rutter, Brooks does not consider the implications of the child imagery for the play in performance.[33] During most of the twentieth century, then, there was a firmly established tradition among Shakespeare scholars of seeing it as of no importance for the play how many children Lady Macbeth had or to interpret her reference to her baby as anything other than a metaphor. In the essay 'How Many Children Did She Have?' from 2000, however, Michael D. Bristol reads Lady Macbeth as a bereaved mother and argues for the usefulness of considering the question of her missing child, as part of explaining a theoretical model for how readers use make-belief to make sense of fiction.[34]

But for one person, of course, the question is of especially great importance: the actress playing Lady Macbeth. As Harriet Walter puts it, 'One footnote I read dismissed the question of Lady Macbeth's child or childrenas "unprofitable". That editor did not have to play the part.'[35] Inventing

30 A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on* Hamlet, Othello, King Lear *and* Macbeth, 2nd ed. (London & New York: Macmillan, 1905), pp. 488-89.

31 Britton, 349. Cf. Eckerman: 'Whether this [that Lady Macbeth has "given suck"] be true or not does not appear; but the lady says it, and she must say it, in order to give emphasis to her speech', *Conversations* 18 April 1927, quoted in Kenneth Muir (ed.), *Macbeth*, p. 42, n. 54.

32 Cleanth Brooks, 'The Naked Babe and the Cloak of Manliness', in *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1947), p. 39. According to Brooks, the children symbolise 'the future which Macbeth would control and cannot control', 'all those enlarging purposes which make life meaningful' and 'all those emotional and – to Lady Macbeth – irrational ties which make man more than a machine – which render him human', pp. 45-46.

33 Carol Chillington Rutter, *Shakespeare and Child's Play: Performing Lost Boys on Stage and Screen* (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 170.

34 Michael D. Bristol, 'How Many Children Did She Have?', in *Philosophical Shakespeares*, ed. John. J. Joughin (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 18-33.

35 Harriet Walter, *Actors on Shakespeare:* Macbeth (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), pp. 27-28. The editor in question is Kenneth Muir, *Macbeth* (London & New York: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 1984), p. 42, n. 54. Cf. Jan Kott, who claims that the Macbeths 'are sexually obsessed with each other, and yet have suffered a great erotic defeat. But this is not the most important factor in the interpretation of the tragedy, although it may be decisive for the interpretation of their parts by the two principal actors'; *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, trans. Boleslaw Taborski (London: Methuen, 1965), p. 93.

a certain amount of backstory for characters is a matter of course in today's Stanislavski-influenced theatre, and it is a kind of trope among actors that 'depth' and subtext are inherently desirable. It should not be surprising to anyone that actors in productions of *Macbeth*, as in productions of any play, feel the need to answer such a fundamental question as who their characters' closest family members are and whether they are alive or dead. But the question of the Macbeths' offspring is more than standard preparation work. Lady Macbeth's reference to her child – whether alive or dead, actual, potential or imagined – occurs at a pivotal moment and is arguably instrumental in changing the course of the plot. The answer to Knights's question has the potential to inform both the individual performances of the two leading actors and the overall vision of the production. Indeed, as Rutter points out, 'How many children had Lady Macbeth?' has, ironically, become '*the* question actors [want] answered'.[36]

'I have given suck, and know / How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me', says Lady Macbeth to her husband.[37] So where is that child? Shakespeare's famous ambiguity on the matter of the Macbeths' children consists in the apparent contradiction that, though Lady Macbeth talks of having breastfed a baby, Macduff says in response to Malcolm's suggestion that they should be avenged on Macbeth, 'He has no children' (IV.3.219). There are more ways than one to interpret this line, however. It could refer to Macbeth, meaning that, as Macbeth has no children for Macduff to kill, there is no appropriate revenge, or possibly that Macbeth would have shown more empathy if he had had children of his own. But it could equally well refer to Malcolm, who if he had had children would not be so unfeeling and naïve as to expect Macduff to recover from the shock and

36 Rutter, *Shakespeare and Child's Play*, p. 171. Of course the question 'How many children had Lady Macbeth?' should not be taken too literally. The question is not whether she has four children or five. That would indeed be irrelevant for the interpretation of the part, not to mention the interpretation of the play. What are important are rather the many questions that Knights' question entails: Has she ever had a child? If so, is that child alive or dead? Who is its father? When was it born and, if dead, when did it die? Does she have any other children? If so, are they alive? Is Macbeth their father? Does he have any other children? Do the couple think they have the possibility of having children in the future? If there are no children, is there a reason for that (that they know of)? Does she want children? Does he want children? Some of these questions may seem anachronistic, but any production of Shakespeare – whether visually historical, modern or 'timeless' – is inevitably a mediation between historical text and modern minds, and so questions like these do have to be considered if they are part of the actors' conception of parenthood (provided that parenthood is regarded as relevant to the characters and to the play).

37 William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Sandra Clark and Pamela Mason (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), I.7.54-55. Subsequent references will be to this edition (unless otherwise stated) and given parenthetically in the text.

grief of learning that his entire family has been slaughtered so quickly that starting to plan for war seconds after he has received the news will be a comfort to him.[38] As soon as Rosse has told Macduff what has happened, Malcolm dramatically exclaims,

> Merciful heaven.
> What, man; ne'er pull your hat upon your brows:
> Give sorrow words. The grief that does not speak
> Whispers the o'er-fraught heart and bids it break. (IV.3.208-11)

Macduff, on the other hand, is stupefied. Even after Malcolm's speech, all he can say is 'My children too? […] My wife killed too?' (212-14). He cannot take in the unfathomable horror of what he has just heard. While he is still in this state of shock and denial, Malcolm says to him, 'Be comforted. / Let's make us medicines of our great revenge, / To cure this deadly grief' (216-18), and that is when Macduff says 'He has no children'. He then immediately returns to asking Rosse if he is absolutely sure that all his children are dead, demonstrating that he still has not recovered from the first shock: 'All my pretty ones? / Did you say all?' (219-20). Surely, Macduff has not at this point already started to contemplate the best way to take his revenge on Macbeth. The first time he collects himself sufficiently to give a coherent speech, it is in reply to Malcolm's insistence that he turn his grief into violent action:

> MALCOLM Dispute it like a man.
> MACDUFF I shall do so;
> But I must also feel it as a man:
> I cannot but remember such things were,
> That were most precious to me. (IV.3.223-26)

The fact that they share the first verse line suggests that Macduff starts to speak directly after Malcolm has finished, almost interrupting him, and it is easy to imagine an actor saying the line as if he is annoyed at Malcolm's lack of empathy. In fact, through the entire dialogue, Malcolm shows himself to be impatient for Macduff to recover from his grief so that they can go to war, while Macduff tries to shake off Malcolm's attempts at persuasion, thinly disguised as consolation, until he has had time to process

38 See Muir, p. 135, n. 216, and Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, pp. 490-92. Both go through all three options.

the news. Macduff needs time to 'feel' and 'remember' before he can begin to consider how to take revenge, and he sees that Malcolm does not understand this.[39] Besides, it is not only Macduff's children that have been killed but his wife too, and there is no talk of killing Lady Macbeth. The line 'He has no children' can be played as referring to either Macbeth or Malcolm, and both interpretations can be borne out by the text. It is surprising how rarely directors and performers seem to favour the alternative that it is Malcolm who is intended, not only because it seems reasonable in the context of the surrounding dialogue, but because it completely clears away any perceived incongruity with Lady Macbeth's statement that she has 'given suck'. If 'He has no children' refers to Malcolm, it cannot be an argument against the existence of Lady Macbeth's child.[40]

Granted, no Macbeth child is actually seen in the play; but there is perhaps no reason why it should be seen, nor any need to regard this as evidence that the Macbeths have no child. Presumably, many dramatic characters can be supposed to have children in their fictional off-stage life, children who are not displayed on stage or mentioned where they have no particular relevance to the plot. In this play, however, other children are both seen and mentioned, and frequently, too. Banquo and Macduff both have onstage sons; in fact, Macduff must have at least three children ('What, all my pretty chickens, and their dam […]?' IV.3.221), although only one of them speaks – in performance there are often three children of varying gender and age

39 Cf. Alexander Leggatt, who connects Malcolm's reaction to his being a 'virgin', both in that he is 'yet / Unknown to woman' (IV.3.125-26) and in that he has not 'committed murder' (p. 192): '[Macduff] needs a period of simple grief, which Malcolm, who wants him to turn straight to anger, does not seem to understand. Malcolm is a virgin, and has no children'; *Shakespeare's Tragedies: Violation and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 195.

40 Muir, for example, supports the theory that Macduff refers to Macbeth, whose children, if he had had any, the only appropriate revenge would be to kill; p. 135, n. 216. Sandra Clark and Pamela Mason write that 'he' is 'often assumed to refer to Macbeth' and consider it 'unlikely' that the reference is to Malcolm; Macbeth, p. 268, n. 219; p. 169, n. 54. Bernard Groom states that it 'probably' refers to Macbeth; *Macbeth*, ed. Bernard Groom (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), p. 99, n. 216. Bradley, by contrast, thinks that 'He' refers to Malcolm (*Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 491), as does Rosenberg ('Lady Macbeth's Indispensable Child', p. 17, n. 2). Alice Griffin also adheres to this interpretation, based on her conviction that the Macbeths do have mutual children: 'Despite critics' misinterpretation, the Macbeths have had children and hope to have more, as indicated by ["I have given suck…"] and ["Bring forth men-children…"]'. She does not consider the possibility that Macbeth might not be the father of Lady Macbeth's child, nor that Macbeth's line 'no son of mine succeeding' could refer to any son he may hypothetically have in the future; *Shakespeare's Women in Love* (Raleigh, North Carolina: Pentland Press, 2001), pp. 112, 117. In Iqbal Khan's 2016 production at the Globe, the line was changed to 'You have no children', clearing away the ambiguity.

on stage in IV.2, up to four if one is an infant that can be played by a doll.[41] None of the other characters is explicitly mentioned as having small children, but Duncan and Siward both have grown-up or adolescent sons. Children also feature in other ways in the play, notably as the second and third apparitions (IV.1), and the imagery of *Macbeth* is full of children and infants.[42] Furthermore, it is the circumstances of a childbirth which finally seal Macbeth's destiny and lead to the solution of the plot: 'none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth' (IV.1.79-80), but Macduff, who 'was from his mother's womb / Untimely ripp'd' (V.8.15-16), does.[43]

With all this preoccupation with children and childbirth, the very absence of a child in the Macbeth family can be seen as a significant dimension to the plot. Macbeth says that the Weird Sisters 'placed a fruitless crown' on his head and 'put a barren sceptre' in his hand (III.1.60-61). This does not per se mean that he has no heir; he could simply assume that his descendants will not inherit the throne. But, as Bernice W. Kliman points out, the Weird Sisters' prophecy only says that Banquo will be 'greater' than Macbeth and that he will 'get kings' (I.3.65-67), not that these kings will take over directly after Macbeth's reign without his son ruling first: 'The Sisters do not prophesy a fruitless crown for Macbeth; he simply assumes so'.[44] The fact that he is so quick to jump to this conclusion could in performance be interpreted as an indication that he has no heirs and that it is a sensitive subject. Macbeth and his wife do not explicitly talk of being childless, but critics have commented that Lady Macbeth's arguably parental treatment of her husband and what can be seen as her desperate pursuit of a purpose in life can be interpreted as the result of thwarted maternal instincts, and involuntary childlessness can be read into Macbeth's extreme jealousy of 'Banquo's issue' (III.1.64).[45]

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41 Victorian productions usually cut the Macduff scene. Barry Jackson reinstalled the scene in his seminal modern-dress production at the Birmingham Rep and the Royal Court in the 1920s. See Michael Mullin, '*Macbeth* in Modern Dress: Royal Court Theatre, 1928', *Educational Theatre Journal*, 30:2 (May 1978), 176-85. According to Rutter, the Macduff slaughter can be seen as the climax of play; *Shakespeare and Child's Play*, p. 165.

42 'And Pity, like a naked, new-born babe, / Striding the blast […]' (I.7.21-22), and ''tis the eye of childhood / That fears a painted devil' (II.2.53-54), to mention just a couple of examples.

43 It should be mentioned that a Caesarean section would probably have had a fatal outcome for the mother in Shakespeare's day, and without question in the historical period that Macbeth lived in.

44 Bernice W. Kliman, *Shakespeare in Performance:* Macbeth, 2nd ed. (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 8.

45 Holinshed, by contrast, explicitly states that the reason for the murder of Banquo is Macbeth's fear that Banquo will follow his example and murder Macbeth.

But if the couple are infertile, Macbeth's line 'Bring forth men-children only! / For thy undaunted mettle should compose / Nothing but males' (I.7.73-75) becomes problematic. It could be that they have not been married long enough to have given up on having children, but for the childlessness to be a motivation for their actions they need at least to believe that they will never have a child. And if that is the case, it is incongruous, not to mention disrespectful, of Macbeth to express a wish for his wife to give birth to sons. On the other hand, the causes for failure to conceive were in the majority of cases unknown in the historical period of Macbeth as well as in that of Shakespeare. Providing that Lady Macbeth is still of childbearing age, the couple can perhaps not be absolutely certain whether they are infertile, although a consummated marriage of some duration which has rendered no children might reasonably lead them to suppose so. Therefore, even if most of the time they think of themselves as permanently childless, they can still for a brief moment entertain a fantasy, or even a hope, that they will have children in the future.[46] At this moment in the play, when they have finally decided that they will go ahead with the murder, perhaps there is a sense that 'everything

46 According to Sinéad Cusack, Jonathan Pryce in Noble's 1986 production played the line as 'black humour'; Carol Rutter, *Clamorous Voices: Shakespeare's Women Today* (London: Women's Press, 1988), p. 64. Simon Russell Beale sees the line as 'a declaration of love' – 'a promise that can […] never be honoured' but is 'generously offered and silently accepted'; 'Macbeth', in *Performing Shakespeare's Tragedies Today: The Actor's Perspective*, ed. Michael Dobson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 107-18 (p. 115). Harriet Walter speculates that Macbeth is either 'indulging her with hope against hope' or 'momentarily blinded by his own [hope]'; *Actors on Shakespeare*, p. 37. In performance, Antony Sher's Macbeth spoke the line while sliding his hand down his wife's body in a clearly sexual way. Cf. Leggatt, who interprets the murder of Duncan as a metaphorical consummation of their marriage, and 'Bring forth men-children' as a suggestion that Lady Macbeth will finally become pregnant when the murder has been committed. He even thinks that the blood staining Duncan's bed should be seen as hymeneal blood. Kott points out that Lady Macbeth 'demands murder from Macbeth as a confirmation of his manhood, almost as an act of love'; p. 71. Dennis Biggins argues that the play links 'martial violence and savage bloodshed with sexuality and love', that there is 'an eroticism' in 'the exchanges between Macbeth and his wife that lead up to Duncan's murder', that 'Macbeth's regicide has overtones of sexual ravishment', and that 'in her mood of masculine aggressiveness [Lady Macbeth] sees herself as impregnating Macbeth's consciousness with her own ruthless ambition for sovereignty' by pouring her 'spirits' in his ear; 'Sexuality, Witchcraft, and Violence in *Macbeth*', *Shakespeare Studies* 8 (1975), 255-77 (pp. 265, 266, 268). Drawing on Biggins's paper, David Mann argues that 'the murder of Duncan is presented as an image of the sexual act, but [Lady Macbeth] is also promising actual consummation if Macbeth does it'; *Shakespeare's Women: Performance and Conception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 158. Alice Fox connects the line to the Renaissance notion that a female foetus was more likely to be aborted than a male one; 'Obstetrics and Gynecology in *Macbeth*', *Shakespeare* Studies, 12 (1979), 127-41 (p. 130). In the production of *Macbeth* that I co-directed, the line was played as a joke that Lady Macbeth found to be in bad taste, which she indicated by walking away from Macbeth. When he realised that the topic was still too sore for her to talk about in that frivolous way, he changed the subject to the murder plan to appease her and cheer her up.

is possible', or that it will be the beginning of a new life for them. 'Bring forth men-children only', although a more puzzling line than 'He has no children', does not necessarily mean that Macbeth as a matter of course expects his wife to bear children, and does therefore not preclude the interpretation that the marriage is childless and that this is a source of grief for the couple.

If there are no children, then, what is to be made of Lady Macbeth's claim that she has 'given suck'? It could be played as the deluded fantasy of a childless woman driven over the edge. But her argument loses some of its force if she is not talking of a real child. Alexander Leggatt considers several possibilities of reconciling childlessness with a child in the past:

> Did the Macbeths have children, who died? Daughters, whom they discount? Did Lady Macbeth have children only by another man? In the latter case, it would appear that the problem lies with Macbeth, not with her, and an implicit taunt in "I have given suck" might be, "It's not my fault that we can't have children." Is Macbeth impotent, or potent but sterile? Or was Lady Macbeth's body damaged in childbirth?[47]

One of the few things that are known for certain about the historical Lady Macbeth is that she did have a son from a former marriage. Kenneth Muir writes that '[t]here is no reason to think that Shakespeare was referring to Lady Macbeth's child by her first husband, who is not mentioned in Holinshed',[48] and it is indeed unlikely that Shakespeare was aware of, or intended Lady Macbeth to refer to, a son that was not in the sources he used for the play. But the idea of Macbeth's having a stepson does fit in very nicely: Lady Macbeth has had a child, but Macbeth has no children and as a couple the Macbeths may be infertile. As Leggatt suggests, 'I have given suck' would then perhaps imply that Lady Macbeth blames her husband for her not being able to have more children, and it could be seen as a continuation of her taunting him for not being enough of a 'man' earlier in the scene. When Harriet Walter played Lady Macbeth in Gregory Doran's RSC production in 1999, she originally found the child-from-a-former-marriage 'an attractive theory', but abandoned the idea, as it did not seem to be part of Shakespeare's plan; if the stepson were meant to be a factor in the story, the cast reasoned, he would have been explicitly men-

47 Leggatt, p. 195.
48 Muir, p. 42, n. 54.

tioned in the play.[49] Another alternative that was considered, also noted by Leggatt, was that the child could be a girl 'and therefore no good for the throne'.[50] However, Lady Macbeth mentions '*his* boneless gums' (I.7.57) [emphasis added], and the idea of a daughter succeeding her father as ruler of the country would surely not have been all that unthinkable to a Jacobean audience.[51] Also, if the Macbeths have a daughter still living they are not childless, and then this circumstance cannot be used as a source of motivation – beyond possibly the feeling of inadequacy at not being able to produce a male heir, which would probably be harder for modern actors and audiences to sympathise with than a more general longing for a child.

The option that was in fact chosen for the RSC's 1999 production was the first alternative mentioned by Leggatt: they have had at least one child, a boy, who died. According to Walter, this choice was made because it seemed the likeliest scenario and 'contained the richest theatrical juice'.[52] The interpretation is very well borne out by the text, and the idea of mourning a dead child gives the two leading actors more to work with than a general regret at having no children. Before Lady Macbeth's 'I have given suck' speech, Macbeth has decided to call off the murder, but by the time she has finished he has apparently changed his mind and seems prepared to go ahead with his wife's plan, only worried about the consequences if they 'fail' (I.7.59). This sudden change of heart suggests that there is something very potent in Lady Macbeth's speech; it persuades him where all her taunts and arguments failed. If the child is dead, it is easier to understand why the mere mention of it moves him so deeply. Moreover, this interpretation is entirely compatible with both 'Bring forth men-children only' and 'He has no children', even if the latter were to refer to Macbeth.

The apparent paradox of the three statements 'I have given suck', 'Bring forth men-children' and 'He has no children', with the question that it entails of what has become of Lady Macbeth's baby, is a problem which the director and the two leading actors have to work out for every new

49 Walter, *Actors on Shakespeare*, pp. 27, 31.

50 Ibid., p. 31.

51 Not that this is in itself any reason to discard the idea in a modern production. Depending on the setting, the idea that women are not eligible monarchs in Macbeth's society may well be conveyed convincingly.

52 Walter, *Actors on Shakespeare*, p. 31. Walter says that she 'argued in [her] own head that there were more than one [child who had died], that [Lady Macbeth] was one of these women who could never quite bring a child to fruition', which might make her 'feel truly blighted and perhaps venegeful against the world'; interview, *Macbeth* [DVD], Illuminations, 2001; *Actors on Shakespeare*, p. 32.

production of *Macbeth*. However, this particular solution, the loss of a child in the past, seems to have become by far the most popular. Sinéad Cusack, Derek Jacobi and Harriet Walter, who were in three different *Macbeth* productions at the RSC between 1986 and 1999, all express an awareness that '[t]here are many other possible interpretations' than the child being dead, that '[t]he line can be interpreted differently' and that '[o]ther actors will draw different conclusions' than they have done.[53] Yet, they all drew the same conclusion, and that is more than a coincidence. There are indeed several playable solutions to the problem, and most of them have probably been used in productions at some point or other. But it is remarkable that in recent years the solution arrived at by virtually every major British production where the thoughts on the matter have been recorded seems to be the dead child.

In the last three decades, Lady Macbeth's missing child has gained a central position in productions of *Macbeth*. Rutter traces the origin of this tendency to Adrian Noble's 1986 production and argues that Sinéad Cusack's performance as Lady Macbeth, opposite Jonathan Pryce's Macbeth, changed the status of the child in theatrical interpretations of *Macbeth*.[54] Interviewed in 1988 for Rutter's book *Clamorous Voices: Shakespeare's Women Today*, Cusack brings up the aspect that she had recently given birth herself when rehearsals began, which made the literal meaning of the 'I have given suck' speech palpable to her, and she was concerned that she might not be able to say the line at all: 'I felt very vulnerable, and I was worried about that element coming into play too much in Lady Macbeth, but in fact I was able to incorporate that rawness into my performance'.[55] Already before she played the role, Cusack had a vision of Lady Macbeth as 'someone who had warmth and fecundity' and of the Macbeths as being at the beginning of the play 'this golden couple […] who have everything', and she was 'adamant about' incorporating as much as possible of this vision in Noble's production.[56] Of the missing child she says,

53 Derek Jacobi, 'Macbeth', in *Players of Shakespeare 4*, ed. Robert Smallwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 201; Cusack, in Rutter, *Clamorous Voices*, p. 56; Walter, *Actors on Shakespeare*, p. 31.

54 Rutter, *Shakespeare and Child's Play*, p. 171. The production transferred from Stratford to the Barbican in 1987.

55 Cusack, in Rutter, *Clamorous Voices*, p. 54. Sandra Richards speculates that Sarah Siddons's state as heavily pregnant when playing Lady Macbeth may possibly have influenced her performance in a similar way; 'Lady Macbeth in Performance', *The English Review*, 1:2 (November 1990) (Oxford: Philip Allan, 1990), 2-5 (p. 5).

56 Cusack, in Rutter, *Clamorous Voices*, p. 55.

> I'm not certain who asked the question ['What happened to Lady Macbeth's child?'] first or whether we all had the idea simultaneously, but as we explored it in rehearsal, we decided that the Macbeths had had a child and that the child had died. […] [A]s the idea grew it seemed to have a beautiful logic.[57]

Rutter comments that 'the idea of maternity came close to the centre of [Cusack's] performance and the whole production', and that '[t]he image of the lost child became the most potent reference point in Noble's production', from the 'blood-smeared child rescued from the battlefield in the opening scene' to the source of motivation for the murder of Duncan.[58]

The loss of the child was constructed as both the driving force behind Lady Macbeth's desire for her husband to be king and what made Macbeth resolved to go through with the murder, according to Cusack:

> That sort of loss, the loss of a child, is so huge, so massive, that it can either draw you closer together or it can separate you, or it can turn the need for a child into the need for something else. If you've lost a child and there are no more children, you either leave the man or you become obsessive about [him] and about his happiness and security. That's the avenue I chose to go up as Lady Macbeth – that she had turned, not in on herself, but completely in on him.[59]

The mention of the lost child was the pivotal point in the scene. Cusack played Lady Macbeth as trying every conceivable strategy, using 'her clever tongue, her sexuality, her goading'; only when she eventually realised that nothing else was going to work did she resort to 'the one area that she's never used, the secret area of the child':[60] 'What she says about the baby, and his reaction to it, is completely divorced from their natural exchange. The use of the baby – that was the worst, that was the real sin'.[61] In a video-recorded performance in the RSC archive, Cusack's Lady Macbeth breaks into sobs at the end of the speech, 'had I so sworn / As you have done to this' (I.7.58-59), and Macbeth comforts her. '[T]hat's when he knows', says Cusack, 'how much she wants this for him, when he understands the sacrifice that she's making'.[62] She then mentions as an important turn-

57 Cusack, in Rutter, *Clamorous Voices*, p. 56.
58 Rutter, *Clamorous Voices*, pp. 54-55, 56.
59 Cusack, in Rutter, *Clamorous Voices*, pp. 56-57.
60 Rutter, *Clamorous Voices*, pp. 63-64.
61 Ibid., p. 64.
62 Ibid.

ing-point for Lady Macbeth the moment when she realises that her husband, unlike herself, is indeed capable of infanticide: when he says, 'Thou knowst that Banquo and his Fleance lives' (III.2.38), she 'knows he's going to kill again, and that he's going to kill Fleance, he's going to *kill the child*'.[63] The apparitions (IV.1) in this production were three children in white nightshirts, blindfolding Macbeth as if for a game of blind man's buff, sitting on his lap, whispering one prophecy in his ear and letting another be pronounced by a hand puppet, and then running in a circle around him in a playful version of the show of kings. For the next scene, the apparitions turned into Macduff's children. The murder of the Macduff family (IV.2) was the climax of this child-centred staging of the play. The conversation between Lady Macduff and her son is often played as an idyllic, playful domestic scene.[64] But in this production family life was taken very seriously, and the child was not even for a second mere comic relief; Penny Downie's Lady Macduff and her son argued bitterly, she was angry not only with her husband but also with her son, and the little boy was frightened by the prospect that his father might be executed. At one point, he took his sister's doll and beat it. Disturbingly, when he said, 'He has kill'd me, mother' (IV.2.83), before the truth of the line became apparent, the audience laughed.[65] The build-up to and timing of the line were apparently consciously designed to invite that laugh, and the effect such a laugh creates in the minds of the audience is one they are likely to remember.

The focus on children in Noble's production was not lost on the reviewers. Christopher Edwards writes that Noble 'makes effective play with the running theme of children as symbols of innocence and promise'; Paul Anderson observes that Noble 'has decided to interpret the [play] as the story of psychological dislocation caused to Macbeth by the frustration of his desire to have children (and thereby form a dynasty)', which 'shifts the centre of the play's gravity away from the initial regicide to the murder of Lady Macduff and her babes'; and Giles Gordon remarks that 'Pryce's Macbeth only relaxes when he's grasping a child to his bosom or patting

63 Ibid., p. 67 [emphasis original].

64 Coleridge wrote: 'This scene, dreadful as it is, is still a relief because a variety, because domestic. Something in the domestic affections always soothing [*sic*] because associated with the only real pleasures of life', *Coleridge's Writings on Shakespeare*, ed. Terence Hawkes (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1959), p. 196. See also Theodore Leinwand, *The Great William: Writers Reading Shakespeare* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), p. 29.

65 Rutter mentions the audience laughing in *Shakespeare and Child's Play*, p. 178, and there is an audible laugh on the archived recording. I assume this happened regularly, but cannot be certain.

[its] head'.[66] Kenneth Hurren calls the production 'eccentric' since 'Lady M's recollection of breastfeeding' makes the 'fanciful idea' of the Macbeths being 'murderously depressed by their childlessness' 'a touch difficult to accept'.[67] Hurren seems to assume that the couple does have a child and to be unaware of any controversiality connected with this question. Eric Griffiths thought that the production 'mis[read] the play', that the 'sense of domesticity' was 'false to the text and the time it represents' and that 'the psychologisation of Macbeth's career neglects the difference between losing your mind and losing your immortal soul'.[68] Joan Smith also thought that the production's reading of *Macbeth* as 'a tale of small suburban emotions' diminished 'the sense of brooding evil normally associated with it'; she especially criticised the portrayal of Lady Macbeth as a 'model house wife' or an 'Avon lady' who 'had just nipped upstairs to indulge in a spot of murder'.[69] Disregarding the fact that Lady Macbeth does not commit any murders in the play, the point of representing the tragedy as domestic or 'suburban' is of course the idea that murder is not removed from everyday life but may be committed by any kind of person with perfectly ordinary emotions. The psychologisation entailed by interpreting Shakespeare, anachronistically, as realist drama is also commented on by Anderson: 'to turn Macbeth's need for authority into a matter of individual phsychosis might be very twentieth century, but it's hardly what Shakespeare intended'.[70] Michael Billington, on the other hand, thought it was the best *Macbeth* production on the RSC's mainstage since Glen Byam Shaw's production with Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh in 1955. According to Billington, Noble's production 'works by treating the play as an intimate family drama with repercussions that spread through the kingdom', a 'domesticated tragedy about barrenness' where 'the Macbeths' naked power has become a substitute for parenthood'. Billington states that 'Noble goes further than any director I have seen in presenting the Macbeths as a Strindbergian couple locked together in love-hate'; he sees Cusack's Lady Macbeth as 'an ambitious woman who has channelled her thwarted moth-

66 Christopher Edwards, *The Spectator* 22 November 1986, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 1986, p. 12080; Paul Anderson, *Tribune* 10 April 1987, in *Theatre Record* Jan-June 1987, p. 393; Gordon Giles, *London Daily News* 2 April 1987, in *Theatre Record* Jan-June 1987, p. 394

67 Kenneth Hurren, *Mail on Sunday* 5 April 1987, in *Theatre Record* Jan-June 1987, p. 394.

68 Eric Griffiths, *The Listener* 20 November 1986, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 1986, pp. 1280-81.

69 Joan Smith, *Sunday Today* 16 November 1986, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 1986, p. 1281.

70 Anderson, in *Theatre Record* Jan-June 1987, p. 393.

erhood into an insane dream of power', and notes that 'when she mentions the loss of their child, they clasp each other with fierce protectiveness'.[71]

Almost two decades later, having followed the subsequent development of *Macbeth*'s performance practice, Rutter declares that 'by putting [the] serious interrogation [of the question "How many children had Lady Macbeth?"] at the top of her performance agenda',

> [Cusack's] performance redirected the play's post-modern afterlife: since Cusack, subsequent Lady Macbeths from Amanda Root to Cheryl Campbell, Brid Brennan, Harriet Walter […], and Emma Fielding have made it a matter of urgency to account for the missing child. Indeed, locating the 'missing child' has become the crucial performance trope defining the Macbeths' partnership.[72]

The next time Adrian Noble directed *Macbeth* (also for the RSC), in 1993-94, the production was not quite so well received as the one he had directed a few years earlier. There now seemed to be a feeling among reviewers that he had achieved the perfect production in 1986 and then run out of ideas.[73] Significantly, one idea he recycled was that of the dead child. Derek Jacobi, who played Macbeth, gives his thoughts on the loss of the child from Macbeth's point of view:

> We had decided that somewhere in the past of their relationship they had lost a child. […] When she mentions having 'given suck' […] I immediately went towards her, to stop her talking about it, as if to say 'Don't talk about it; you know what it does to us.' And she does know, of course, which is why she brings it up here. It's a vulnerable point for him. The moment the subject is mentioned he's automatically on the defensive and she uses all that.[74]

However, for Jacobi it is not the mention of the child that changes Macbeth's mind, it is 'her intimation that he's a coward, that he has no balls'.[75] Jacobi sees the memory of the child as being painful primarily to Macbeth, while his wife plays on his sensitivity to get what she wants – although it is unclear whether the production's Lady Macbeth, Cheryl Campbell, would take the same view. Similarly, in Ron Daniels' 1999 production at Theatre for a New

71 Michael Billington, *The Guardian* 13 November 1986, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 1986, p. 1279.
72 Rutter, *Shakespeare and Child's Play*, p. 171.
73 See, for example, Michael Billington, *The Guardian* 18 December, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 1993, p. 1475.
74 Jacobi, p. 201.
75 Ibid.

Audience in New York, Bill Camp's Macbeth 'raise[d] a finger warningly' when Elizabeth Marvel's Lady Macbeth mentioned 'giv[ing] suck', 'as if to say "Don't talk about that!"' – according to Kliman, '[h]e seem[ed] more pained by their loss of babies than she [did]'.[76]

In Doran's production, Walter followed Cusack in playing 'I have given suck…' as if the reference to the memory of the child were a so far unbroken taboo for the couple and a last resort when nothing else works. It was decided, Walter writes, that the Macbeths 'had not spoken of the child since its death'.[77] This accords with the memory of Antony Sher, who played Macbeth:

> Most crucial [to the Macbeths' relationship] is the baby. 'I have given suck,' says Lady M., 'and know how tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me.' Scholars invent all sorts of nonsense to explain this: a previous marriage, et cetera. Cis Berry is right when she says you mustn't just *read* Shakespeare; it was written to be spoken, to be performed. You can't play a previous marriage (never referred to), but you can play a dead baby (referred to). They're a couple whose baby has died. It's a taboo subject, we decided, never mentioned. And then suddenly it is. At the very moment he's got cold feet about the murder. Macbeth has to do a drastic U-turn in that short scene, resolving to do the deed. I don't know how other Macbeths achieve this, but for me it was solved by the mention of the baby and the upset Harriet brought to it, not a manipulative upset, real upset. I suddenly needed to be on her side whatever the cost. [78]

In this production, the unprecedented mention of the dead baby was thus what changed Macbeth's mind. Walter 'consulted a bereavement counsellor about the effects on the parents of losing a child',[79] and She felt the need for a visual aid: 'I found a photo of a dead baby in one of my Boer War books […]. Our baby. Frozen, white, wearing an embroidered shift, lying in a tiny plank-and-nail coffin. The Macbeth baby'.[80] He and Walter each kept a copy of the photograph in their script during the rehearsal period, and during performances Walter would sometimes take up the doll appearing as Lady Macduff's baby and hold it as she stood waiting in the wings before I.7.[81] She decided that, as a result of

76 Kliman, p. 156.
77 Walter, *Actors on Shakespeare*, p. 32.
78 Antony Sher, *Beside Myself: An Autobiography* (London: Hutchinson, 2001), p. 343.
79 Walter, *Actors on Shakespeare*, p. 32.
80 Sher, pp. 343-44.
81 Walter, *Actors on Shakespeare*, p. 34.

her child's death, Lady Macbeth makes her entrance into the play 'in a deep depression from which she is rescued by a new-found purpose that might restore meaning to her marriage'.[82] Like Cusack, then, Walter used the dead child as Lady Macbeth's source of motivation; she found it difficult to 'relate to the idea of hunger for power in the abstract', and so needed Lady Macbeth's 'ambition […] to be driven by something more personal and deeper'.[83] On stage, Lady Macbeth's grief at her childlessness was indicated for example in I.6, where the whole Macduff family arrived with Duncan, Banquo and the noblemen. There was a moment when the baby, carried by Lady Macduff, dropped something and Macduff picked it up, drawing attention to the baby. As Lady Macduff walked past Lady Macbeth, the latter reached out longingly for the child – a gesture that was replaced by a close-up of Walter in the television version, which amplified the poignancy of the moment further.[84] During 'I have given suck', Lady Macbeth seemed to weep throughout the speech, and Sher's Macbeth, like Pryce's, went to comfort Lady Macbeth, holding her during a long pause before his next line.[85]

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the lost child had become a fixed figure in *Macbeth* in performance. Sian Thomas, who played Lady Macbeth in Dominic Cooke's 2004 RSC production opposite Greg Hicks, and Simon Russell Beale, who played Macbeth opposite Emma Fielding in John Caird's 2005 production at the Almeida Theatre, both give very familiar-sounding accounts of trying to make sense of the enigmatic missing child. Thomas writes:

> We decided that we had been married at least ten years, and – in response to the famous 'How many children had Lady Macbeth?' question, that is supposed to be so disreputable but that performers do actually have to answer […] – that there had been a child, who had died. I don't think you need to go into more specifics than

82 Ibid., p. 33.

83 Ibid.

84 Walter describes the moment in the production in the following way: 'To make up maximum numbers, nearly the whole cast entered and filled the stage, including Macduff, his young son and Lady Macduff with a baby in her arms. This image of happy families scorched Lady Macbeth for a second. I tried to make this moment register with a well-placed look, but I couldn't hope to communicate this complex story in a blink that the audience was not looking out for'; *Actors on Shakespeare*, p. 34.

85 Unusually, the RSC archive holds recordings of two different performances of this particular production (from 8 November and 23 November 1999, both in the Swan), making it easier to distinguish between planned choices and in-the-moment variation. For example, the crying in Lady Macbeth's voice during the 'suck' speech was more noticeable on the 8th than on the 23rd.

> that […] but clearly they had briefly been parents, but that trajectory had failed for them, the child was dead […].[86]

Thomas' account, and those given by Cusack, Jacobi, Walter and Sher, can be compared to this, by Russell Beale:

> Although the debate about the number of children Lady Macbeth had was presented, many years ago now, as a bit of a joke, it is a subject that simply cannot be avoided or left unresolved by the two actors playing husband and wife. […] Who and where, precisely, is the child that Lady Macbeth talks about? Emma Fielding and I, like so many people who have played the Macbeths before us, felt the need to invent a precise back-story. I suppose ours was the simplest of all the options. A child was born to the Macbeths who lived only long enough to have been suckled by Lady Macbeth and whose death was as traumatic as any such death would be for a married couple.[87]

There almost seems to be an expectation in Russell Beale's text that everyone has heard all this before. In Noble's productions from 1986 and 1993, attaching any importance to the child was a new idea, and in Doran's 1999 production the dead child still seemed like an active choice. In Cooke's and Caird's productions from 2004 and 2005, it was the default option.[88]

Michael Boyd's RSC production in 2011 took the child-centeredness a step further than had been done before: in this production, the same three children played the witches (who first appeared hanging by the neck from the ceiling, and whose dialogues had been heavily cut), the apparitions

86 Sian Thomas, 'Lady Macbeth', in *Performing Shakespeare's Tragedies Today: The Actor's Perspective*, ed. Michael Dobson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 95-106 (p. 99).

87 Russell Beale, 'Macbeth', in *Performing Shakespeare's Tragedies Today*, pp. 107-18 (p. 114).

88 How much backstory productions invent varies, however. Kate Fleetwood, who played Lady Macbeth in Rupert Goold's Chichester Festival production from 2007 (and its subsequent runs in the West End and on Broadway as well as the film version), did not investigate the circumstances of Lady Macbeth's breastfeeding in any depth, as it did not feel helpful to 'answer those questions', although 'that's not to say that when you're saying those lines you're not imagining having a child'. She does not seem to have considered it as an option to think that Lady Macbeth had not had a child, and the film version of the production shows both Fleetwood's Lady Macbeth and Patrick Stewart's Macbeth to be upset at the mention of the child. Interview, *Macbeth* [DVD], Illuminations, 2011. In Tim Crouch's *I, Banquo*, from 2005, a play for children in which Banquo explains what happens in Shakespeare's play without any changes to the plot, Banquo mentions Macbeth's dead child in passing, as a matter of course, and then never returns to the subject: 'We were friends when your child died so young'. This indicates that Crouch sees the death of Macbeth's child as being uncontroversially part of Shakespeare's story. Tim Crouch, 'I, Banquo', in *I, Shakespeare: Four of Shakespeare's Better-Known Plays Re-Told for Young Audiences by Their Lesser-Known Characters* (London: Oberon Books, 2011), pp. 35-52 (p. 37).

(who were equated with the witches) and the Macduff children, who after their death joined the other 'ghosts' (not only Banquo but all characters who had been killed) and literally haunted the battlefield in the last act. Iqbal Khan's 2016 production at the Globe focused more specifically on the Macbeths' child and innovatively showed him on stage. So ingrained in the common perception of *Macbeth* has the Macbeths' status as a childless couple become that Michael Billington called the presence of an apparently living son 'puzzl[ing]'.[89] However, there were indications in the performance that the child's presence should be interpreted as Lady Macbeth's memory of a child who was no longer alive.

But just as Lady Macbeth's children have not always been regarded as relevant for the play by literary critics, it is only in recent years that directors and actors have begun to use the child as the main driving force behind the Macbeths' actions; and as Rutter asserts, there does seem to be a turning-point some time in the 1980s. According to Judi Dench, she and Ian McKellen '"never discussed the question" of children' in their rehearsals for Trevor Nunn's highly acclaimed RSC production from 1974-78.[90] Similarly, in Glen Byam Shaw's 1955 production at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Macbeth was not persuaded by Lady Macbeth's speech; '[r]ather', according to Kliman, 'he reflected for a time and […] persuaded *himself*'. Shaw thought that had been a son who died in infancy, but it was not an important enough part of the play to be the factor that changed Macbeth's mind.[91] It seems that in the best-known theatrical productions of *Macbeth* from 1950-1980, the child plays a small part or no part at all in the conception of the play.

Rutter notes, however, that there is a tradition of longer standing in film to pay attention to the child than there is in the theatre. Orson Welles' film from 1947 starts with 'the witches pulling from a bubbling cauldron a foetal lump that they […] shape into a child'.[92] In Akira Kurosawa's Japanese adaptation *Throne of Blood* from 1957, Lady Macbeth is pregnant at the beginning of the film and has a miscarriage once she is queen. In Jack Gold's 1982 BBC version, with Nicol Williamson and Jane Lapotaire, Kli-

89 Michael Billington, 'Macbeth Review: It's Not Just the Sisters That Are Weird in Iqbal Khan's Bizarre Take', *The Guardian* 24 June 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/jun/24/macbeth-review-shakespeares-globe-iqbal-khan-ray-fearon-tara-fitzgerald> [accessed 10 November 2016].

90 Quoted in Rutter, *Shakespeare and Child's Play*, p. 232, n. 61.

91 Kliman, p. 76. See also Michael Mullin (ed.), Macbeth *Onstage: An Annotated Facsimile of Glen Byam Shaw's 1955 Promptbook* (Columbia & London: University of Missouri Press, 1976), p. 75.

92 Rutter, *Shakespeare and Child's Play*, p. 232, n. 62.

man thinks that 'Macbeth's reaction [to 'I have given suck…'] makes it apparent that there have indeed been such infants who were most precious to them both, whom both of them loved, and who are no more'.[93] In *Macbeth on the Estate*, the interpretation that the couple have lost a child is made visual in a more palpable way: they have kept their son's nursery intact, and at one point Lady Macbeth, who is obviously still trying to conceive a second child, gets her period and flings a box of tampons to the floor in despair. By 2015, the idea of a lost child had become so deeply rooted in the perception of *Macbeth* that Justin Kurzel's film adaptation begins with a scene showing the funeral of the Macbeths' young child. Children are to be found everywhere in this production. The Weird Sisters are accompanied by a little girl and an infant. Michael Fassbender's Macbeth seems pained at the thought that Fleance will have to be killed, and the boy's flight is seen from Fleance's perspective. Macbeth also has a recurring memory of a boy soldier being killed in the battle at the beginning of the film, shown in flashbacks. During one of his speeches, Macbeth holds a knife to his wife's stomach in a way that connotatively suggests the vulnerability of childbearing, and when Marion Cotillard's Lady Macbeth's mind begins to unravel she has hallucinations of a toddler.[94]

Why, then, has the child come to be seen as such an important factor in the play in performance? One answer could be that acting techniques have changed, as well as the received conception of what constitutes a plausible motive for murder. Actors today are perhaps more likely to turn for motivation to traumatic experiences in their characters' past than actors of earlier generations. It is an attractive theory that Cusack 'effected [the] shift', and

93 Kliman, p. 103. This is Kliman's interpretation; I can find no indication that it was a deliberate choice.

94 However, there are other film versions where children do not play a central part. Of John Gorrie's BBC version from 1970, Kliman writes: '[T]his Macbeth [Eric Porter] is not especially moved by his wife's [Janet Suzman] declaration that she would have dashed out the brains of her own child. In this production, they have no children, they had no children […]. Her declaration about the child […] [is] metaphoric, not historically accurate'; p. 95. In Roman Polanski's film from 1971, lines I.7.52-58, where the baby is mentioned, have been cut. Polanski saw the Macbeths as young, ambitious people with high hopes for the future, and therefore cast two actors in their mid- to late twenties; Mark Shivas, quoted in Deanne Williams, 'Mick Jagger Macbeth', in *Shakespeare Survey* 57, ed. Peter Holland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 145-58 (p. 147). Even though there would surely have been time for them to have borne and buried at least one infant even at that comparatively young age, their youth could be one reason for omitting Lady Macbeth's speech. Kliman also suggests that Jon Finch's Macbeth is persuaded by Malcolm's and his own mutual dislike and jealousy of each other rather than by his wife, and that Francesca Annis's Lady Macbeth is 'too childlike' herself to be a mother; pp. 208-09. Either way, it must be inferred that the child was not seen as important for the overall interpretation of the play.

Rutter presents it convincingly.[95] But, as Rutter also points out, it is not a coincidence that it happened when it did. Rutter states that Britain was a 'child-centred' society in the 1980s, with a newly raised awareness of both child abuse and child-initiated violence. There was therefore a particular interest in the connection between children and evil.[96] Rutter and Cusack argue that the images of dead and dying children in Noble's 1986 production 'found a contemporary expression for the evil that the play is exploring. The abuse of children is the ultimate taboo, the death of a child the ultimate grief'.[97] Nor is it merely coincidental that the interest in Lady Macbeth's child entered the arenas of directorial vision and critical interest around the same time as actors had begun to have more influence in the rehearsal room and their interpretative process was beginning to be taken seriously by scholars.

Nevertheless, certain instances of critical interest in Lady Macbeth's child preceded Noble's production by a few years, which is a further indication that the preoccupation with children was of its time. In 1974, Marvin Rosenberg argues that '[o]f course Lady Macbeth has at least one child', that '[i]f Macbeth were childless, the succession of Fleance would be no great matter', and that Shakespeare 'stipulate[s] a child-Macbeth with a father driven more by ambition for the son's royalty than for his own':[98]

> History may insist that the child was not sired by Macbeth; but Shakespeare carefully censured Lady Macbeth's earlier marriage, and no spectator – except the few burdened with excessive learning – could possibly, in the playwright's time or subsequently, have suspected it. Shakespeare begins with a loving pair, and tells us unequivocally – in a play full of equivocation – that they have had a child.[99]

According to Rosenberg, Lady Macbeth's prayer to the spirits to 'take her milk' indicates that she is lactating and that the memory of breastfeeding her son may therefore be very recent. Rosenberg thinks it would be dramatically effective to keep the baby on stage in a cradle during the scenes that take place at the Macbeths' home and to include the sound of its cry at well-chosen points. In 1979, Alice Fox, conversely, argues that the Macbeths are childless. She takes it for granted that they have had 'at least one child' that

95 Rutter, *Shakespeare and Child's Play*, p. 171.
96 Ibid., p. 172.
97 Rutter, *Clamorous Voices*, p. 56.
98 Marvin Rosenberg, 'Lady Macbeth's Indispensable Child', *Educational Theatre Journal*, 26:1 (March 1974), 14-19 (pp. 14, 15).
99 Ibid., 14.

'lived long enough to have nursed', but takes the way in which 'the vocabulary of Macbeth and his Lady frequently draws on the language of Renaissance obstetrics and gynecology' as an indication that this and any other children have died and that Lady Macbeth has also suffered several miscarriages.[100] Jenijoy La Belle, the following year, argues that Lady Macbeth renders herself infertile when she asks the spirits to 'unsex' her.[101]

Like the productions of *Macbeth* discussed above, the three appropriations attach a great deal of significance to Lady Macbeth's child. In *Macbeth Speaks*, Macbeth's stepson Lulach, Gruoch's son from her first marriage, is an important figure (although GilleComgáin, Lulach's father, is not mentioned). Macbeth claims that he was elected on condition that Lulach would succeed him, rather than his own son, Fergus. Lulach did succeed Macbeth, but did not reign for long:

> Lulach is invited to a peace conference.
> Of course he went.
> Under Celtic law hospitality is a sacred trust […].
> But Malcolm has been brought up in England… Yes, Lulach was dirked in his bed by the very man who should 'against his murderer shut the door, not bear the knife himself'. (20)

Towards the end of the play, Macbeth reveals that he and Lulach are now buried 'not far away from each other' on Iona (20).

In Calcutt's play, too, the baby that Macbeth's wife has nursed is her son from her first marriage. Gruach hates her first husband, but, after the Wyrd Sisters have prophesied that he will die once she gives birth, she bears him a son and decides that her child will be king of Scotland. When Macbeth kills Gillacomgain and proclaims Duncan to be the new king, Lady Macbeth asks her child's nurse to escape with him and take care of him until it is safe for him to return. But the small-time crook Magg finds the baby in the woods and sells him to the childless Lady Macduff, who brings him up as her and Macduff's own son. Meanwhile, Gruach, who has married the murderer of her husband, tells Macbeth that her child has died of a fever. Lady Macbeth says that 'once [she] could have loved [Macbeth]' – but it is too late. Her thoughts are always with her missing child, and

100 Fox, 128.

101 Jenijoy La Belle, '"A Strange Infirmity": Lady Macbeth's Amenorrhea', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 31:3 (Autumn, 1980), 381-86.

her only ambition after the murder of Duncan is to see her son succeed her 'tyrant' husband, Macbeth, and 'restore [her] people's stolen rights' (scene 19, p. 87). For spectators/readers who know what 'deed' Macbeth refers to, and who have made the connection between the baby purchased by Lady Macduff and the Macduff boy in Shakespeare's play, it is dramatically ironic that it is at this point that Macbeth tells his wife, 'There shall be done a deed of dreadful note' (scene 19, p. 87).

Just as Macbeth has ordered Magg's husband, Grimm, to have Macduff's family killed, Magg comes to sell the information about the whereabouts of the child to Lady Macbeth. When Grimm realises that Lady Macbeth's son is in Macduff's castle he tells Lady Macbeth, in exchange for a reward, that her husband is planning to kill Macduff's 'wife, his babes, all'. Lady Macbeth is horrified: 'Oh, God! What monster's this I've made?' (scene 2, p. 97). She sends a messenger to Fife to warn Lady Macduff, but it is too late. What Grimm has not told Lady Macbeth is that he himself has already dispatched the killers. The invention of this plotline clears up two mysteries in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: 'Where is Lady Macbeth's child?' and 'Who is the Messenger who warns Lady Macduff?'.[102] In Calcutt's play, Lady Macbeth's descent into madness is brought on not by guilt because she persuaded Macbeth to murder Duncan but by grief for her child and guilt because if she had not persuaded Macbeth to murder Duncan, her son would still be alive:

> The Thane of Fife, he [*sic*] had a wife… She's killed – the whole household put to death – her children slaughtered – my child – the oldest boy – I saw him once. I didn't know. And now he's dead. My child is dead.
> The Thane of Fife, he had a wife;
> That wife, she had a child… (Scene 21, p. 98)

Calcutt's appropriation takes its starting point in two of Lady Macbeth's speeches from Shakespeare's play: 'I have given suck, and know / How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me'[103] and 'Had he not resembled / My father as he slept, I had done't' (II.2.13-14).[104] In these two lines, Lady

102 N. H. Paul (*The Royal Play of 'Macbeth'*, 1950) thinks that the messenger in *Macbeth* IV.2 has been sent by Lady Macbeth, but Muir sees 'no reason to believe' that; p. 120, n. to ll. 64-72. In *Macbeth on the Estate*, Lady Macbeth herself runs to warn Lady Macduff and sits crying on the doorstep while Macbeth is killing the children in the kitchen.

103 It is a little strange, therefore, that the child has a wet-nurse in *Lady Macbeth*.

104 Mark Thornton Burnett notes that '[c]ritics quote these lines ["Had he not resembled / My father…"] with an enthusiasm which borders upon relief – finally the woman in the unwomanly Lady

Macbeth expresses a family affection that is not otherwise associated with her; they are arguably her most 'human-making' lines in the play. As neither her child nor her father is ever mentioned again, the appropriator is free to invent any backstory that fits the purpose of the appropriation, in the same way that an actor is free to invent any backstory that aids her/his performance. The invention that the Macduff boy is Lady Macbeth's lost child is perhaps the element of the plot that is most likely to have an emotional impact on spectators/readers, especially if they are familiar with Shakespeare's play. Although the Macduff slaughter, which, as has been mentioned, can be construed as the climax of Shakespeare's play, is not actually a scene in *Lady Macbeth*, the whole play is in a sense built around it and its connection to Lady Macbeth's mention of her child. In *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth may have said that she would be prepared to kill her child, but she never does. Instead, it is Macbeth who becomes a child murderer. In *Lady Macbeth*, Macbeth not only kills *a* child but the very child whom Lady Macbeth has 'given suck'.

In Greig's *Dunsinane*, the most significant changes from Shakespeare's play are that Lady Macbeth survives and that she has a son, again called Lulach, by her first husband. In this version, as in history, Lulach has grown up with the Macbeths and is alive when his stepfather dies.[105] When besieging the castle at Dunsinane, Siward finds out that – unlike what he has been led to believe – the tyrant's wife is, in the words of Siobhan Redmond (who played Gruach in the original production), 'neither mad nor dead'. Moreover, she is 'queen in her own right', 'the tyrant was king because he was married to her', and 'she has a son who she's managed to smuggle out of the castle'.[106] Macduff informs Siward:

Macbeth is glimpsed'; 'The "fiend-like Queen": Rewriting Lady Macbeth', *Parergon*, 11:1 (June 1993), 1-19 (p. 14). The afterlife of this particular line includes James Thurber's story in *The New Yorker*, in which a lady whom the narrator meets on holiday has read *Macbeth* as if it were a whodunnit and suspects Macduff of having killed Duncan, whereupon the narrator proceeds to find evidence in the text that the real murderer is in fact Lady Macbeth's father, who took the king's place in the bed after having killed him and so understandably resembled himself; James Thurber, 'The Macbeth Murder Mystery', in *The New Yorker* 2 October 1937, printed in James Thurber, *My World – And Welcme to It* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1942), pp. 33-39.

105 The characters are never referred to as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, but as 'the tyrant' and 'Gruach'.

106 Siobhan Redmond, interview, Aberdeen Performing Arts <http://youtu.be/B8-aEHCUuMA> [accessed 20 August 2014].

> The tyrant's son belongs to the Queen's first husband. Her father married her first to a prince of Alba with the aim of unifying Scotland under one crown. Gruach bore that prince a son – the rightful heir. But then the tyrant came from Mull and murdered the boy's father.
> The tyrant married Gruach and he became king.
> He adopted the boy as his own.
> The boy is the rightful heir.[107]

But according to Gruach, 'the tyrant' was a 'good king', and he killed her first husband because she 'asked him to do it' (Act I, p. 33). When Siward asks Gruach to 'renounce [her] son's claim to the throne', she answers:

> My son doesn't *claim*. My son *is* the King.
> It's not a matter about which he has a choice.
> My son is my son.
> My son is the son of his father.
> My son's father is dead.
> My son is the King. (Act I, p. 34)

When Siward kills Gruach's son to end the Moray claim once and for all, it turns out that Lulach had a son of his own.

Gruach insists that Lulach's baby is the new king, and Siward tries to persuade her to give up her fight: 'We've both lost sons in Scotland, Gruach. It's time for us both to do what's best for our people. The Moray claim is over. Accept that or I'll kill this child' (Act IV, p. 134). Gruach answers, 'Kill the child, Siward. Scotland will find another child' (135). This, similarly to Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth's claim that she would be prepared to kill her own child, could be interpreted as heartlessness, but a more contextually reasonable interpretation is that she knows that Siward will never go through with it – just as Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth would arguably never go through with killing her child.

It is clear that since the 1980s Lady Macbeth's missing child has gained a central position in interpretations of *Macbeth*, in appropriations as well as in productions and criticism. But while appropriations and productions alike focus on Lady Macbeth's child, they have different approaches: where the appropriations re-introduce the historical son-from-a-former-mar-

107 David Greig, *Dunsinane* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), Act I, p. 31. Subsequent references will be to this edition and given parenthetically in the text.

riage, productions of *Macbeth* typically interpret the child as the Macbeths' mutual child who has died in infancy. In all three appropriations studied here, the child is Lady Macbeth's son by her first husband, and he dies in all three versions, but under very different circumstances. Cargill Thompson's and Greig's versions have some basis in historical reality, while the son's destiny in Calcutt's play is fictional.[108]

'Look to the Lady': Who is Lady Macbeth?

The question of the missing child is closely related to the interpretation of Lady Macbeth's character, and goes hand in hand with the development of how she is perceived and portrayed. Samuel Johnson famously saw no redeeming features in Lady Macbeth, but called her 'merely detested'.[109] The traditional view of Lady Macbeth as a monster has been in contestation for at least two hundred years, but it is still very much part of the public consciousness. It is still often routinely said, by both laymen and critics, that *Macbeth* is a play about a man whose wife drives him to murder, in the same way that Goneril and Regan are often referred to as driving Lear out into the storm and making him mad. In contrast to this perception and more in accordance with Shakespeare's text, Joan Larsen Klein argues that Lady Macbeth never succeeds in 'unsexing' herself but continues to perceive herself primarily as a wife (in contrast to Macbeth, who 'thinks of himself as a husband only when she forces him to do so'); that 'Lady Macbeth's threats of violence, for all their force and cruelty, are empty fantasies'; and that it is Macbeth's desertion of his wife when he excludes her from his plans, denying her her former role of helpmate, that destroys her.[110] Lady Macbeth's tragedy, in this reading, is a specifically female one.[111]

108 Jean Binnie's unpublished play 'Lady Macbeth', from 1991, also takes the missing child into account, but not in a way that attempts to be historically accurate. This appropriation features only two characters: Lady Macbeth and Macduff. Lady Macbeth has seduced Macduff to be able to have a son, since Macbeth is apparently infertile. The first act takes place in bed and the second by the throne, which reviewers read as symbolising the connection between sex and power. See *Theatre Record* Jan-June 1991, p. 246.

109 *Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare*, ed. H. R. Woudhuysen (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 229.

110 Joan Larsen Klein, 'Lady Macbeth "Infirm of purpose"', in Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene and Carol Thomas Neely (eds), *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare* (Urbana, Chicago & London: University of Illinois Press, 1980), pp. 240-55 (p. 244).

111 Thornton Burnett rejects the view of Lady Macbeth as a demon and the view of her as 'an ordinary woman in need of her husband's support' in equal measure and instead argues that the char-

Hannah Pritchard, who played Lady Macbeth opposite David Garrick 1748-68, is often described as 'masculine'. According to Kliman, Shakespeare's boy actors would have had to emphasise Lady Macbeth's femininity, but Pritchard, as a woman, could afford to portray her in a more androgynous or even masculine way.[112] Both Pritchard and Sarah Siddons, who played the part opposite John Philip Kemble 1785-1819, were tall, dark, physically strong and imposing women. However, Reiko Oya claims that Siddons 'departed from the stereotype established by [Pritchard]'; and according to Russ McDonald, 'Lady Macbeth [had been] one of the most codified dramatic parts', but 'Mrs Siddons threw away the book of rules'.[113] But while Siddons developed the role further than Pritchard and saw the character as a 'fair, feminine, nay, perhaps, even fragile' woman who was 'respectable in energy and strength of mind, and captivating in feminine loveliness',[114] it was as the formidable amazon that her Lady Macbeth became so immensely popular. McDonald reports that one critic wrote, 'Lady Macbeth, that dark and dreadful sublimity of evil, has perished forever from the stage with Mrs. Siddons'.[115] Nevertheless, between them Pritchard and Siddons established a prototype for future portrayals of Lady Macbeth.[116]

In Siddons's day, according to Georgianna Ziegler, Lady Macbeth was seen as 'a larger-than-life figure of evil […] out of the past' and so '[could] have nothing to do with "real" women and their emotions'.[117] During the nineteenth century, *Macbeth* came to be seen as an 'analogy of the Fall' and

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acter tries 'to realize herself by using the dominant discourses of patriarchy as she lacks an effectively powerful counter-language' and, rather than 'destroy[ing] herself', she 'is harmed by patriarchy in her manipulation of female roles and in her efforts to find a voice, to be heard, and to become an authentic subject'; pp. 1-2.

112 Kliman, pp. 8-9. Anthony Vaughan points out that the first time Pritchard played Lady Macbeth, in 1744, it was not in Garrick's but in Davenant's version; *Born to Please: Hannah Pritchard, Actress, 1711-1768: A Critical Biography* (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1979), p. 35.

113 Reiko Oya, *Representing Shakespearean Tragedy: Garrick, the Kembles and Kean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 67; Russ McDonald, *Look to the Lady: Sarah Siddons, Ellen Terry and Judi Dench on the Shakespearean Stage* (Athens, Georgia & London: University of Georgia Press, 2005), p. 40.

114 Sarah Siddons, 'Remarks on the Character of Lady Macbeth', in Thomas Campbell, *Life of Mrs Siddons* (1983), vol. II, p. 11 (printed in *Women's Theatrical Memoirs*, Part 1, vol. 5, ed. Sharon Setzer [London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007], p. 19).

115 Quoted in McDonald, p. 38.

116 See also Rosenberg, *The Masks of Macbeth*, pp. 160-65.

117 Georgianna Ziegler, 'Accommodating the Virago: Nineteenth-Century Representations of Lady Macbeth', in *Shakespeare and Appropriation*, ed. Christy Desmet and Robert Sawyer (London & New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 119-41 (p. 124).

Lady Macbeth as the temptress who leads the man into evil.[118] According to Sandra Richards, Helen Faucit, in the midnineteenth century, played the part as 'the Victorian ideal woman gone wrong', and according to Rosenberg, Faucit's Lady Macbeth was 'an extraordinary example of the loving wife'.[119] In 1832, Anna Jameson observes in her influential *Shakespeare's Heroines: Characteristics of Women Moral, Poetical and Historical* that Lady Macbeth's ambition is for her husband, for whom she feels 'wifely and womanly respect and love', showing that there was by then an alternative idea that Lady Macbeth was trying to act in the best interest of her husband rather than trying to deprave him.[120] Ziegler points out that Jameson thus 'place[s] [Lady Macbeth] – however flawed – within the accepted framework of Victorian womanhood'.[121] According to Ziegler, there were two conflicting traditions of depicting Lady Macbeth, as 'barbaric and passionate' or as 'domesticated and caring', which is symptomatic of 'the conflicted notions about women's roles in the nineteenth century'.[122]

Whether or not Lady Macbeth is inherently evil is perhaps the most central point in an interpretation of the character. According to Samantha Chater, Garrick wanted to portray Lady Macbeth as the evil force of the play to such an extent that he omitted scenes and lines so as to 'depict Lady Macbeth as totally evil' and avoid 'incriminat[ing] Macbeth'.[123] Chater

118 Ibid., pp. 125-26.

119 Richards, p. 3; Rosenberg, *The Masks of Macbeth*, p. 180.

120 Anna Jameson, *Shakespeare's Heroines: Characteristics of Women Moral, Poetical and Historical* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1908 [1832]), p. 328. Bradley observes that '[t]he assertion that Lady Macbeth sought a crown for herself, apart from her husband, is absolutely unjustified by anything in the play. It is based on a sentence of Holinshed's which Shakespeare did *not* use'; *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 350, n. 1 [emphasis original]. In 1909, August Goll remarks, 'in no single place does Lady Macbeth affirm that power and position constitute any temptation to herself. Shakespeare never suggests the presence of any wish, the satisfaction of which she would obtain by becoming queen'; *Criminal Types in Shakespeare*, trans. Mrs. Charles Weekes (London: Methuen, 1909), pp. 135-36.

121 Ziegler, p. 130.

122 Ibid., p. 137.

123 Samantha Chater, 'Two Shakespearian Actresses, Hannah Pritchard and Sarah Siddons: An Examination of Their Interpretations of Lady Macbeth, Viewed Within the Context of Their Times' (MA dissertation), The Shakespeare Institute, University of Birmingham, 1990, p. 72. It must be pointed out, however, that it was not unusual either for Garrick or for his contemporaries to make changes or substantial cuts to Shakespeare's plays. Published posthumously in 1674, William Davenant's appropriation of *Macbeth* had been first performed some ten years earlier and held its position as the predominant version of the play for the best part of a century. Kliman points out that though Garrick 'boasted of restoring Shakespeare's language' after a period when Davenant's version had been the one usually seen on stage, Garrick cut Shakespeare's text heavily, kept the singing and dancing of Davenant's witches, and introduced a dying confession from Macbeth; p. 23. However, George

further states that 'Lady Macbeth was not allowed to reveal any personal anguish or sensitivity that might depict her in a sympathetic light'.[124] While Siddons's Lady Macbeth was not considered by the audience to be very much less evil than Pritchard's, Siddons's interpretation was that as Lady Macbeth does not want to '[add] to the weight of [Macbeth's] affliction the burthen of her own, she endeavours to conceal it from him'.[125] This, Oya suggests, might be why the audience was unaware of Lady Macbeth's 'agony':[126] it cannot have been easy, Oya argues, to reveal Lady Macbeth's true state of mind to the audience whilst at the same time concealing it from Macbeth.[127]

Siddons's conception of Lady Macbeth was, according to Joseph Leach, 'rejected' by the Victorian actress Charlotte Cushman: her Lady 'embodied virile determination to cower her weakling husband into total obedience'.[128] Barbara Marinacci states that Cushman did not like playing Lady Macbeth, 'since she was revolted by the woman's deeds – although she knew they gave a stern moral lesson to beholders'.[129] This was a step back from Siddons's interpretation in the development from a wantonly evil force to a woman whose motives could be at least partially understood. Ellen Terry, on the other hand, did not see how 'anyone [could] think of Lady Macbeth as a sort of monster, abnormally hard, abnormally cruel'. Her conception of the character was 'a small slight woman of acute nervous sensibility', though Ziegler points out that Terry, like Siddons, 'acted

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Winchester Stone, Jr., demonstrates that Garrick's changes to the parts of Shakespeare's text that he retains largely consist in replacing individual words, whereas Davenant's version is almost entirely paraphrased; 'Garrick's Handling of *Macbeth*', *Studies in Philology* 38 (1941), Shakespeare Institute Library, pamphlet box: pPR2823 I-Z. It was in 1744 that Garrick 'revived Shakespeare's *Macbeth*', or, as Vaughan puts it, 'as near Shakespeare as had been seen on stage since [the 1660s] when Davenant's operatic version, bearing little relation to Shakespearian tragedy, had been established and become a great favourite'; pp. 34-35. According to Dennis Bartholomeusz, it was a controversial choice to restore Shakespeare's text, even partly: Garrick 'met with immediate and widespread opposition. The press could not see why any change had to be made, as Davenant's version had given satisfaction for eighty years'; *Macbeth and the Players* (Cambridge, London New York & Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 39.

124 Chater, p. 82.

125 Siddons, pp. 31-32 [pp. 23-24].

126 Oya, p. 75.

127 Ibid., pp. 75, 77.

128 Joseph Leach, *Bright Particular Star: The Life & Times of Charlotte Cushman* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 44. See also Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation and Authorship, 1660-1769* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 37-38.

129 Barbara Marinacci, *Leading Ladies: A Gallery of Famous Actresses* (London: Alvin Redman, 1962), pp. 84-85.

the part with more passion and power than [her] writings indicate'.[130] According to Nina Auerbach, Terry insisted that Lady Macbeth was 'Everywoman'.[131] This attitude is clear in Terry's letters to William Scott and to William Winter. In the former, she argues that if Lady Macbeth had already been evil, there would have been no logical reason for her to ask the spirits to make her so:

> Surely did she not call on the spirits to be made bad, because she knew she was not so very bad? I'm always calling on the spirits to be made good, because I know I'm not good […] No – she was not good, but not much worse than many women you know – me for instance – My hankerings are not for blood, but I think I might, kill for my child or my love blindly – & see & regret & repent in deepest sincerity after[.][132]

In the second letter, Terry expounds an analysis of Lady Macbeth's character that closely resembles Larsen Klein's:

> Everyone seems to think Mrs. McB is a Monstrousness & I can only see that she's a woman – a mistaken woman – & weak – not a Dove – of course not – but first of all **a wife** = I don't think she's at all clever ("Lead Macbeth" indeed! – she's not even clever enough to sleep!) She seems shrewd, & thinks herself so, at first to a certain point, about her husband's character but oh, dear me how quickly he gets steeped in wickedness beyond her comprehension[.][133]

130 Terry, *Four Lectures on Shakespeare*, ed. with an introduction by Christopher St. John (London: Martin Hopkinson, 1932), pp. 123-67 (pp. 160-61); Ziegler, p. 129. Terry commented on the discrepancy between Siddons's notes on the part and her actual performance in her lecture on Shakespeare's 'Pathetic Women': 'From all accounts by Mrs. Siddons's contemporaries, there would seem to be no doubt that she played Lady Macbeth on the "tigress" lines, creating a woman of inhuman strength (an "exultant savage" says one witness), but her memoranda about the part prove that she did not *see* her like that. She thought that Lady Macbeth was "fair, feminine, nay, perhaps even fragile". If there was such a difference, as this note indicates, between the great actress's theory and practice, it would not surprise me'. Terry goes on to explain why: 'It is not always possible for us players to portray characters on the stage exactly as we see them in imagination. Mrs Siddons may have realized that her physical appearance alone – her aquiline nose, her raven hair, her flashing eyes, her commanding figure – was against her portraying a fair, feminine, "nay, perhaps even fragile" Lady Macbeth. It is no use an actress wasting her nervous energy on a battle with her physical attributes. She had much better find a way of employing them as allies'; pp. 162-63. According to Nina Auerbach, Terry herself 'lost heart when her performance [as Lady Macbeth] failed to communicate all she meant it to'; *Ellen Terry: Player in Her Time* (London: J. M. Dent & Son, 1987), p. 208.

131 Auerbach, p. 208.

132 Ellen Terry to Clement Scott, quoted in Auerbach, p. 258.

133 Ellen Terry to William Winter, quoted in Auerbach, p. 259.

Terry's character analysis shows that the idea that Lady Macbeth is a loving wife who does not realise her husband's propensity for cruelty until it is too late is not a new one. Portrayals of Lady Macbeth as 'fiend-like' have continued to occur; but as the twentieth century advanced, an increasing number of interpretations of Lady Macbeth would follow the ideas of Siddons and Terry by depicting her as less evil and more human.

Sinéad Cusack's conception of Lady Macbeth, first formed in the 1960s, was someone 'very young' and 'very beautiful', who had 'a sort of amorality, a complete ignorance of right and wrong, the sort of blinkered vision of a child who grabs what it wants with no thought of the consequence'.[134] Though that was not exactly the Lady Macbeth she would eventually play, the description tallies with Francesca Annis' Lady Macbeth in Polanski's 1971 film: she gives the impression of just such an amoral child, totally unaware of the consequences of her actions. To call her evil would be misleading, because she has no conception of right and wrong, nor does she reflect on the suffering she will cause. The lack of callousness in Judi Dench's Lady Macbeth, as seen in the television version of Trevor Nunn's production, is of a quite different sort: she does reflect, and is torn between good and evil; she seems to suffer more than almost anyone else in the play. In this interpretation, she is a victim, as was, according to Kliman, Melinda Mullins's 'playful' and 'good-natured' Lady Macbeth, in the New York Shakespeare Festival's production from 1990, whose husband was 'rational', 'wholly unsympathetic' and 'evil'.[135] This also applies to Jules Wright's 1986 production of *Macbeth* at the Royal Lyceum Theatre in Edinburgh. Inspired by Marilyn French's feminist study *Shakespeare's Division of Experience*, Wright set out to redistribute the perceived guilt from Lady Macbeth to her husband. Many reviewers objected to this, as they found Lady Macbeth too dull and Macbeth too much of a villain.[136]

Most modern performances deviate from the tradition created by Pritchard and Siddons, but not all in the same way. Annis's and Dench's Lady Macbeths, for example, are both opposites of the stereotype, but in

134 Cusack, in Rutter, *Clamorous Voices*, p. 55.

135 Kliman, pp. 218; 217.

136 Elizabeth Schafer, *Ms-Directing Shakespeare: Women Direct Shakespeare* (London: The Women's Press, 1998), pp. 153-58. According to Marilyn French, '*Macbeth* presents [a] world in which the feminine principle is devalued' and 'is an envisioning of the consequences to a man and to his culture of casting certain values aside'; *Shakespeare's Division of Experience* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), p. 241. Cf. Thornton Burnett, who rejects this interpretation, saying that the '"feminine principle" in *Macbeth* is not defeated; it lives on, still shaping conflict in the society which it has helped to create' (19).

different respects: Annis's Lady is young, feminine, cheerful and fair rather than middle-aged, masculine, demonic and dark, whereas Dench's is vulnerable, fragile, scared and unhappy rather than evil, powerful, bold and exultant. It seems that it is not unusual for present-day actresses, including Harriet Walter and Sian Thomas, to take Sarah Siddons's 'Remarks on the Character of Lady Macbeth' into account in their interpretations. This shows that – while Siddons's performance as Lady Macbeth was influential in its day – in the long run, Siddons revolutionised the interpretation of Lady Macbeth not primarily by her lauded performance but by her written comments on the character. According to Richards, 'actresses have worked from the eighteenth century to the present day to give Lady Macbeth's fiendishness a more human face'.[137] The preoccupation with children is part of the work actors do to make the character 'human'. Naturally, it has not been a uniform one-way development; but the tendency over the past two-hundred years is that Lady Macbeth has gone from masculine to feminine, from fierce to fragile, from powerful to vulnerable, from frightening to attractive, from ambitious and ruthless to a self-sacrificing and loving wife, and from wantonly evil to psychologically believable.

In performance, the conception of Lady Macbeth's character manifests itself by a number of choices. For example, there are infinitely many ways of interpreting the soliloquy in which Lady Macbeth summons the 'Spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts' (I.5.40-41). Sarah Siddons, like Ellen Terry, saw Lady Macbeth's need to apply to the spirits for assistance as evidence that she was not naturally evil.[138] In Trevor Nunn's 1974-75 RSC production, Helen Mirren's Lady Macbeth slashed her wrists to summon the spirits. In the television version of Nunn's next RSC production of the play, Dench's Lady Macbeth almost appears to be in physical pain, tense and obviously terrified of the spirits. McDonald sees the soliloquy in Dench's interpretation as an 'effort to suppress [Lady's Macbeth's] vulnerability'.[139] In the words of Kliman, Dench's Lady Macbeth 'violently wrenches her nature to unsex herself, unlike the terrible Lady Macbeth for whom these declarations are exultant liberation'.[140] In Jack Gold's BBC version from 1983, for example, Jane Lapotaire's Lady Macbeth is panting excitedly already at the beginning of the soliloquy, and as she pronounces

137 Richards, p. 2.
138 McDonald, p. 40.
139 Ibid., p. 140.
140 Kliman, p. 139.

the words 'unsex me' she flings herself upon the bed, her legs wide apart, and begins to perform what Kliman refers to as 'orgasmic writhings'. According to Kliman, this Lady Macbeth does not want the spirits to take away her sexuality but her 'woman's repugnance for violence'.[141] In Cusack's interpretation, 'unsex me' should be read as 'make me invulnerable to love', not 'make me an un-woman', a plea for the strength to resist letting her affection for her husband get in the way of her plans rather than a plea for male courage or capability of violence.[142] Walter sees 'unsex me' in connection with Lady Macbeth's childlessness – 'Her breasts are cruel mockery, so why should the spirits not take her "milk for gall"?' – while Cusack thinks of this passage as 'a bargain […] with the devil' to give up her sexuality and her fertility if her plan succeeds.[143]

In I.7, Lady Macbeth asks her husband, 'What beast was't then / That made you break this enterprise to me?' (47-48). This has sometimes been

141 Ibid., p. 103. The idea that Lady Macbeth's power over her husband is sexual is old enough to have been criticised by Bradley; *Shakespearean Traghedy*, p. 379, n. 1. This interpretation has been brought into performance by several late-twentieth-century actresses, notably Helen Mirren in Nunn's 1974-75 production and Anastasia Hille in Richard Eyre's 1993 production at the National Theatre. Both portrayed Lady Macbeth as considerably younger than Macbeth, played by Nicol Williamson and Alan Howard, respectively.

142 Cusack, quoted in Rutter, *Clamorous Voices*, p. 61.

143 Walter, *Actors on Shakespeare*, p. 32; Rutter, *Clamorous Voices*, pp. 60-61. Several critics have commented on the connection between Lady Macbeth's desire to be defeminised in preparation for the murder of Duncan and her plea to 'make thick my blood, / Stop up th'access and passage to remorse, / That no compunctious visitings of nature / Shake my fell purpose' (I.5.43-46), which could be taken to mean 'stop me from menstruating'. As La Belle puts it, '[t]o free herself of the basic psychological characteristics of femininity, [Lady Macbeth] is asking the spirits to eliminate the basic biological characteristics of femininity'; p. 381. According to Fox, it was believed in Shakespeare's day that amenorrhea was caused by particularly thick blood, and 'natural visits' was 'a common euphemism for menstruation'; p. 129. According to La Belle, 'Renaissance medical texts generally refer to the tract through which the blood from the uterus is discharged as a "passage"', and it was known that an artery connects the heart (the seat of 'remorse') and the uterus; p. 382. Although more disposed to interpret the passage metaphorically, Adelman also observes that 'the thickening of the blood and the stopping up of access and passage to remorse begin to sound like attempts to undo reproductive functioning and perhaps to stop the menstrual blood that is the sign of its potential', as if 'she imagines an attack on the reproductive passages of her own body, on what makes her specifically feminine'; p. 135. La Belle argues that '[t]he menstrual flow abnormally stopped by Lady Macbeth is part of the blood that darkens the entire play'; p. 385. Seen differently, menstrual blood could also have a place in this 'bloody' play as a sign of the absence of pregnancy, as in *Macbeth on the Estate*, where Lady Macbeth does menstruate (see above). In the production that I co-directed, Lady Macbeth got menstrual blood onto her hand during the sleepwalking scene, and the dismay at the memory of Duncan's blood-stained corpse was compounded by this reminder of not being able to conceive, and maybe also of bleeding in connection with past miscarriages. Throughout the production, which was set in a bathroom, there was an ovulation test in the Macbeths' downstage bathroom cabinet, a detail that might be picked up by the occasional spectator in the front row.

seen as evidence that *Macbeth*, Shakespeare's shortest tragedy, is missing a scene in its extant form, since we have not heard Macbeth tell his wife of any plan.[144] But the line is significant for what it says about the relative initiative of Macbeth and his wife, respectively: in their first scene together, I.5, Lady Macbeth seems to take the lead, even asking her apparently more reluctant husband to 'Leave all the rest to me' (73), which could lead spectators/readers to expect her to perform the murder. But she does not kill anyone in the play, and she is only accessory to the first of Macbeth's many murders. If her statement that even that murder was Macbeth's idea can be taken at face value (and Macbeth does not contradict her), the conventional reading of Lady Macbeth as the force that is initially behind Macbeth's tyranny is severely undermined. Bradley observes that in her speech in I.7, 'Lady Macbeth asserts (1) that Macbeth proposed the murder to her: (2) that he did so at a time when there was no opportunity to attack Duncan, no "adherence" of "time" and "place": (3) that he declared he would *make* an opportunity, and swore to carry out the murder'. The 'swearing', Bradley concedes, could occur between scenes 5 and 6 or 6 and 7, but the 'enterprise' must have been 'broken' before the beginning of the play, as time and place have 'adhered' since before the first meeting of the spouses on stage.[145]

Walter also sees the line as evidence that it must have been Macbeth's idea to kill Duncan in the first place, not his wife's, and speaks of the play as a 'portrait of a *folie à deux*', claiming that '[t]he tragedy of *Macbeth* is set in motion by two people, a man and his wife. None of it would have happened if either had been acting alone'.[146] According to her conception of the play, while the murder was originally Macbeth's initiative, neither of the Macbeths is either innately evil or entirely innocent: it is the combination of these two characters that gives rise to evil. Jameson remarks that 'the first idea of murdering Duncan is not suggested by Lady Macbeth to her husband' but 'springs within *his* mind and is revealed to us before his first interview with his wife' ('My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical…' [I.3.141]), and that '[t]he guilt is thus more equally divided than we should suppose, when we hear people pitying "the noble nature of Macbeth", bewildered and goaded on to crime, solely or chiefly by the instigation of his wife'.[147] That Lady Macbeth 'appears the more active

144 See Muir, pp. xlviii-xlix.
145 Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 481.
146 Walter, *Actors on Shakespeare*, pp. 35, 18, 1.
147 Jameson, pp. 324, 325.

agent of the two', Jameson argues, is 'less through her pre-eminence in wickedness than through her superior intellect'.[148] Rosenberg comments on the interplay between Macbeth and his wife in the following way:

> In the text [Lady Macbeth] seems so active a force that Macbeth might have remained innocent without her; but critics as well as actors have sensed an interplay between, on the one hand, Macbeth's spoken reluctances that perhaps hid his secret hopes – if not his desires or manipulations – and on the other hand Lady Macbeth's overt, tense determination, masking only for a time the irresolution, vulnerability, perhaps remorse, that destroys her.[149]

The idea that Macbeth's reluctance and Lady Macbeth's determination in scenes 5 and 7 may to a certain extent be shows put on to hide their underlying attitudes, in Lady Macbeth's case to be able to go through with the murder and in Macbeth's to put a larger part of the responsibility onto his wife, gives an alternative meaning to the so-called 'chiasmus' reading, in which Lady Macbeth is the dominant character during the first half of the play and then replaced by Macbeth during the second.[150] Rather than Macbeth taking over as the dominant partner after the murder, it could perhaps be argued that both characters start to show their real natures to a greater extent.

The speech in which Lady Macbeth claims to have 'given suck' is an important key to her character in ways that the present chapter has not yet discussed. Jacobi says of Campbell's Lady Macbeth that the 'appalling image of the braining of the child comes from the hardness that is within her', and that this is an example of her being 'brilliantly manipulative'.[151] Siddons, on the other hand, saw the speech as evidence of Lady Macbeth's capability of tenderness.[152] According to Walter, Lady Macbeth's protestation that she would have 'plucked [her] nipple from his boneless gums, / And dashed the brains out' (I.7.57-58) should not be seen as 'proof of Lady Macbeth's heartlessness' – rather, she 'is thinking up the supreme, most horrendous sacrifice imaginable to her in order to shame her husband into

148 Ibid., p. 325.

149 Marvin Rosenberg, *The Masks of Macbeth* (Newark: University of Delaware Press; London & Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1978), p. 159.

150 See Kliman, pp. 62-111.

151 Jacobi, p. 203.

152 Kliman, pp. 34-35.

keeping his pledge'.[153] As was suggested above, she argues that Macbeth understands how much effort and pain it takes for Lady Macbeth to utter the words about the child, and that that is the only thing that could have persuaded him.[154]

The 'given suck' speech can be done in a calculated and controlled way, or as an outburst that surprises and perhaps frightens Lady Macbeth herself. The irregularity of the metre in the final lines is an indication that Lady Macbeth is not in full control.[155] The line can be scanned in different ways, but a simple way to do it is to insert an empty beat before 'had I so sworn'.[156] This pause can be filled with any number of things: Macbeth looking at her; Lady Macbeth looking at him, or perhaps taking a moment to compose herself. It is possible to keep the rhythm all the way up to the pause, which is likely to result in a calmer delivery, perhaps giving a more manipulative impression than if the rhythm is irregular. It is also possible to depart from the metre on the words 'dashed the brains out'. These words may be interpreted as the most difficult for her to say, and the line can be played as if she breaks down when the metre breaks down. If the line is spoken irregularly, it is also possible to omit the pause. However, this makes the audience more likely to miss Lady Macbeth's logical argument and instead interpret her speech as proof that she is capable of horrible acts of cruelty. This is because 'had I so sworn / As you have done to this' is not given as much stress as if it were preceded by a short pause. What comes after the pause completely changes the meaning of what was said before it.

153 Walter, *Actors on Shakespeare*, p. 31. It is perhaps significant that Jacobi did not, like Siddons and Walter, play the part of Lady Macbeth and therefore is not considering the matter from her point of view.

154 Walter, *Actors on Shakespeare*, pp. 31, 36.

155 Bradley thought that Lady Macbeth's 'voice should doubtless rise until it reaches, in "dash'd the brains out," an almost hysterical scream', as Siddons's was reported to have done; *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 371.

156 Alternatively, the lines may be divided in the following way, which yields an extra syllable instead of an empty beat: 'And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn as you / Have done to this'. Either way, the irregularity of the verse line may suggest that Lady Macbeth loses control over her emotions as she loses control over the verse. It should be noted that breastfeeding one's own child was unusual in Elizabethan England and was seen as a sign of exceptional maternal affection and tenderness. This is, for example, how the information in Anne Hathaway's epitaph that she had breastfed her daughter should be understood. There were of course class differences, but it was not the case that only aristocrats employed wet nurses. In Medieval Scotland, however, it was according to Hector Boece customary for mothers to nurse their own children; 'From Vol. II. The Description of Scotland, written at first by Hector Boece, and afterward translated into the Scotish speech by John Bellenden…and now finallie into English by R.H.', in Bullough, vol. VII, pp. 506-07 (p. 506).

It is not that she would kill her child because that is the sort of thing she would do. She would keep her promise, even if that promise were to kill her child, because keeping her promise is the sort of thing she would do, and the sort of thing everyone should do. Lady Macbeth would never promise to kill her child, but Macbeth *has* promised to kill the king; if he is not prepared to do it, he should not have promised, just as she has not promised to kill her child.[157] If the speech is put in connection with an earlier line from the same scene, 'From this time / Such I account thy love' (38-39), it is easy to see that Lady Macbeth is simply using emotional blackmail. What she is saying is, 'When I make a promise to you I keep it, however difficult, and I expect you to do the same for me. If you don't do this one thing that I ask you to do and that you know means so much to me, it means that you don't love me.' This does not mean that she is not genuinely distressed at the thought of braining her child. There is good evidence in the text to support the theory that the mention of the baby has a strong impact on Macbeth and is painful to both of them, as that is what finally persuades him to change his mind, and as she waits so long to bring it up and it is never mentioned between them again. In light of the fact that this reading of Lady Macbeth's speech was proposed already by Coleridge, it has been remarkably slow in gaining ground.[158]

Two other performance choices that are connected to the overall interpretation of Lady Macbeth, how much she is in control of the situation and how much she is aware of the consequences, are the inflection used for the line 'We fail?' (which is punctuated in different ways in different editions) and whether the faint in II.3 is real or feigned. Siddons famously

157 Adelman interprets the speech in a completely different way. In her reading, it shows Lady Macbeth's power over Macbeth and her affinity to the witches: Lady Macbeth's 'attack on Macbeth's virility', Adelman argues, 'is the source of her strength over him', and she 'acquires that strength […] partly because she can make him imagine himself as an infant vulnerable to her. In the figure of Lady Macbeth […], Shakespeare rephrases the power of the witches as the wife/mother's power to poison human relatedness at its source; in her, their power of cosmic coercion is rewritten as the power of the mother to misshape or destroy the child'; pp. 137-38.

158 Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote that 'though usually thought to prove a merciless and unwomanly nature, [the mention of the child] proves the direct opposite: she brings it as the most solemn enforcement to Macbeth of the solemnity of his promise to undertake the plot against Duncan. Had *she* so sworn, she would have done that which was most horrible to her feelings, rather than break the oath; and as the most horrible act which it was possible for imagination to conceive, as that which was most revolting to her own feelings, she alludes to the destruction of her infant, while in the act of sucking at her breast. Had she regarded this with savage indifference, there would have been no force in the appeal; but her very allusion to it, and her purpose in this allusion, shows that she considered no tie so tender as that which connected her with her babe'; quoted in Muir, p. 42, n. 57.

tried first a 'quick contemptuous' 'We fail?', then '*We* fail!' with 'indignant astonishment', and finally a simple statement, 'We fail'.[159] Many other variations are of course possible, but the basic difference between question and statement decides whether Lady Macbeth thinks there is a possibility of failing and whether she is prepared to risk the consequences of such failure. Thornton Burnett claims that the question of whether Lady Macbeth pretends to faint to save the situation or actually faints is 'irrelevant' as it serves the same dramatic function either way;[160] but it is of course a question that must be decided in performance. Lady Macbeth certainly has reason to faint: not only is Macbeth's description of Duncan's 'gash'd stabs' bound to bring back unpleasant memories, but she has just learnt that her husband has departed from their plan and killed several people whose deaths were not intended. Bradley writes that it seems to be 'the general view' that she pretends, which could be supported by the fact that Lady Macbeth does not faint when she sees Duncan's corpse and is therefore unlikely to faint at the description, and that the faint successfully leads everybody's attention away from her husband's over-acting. Bradley, however, believes that the faint is real, since Lady Macbeth's memory of Duncan's corpse in the sleepwalking scene reveals how deeply affected she was by the sight, and as her failure to perform the promised 'griefs and clamours' indicates that she is finding the pretence and the fear of discovery more of an ordeal than she had imagined.[161] According to Dennis Bartholomeusz, the faint had been cut prior to Helen Faucit's reinstatement of it, because it had been considered too 'Machiavellian'; but Faucit's performance left contemporary spectators in no doubt that Lady Macbeth genuinely fainted at the recollection of the bloody corpse of the man who had reminded her of her father.[162] One modern performance where the faint was clearly not a masquerade is the one by Cusack, whose 'Help me hence, ho' (II.3.119) was barely audible.

Appropriations of the play have even greater possibilities to shift the focus to Lady Macbeth and to make any unconventional readings of the character explicit. Lady Macbeth is a central figure in all three appropriations, even in *Macbeth Speaks*, where she does not appear on stage. Cargill

159 Jameson, pp. 326-27, n. 1.

160 Thornton Burnett, 15, n. 32.

161 Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 485.

162 Bartholomeusz, pp. 174-75. Fox believes that the faint is real, since the language Macbeth uses to describe Duncan's corpse may be thought suggestive of 'the gory sights of difficult births'; p. 135.

Thompson's Macbeth's primary motivation for giving his lecture is to restore the reputation of his wife:

> I wouldn't mind if it was just me… […] But how can you do this to her? … How can you do this to my Gruoch? … You didn't even know she had a name did you? [---] Don't you see, it is what has been done to Gruoch that has torn me out of my grave to come here to speak to you tonight. (8-10)

According to this Macbeth, Gruoch was not only a wife and mother, but a political force to be reckoned with:

> [S]hall I really confuse you now? […]
> Wait for it!
> Lady Macbeth is Macduff.
> No, I am not just being clever.
> [---]
> Macduff was the King's name.
> My name… Gruoch's name.
> For us the chief of Clan Macduff had an almost spiritual authority. Gruoch was our Chief of Clan Macduff. I told you women had authority with us.
> [---]
> [Macduff] is the Royal name. And the first of that ilk is my wife Gruoch.
> […] It is in her right and the right of her son Lulach that I have rule.
>
> (9-10)

This idea is also present in *Dunsinane*, where the English are surprised to find that Gruach is queen in her own right and that the tyrant's sole claim to the throne was his marriage to her.

The marriage of Shakespeare's Macbeths is often described as extremely close, almost symbiotic, and to begin with very happy. Cargill Thompson has preserved this aspect of the play in his appropriation. Calcutt, however, despite the fact that he sets the relationship up in a romantic way – Macbeth is the 'true love' that the Wyrd Sisters show Gruach at the beginning of the play – has chosen to depict a marriage of convenience without any particular depth of feeling between husband and wife. This seemed more realistic to Calcutt, as, historically, the marriage between Gruoch and Macbeth was arranged for political reasons.[163]

As Leggatt points out, Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth, unlike Desdemona

163 David Calcutt, personal interview, 25 March 2014.

and Juliet, has no female companion; there is a 'Gentlewoman' waiting on her, but we never see the two of them talking to each other.[164] In *Dunsinane*, by contrast, Gruach is surrounded by women, and it is implied that these are the Weird Sisters: Lulach says that his mother and her 'women', who are 'witches', 'cast spells' and can turn people into birds.[165] The connection between Lady Macbeth, the Weird Sisters and the spirits that 'tend on mortal thought' can be argued to exist in *Macbeth* as well as in *Lady Macbeth*. Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth has often been interpreted as 'the fourth witch' – yet another female figure who manipulates Macbeth into committing murder. In Eugène Ionesco's absurdist appropriation *Macbett*, Lady Macbett turns out actually to be one of the three witches, and Sybil Thorndike had 'often thought I'd like to double Lady Macbeth and the first witch. I think in Macbeth's nightmare brain the witches may have taken on his wife's face'.[166] Janet Adelman argues that '[t]he often-noted alliance between Lady Macbeth and the witches constructs malignant female power both in the cosmos and in the family', but that Lady Macbeth is 'more frightening' than

164 Leggatt, p. 200. In performance, however, the waiting gentlewoman and some of Macbeth's unnamed servants and messengers are sometimes merged into one character, leading to Lady Macbeth's interacting with the gentlewoman in I.5 and III.2. In Cooke's production, a close relationship between servant and mistress was implied in III.2 ('Is Banquo gone from court?'). Lady Macbeth held the gentlewoman's hand for a long moment and the gentlewoman seemed to realise how her mistress was feeling; the two of them spoke gently, almost tenderly, to each other. In the production of *Macbeth* that I co-directed, a female Seyton, played as Macbeth's personal assistant, took on the lines and actions of the waiting gentlewoman, the murderers, the Scottish doctor and most unnamed servants and messengers. Seyton had a close professional relationship with Macbeth but kept her distance from his wife, even though she worried about her and tried to keep her safe during her final illness. Lady Macbeth's sense of Seyton's replacing her as her husband's partner in crime as the play wore on was compounded by the fact that Seyton was a woman.

165 According to Mary Dellasega, the witches and their community are central to any feminist production of *Macbeth*. Such a production must 'establish the nature of [the witches'] power as seeing and showing to men the darkness and savagery of their souls' and 'establish that Macbeth is a symptom of the sickness of this world as a whole in its overemphasis on traditionally masculine values and virtues'. The witches should, according to Dellasega, be represented as 'a community of like-minded women who share their distrust of the men's viewpoints, values, religion, and actions'. Dellasega argues that this female community is unique among the relationships between women in Shakespeare's tragedies, which tend to be 'hostile' and 'alienated'; the fact that the witches 'form their own viewpoints' and 'confirm these opinions by sharing them with other women' contributes to their survival; 'Witches and Women: Performance Choices for *Macbeth*' (unpublished paper). Shakespeare Institute Library, pamphlet box pPR2823 A-H. We tried to convey something similar, but particular to a present-day context, in the *Macbeth* production that I co-directed: the Weird Sisters were played as a group of young female YouTubers, and their backstory was that they wanted to take revenge on men who had harrassed them online; like Lady Macbeth, they never intended any women or children to be hurt. Only three adult characters were male in our productions: Duncan, Macbeth and Malcolm.

166 Quoted in Richards, 4.

the witches.[167] But even though Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth calls on evil 'spirits' to help her, there is no sign that the invocation is successful or that the spirits she mentions have anything to do with the Weird Sisters.[168] There is certainly no indication that Lady Macbeth's intention is to hurt Macbeth. Besides, as the murder results in not only Macbeth's but also his wife's suffering, this would make Lady Macbeth herself one of her own victims. And as Bristol argues, 'Is it really more useful to consider [Lady Macbeth's evil deed] as the unmotivated malice of a witch rather than as the desperate act of an unhappy woman?'[169]

Lady Macbeth sees the story from Lady Macbeth's point of view and gives her human motives for her actions, while no effort is made to explain Macbeth's motives. It is possible, therefore, that a spectator/reader of *Macbeth* who has seen/read *Lady Macbeth* may sympathise more with Lady Macbeth and less with Macbeth than a spectator/reader who has no knowledge of Calcutt's play.[170] In *Dunsinane*, however, even though Gruach is in many ways the focus of the play, the events are not seen from her perspective but from Siward's and the other English soldiers'. Nor is the audience privy to her plan to only pretend to accept marriage to Malcolm, the usurper of the throne, while stalling for time for her army to take back Dunsinane. Gruach is presented as a mystery, and it is even suggested that she has magic powers. Siward wonders if she is a witch, a woman, or simply made of '[i]ce' (Act IV, p. 135). Out of the three appropriations, only *Lady Macbeth* is seen from Macbeth's wife's point of view. *Macbeth Speaks* explicitly lifts the

167 Adelman, p. 136. Adelman further connects Lady Macbeth to the Weird Sisters through her references to breastfeeding: 'Come to my woman's breasts, / And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers' (I.5.47-48). This is usually thought to mean 'replace my milk with gall', but Adelman argues that it could also be read as asking the spirits to accept her milk as nourishment in place of gall: 'she here invites precisely that nursing of devil-imps so central to the current understanding of witchcraft that the presence of supernumerary teats alone was often taken as sufficient evidence that one was a witch'; p. 135.

168 But see La Belle, who, supported by the Renaissance idea that the symptoms of amenorrhea included fainting, depression and troubled sleep, all of which affect Lady Macbeth, thinks that her summoning of evil spirits is successful and that they do 'make thick [her] blood', resulting in infertility. La Belle also connects Lady Macbeth's amenorrhea and the witches' hirsutism ('you should be women, / And yet your beards forbid me to interpret / That you are so' [I.3.45-47]) as two cases of 'unsexed' womanhood; pp. 383-85. Fox points out that witchcraft was thought to be one cause of infertility; p. 137.

169 Bristol, p. 33.

170 Even though *Lady Macbeth* is not usually presented as a feminist play, it was a conscious decision to apply a gender perspective and focus on the women and children of the story; David Calcutt, personal interview, 25 March 2014.

blame from her and addresses the issue of her having received an unfair amount of censure, but the story is told entirely by Macbeth. *Dunsinane* presents Gruach as cold and calculating, and in the RSC's original production Siobhan Redmond cut an imposing figure in the part, rather similar to John Singer Sargent's famous painting of Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth – a worthy puzzle for Siward, arguably that play's real protagonist, to try to solve. Substantial parts of *Dunsinane* also consist of the letters of an anonymous young English soldier. This Scottish play about the survival of an iconic female character is thus dominated by male, English voices.

*

While it is conspicuous that *Macbeth* criticism and the play's performance history have gone hand in hand during the last few decades with respect to the importance assigned to Lady Macbeth's missing child, appropriations from the same time period have developed in a different direction from productions of the play. The child does receive a great deal of attention in the appropriations as well, but is interpreted in a different way, and other aspects of the play further separate the appropriations from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as viewed in the theatre. Productions of *Macbeth* have lately focused on the human aspects of Lady Macbeth and tended to downplay any witch-like or wantonly wicked features perceived in the character, but *Dunsinane* brings her back as a majestic elemental being. The concern with historical accuracy and the highlighting of the play's Scottishness, found in all three appropriations, also go against most present-day productions, which tend to stress the play's universality or its applicability to specific dictatorships. An example of this is Goold's 2002 production at the Chichester Festival, which was visually set in a Soviet-like state.

Lady Macbeth and *Dunsinane* are set apart from the other appropriations in this study by the fact that they were commissioned, the former by the Oxford University Press and the latter by the Royal Shakespeare Company. Unlike theatrical appropriations provoked by some aspect of Shakespeare's work and written either on the initiative of the individual playwright or within the context of fringe theatre, these two plays can therefore be said to have their roots within establishments that affirm Shakespeare's status: the school syllabus and mainstream theatre, respectively. While *Macbeth Speaks* is more explicitly critical of Shakespeare than most appropriations,

neither *Lady Macbeth* nor *Dunsinane* seems to have any quarrel with Shakespeare, except in the case of *Dunsinane* as an element of the English dominance over Scotland.

All three appropriations position themselves in relation to history as well as in relation to Shakespeare. The version of the Macbeth story that is most widely known today apart from Shakespeare's is what is currently believed about the factual historical events and people; Holinshed's version is less well known. For this reason, many of Holinshed's changes in relations to historical circumstances may be erroneously attributed to Shakespeare. Spectators/readers who look into the play's historical background may for instance believe that it was Shakespeare who chose not to preserve Gruoch's name, to present her as a scheming and ambitious character, to write her out of the story before it is finished and to write Lulach out of it before it has even begun. Far from that being the case, these changes were made by the chroniclers; the Lady Macbeth we know was created by Shakespeare as an appropriation of the line 'his wife lay sore vpon him to attempt the thing, as she that was verie ambitious, burning in vnquenchable desire to beare the name of a quéene', without any knowledge of the historical person Gruoch. Rather than playing down Lady Macbeth and suppressing information about her child, Shakespeare made her much more central to the story, gave her depth of character and human motivation, and introduced the notion of her being a mother. It can be said, therefore, that *Macbeth* does to Holinshed's text what recent productions and appropriations have done to Shakespeare's text: it makes Macbeth's wife a more central character in the story and emphasises her human qualities.

4.
Othello and Desdemona's Lost Handkerchief
'Did it have to happen?'

In 1693, Thomas Rymer referred to *Othello* as 'a warning to all good Wives, that they look well to their Linnen', complaining that the play included so much fuss about Desdemona's handkerchief that Shakespeare might as well have named it *The Tragedy of the Handkerchief*.[1] This chapter discusses two re-visions of *Othello*: Paula Vogel's *Desdemona: A Play about a Handkerchief* (1979; 1994) and Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* (1988; 1990), which both focus on the handkerchief as the factor that determines Desdemona's fate. These two plays have been selected in accordance with the criteria presented in the introduction: while *Othello* is neither the most frequently appropriated, nor the most frequently produced, Shakespearean tragedy, there are other appropriations; but these do not fulfil all the criteria set up for this study. The two most obvious examples are Djanet Sears' *Harlem Duet*, which is not about Shakespeare's characters but about present-day equivalents in a different cultural context, and Toni Morrison's *Desdemona*, which is in many ways relevant to this study, but is less a play than a collage of dialogues, poems and songs. Taking place beyond the grave, Morrison's *Desdemona* has lyrics by the singer and songwriter Rokia Traoré, who also played Barbary in the European-American co-production in 2011-12, directed by Peter Sellars.[2]

1 *The Critical Works of Thomas Rymer*, ed. with an introduction and notes by Curt A. Zimansky (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1956), pp. 132, 160.

2 Djanet Sears, 'Harlem Duet', in Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier (eds), *Adaptations of Shakespeare: A Critical Anthology of Plays From the Seventeenth Century to the Present* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 289-317; Toni Morrison, *Desdemona*, lyrics by Rokia Traoré, with a foreword by Peter Sellars (London: Oberon, 2012). A third appropriation is *Casting Othello*, a play about a multi-racial American theatre company rehearsing a production of Shakespeare's *Othello*; Caleen Sinnette Jennings, *Playing Juliet / Casting Othello* (Woodstock, IL; London; Melbourne: Dramatic Publishing, 1999).

Unquestionably the most popular and probably the most influential among the appropriations in this study, *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* has been called 'one of the most successful Canadian plays written in English'.[3] *Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief* is the earliest appropriation discussed in this study and one of the plays that launched the genre of feminist Shakespeare re-vision. Together with *Lear's Daughters* (1987), they make up the three core works within feminist drama about Shakespearean female characters. *Desdemona* and *Goodnight Desdemona* take as their starting-points the question 'Did it have to happen?' – a question that has also proved to be many spectators'/readers' spontaneous reaction to Shakespeare's *Othello*. In this chapter, the re-visions' take on the inevitability of Desdemona's death is studied in relation to gender and race in productions of *Othello*.

'When you shall these unlucky deeds relate': *Othello* as an Appropriation

Shakespeare based *Othello* on stories from Cinthio's *Gli Hecatommithi* – notably Story 7 from Decade 3, 'Disdemona of Venice and the Moorish Captain' – and possibly also on Discourse IV from Bandello's *Certain Tragical Discourses* and historical accounts including Richard Knolles' *History of the Turks*.[4] In Shakespeare's appropriation of his sources, a shift of focus can be seen in terms of both gender and race. For example, in 'Disdemona of Venice', the 'Moorish Captain' does not even have a name. Allowing this racialised, 'othered' character a name functions as a way of humanising him and recognising his possession of an identity. Also, the actions of the Moorish captain's Ensign ('Iago') are explained by the fact that he is in love with Disdemona and honestly believes that she is in love

3 Christopher Hoile, review, 'Stage Door' 12 April 2001 <http://www.stage-door.com/Theatre/2001/Entries/2001/4/12_Goodnight_Desdemona_(Good_Morning,_Juliet).html> [accessed 3 January 2017].

4 Giovanni Battista Giraldi Cinthio, 'From GLI HECATOMMITHI' (1566 edn.), trans. Geoffrey Bullough, in Bullough (ed.), *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. VII: 'Major Tragedies: *Hamlet*; *Othello*; *King Lear*; *Macbeth*' (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), pp. 239-52; 'CERTAINE TRAGICALL DISCOURSES of Bandello', trans. Geoffrey Fenton (1567) via François Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques*, in Bullough, pp. 253-62; Richard Knolles, 'From THE GENERALL HISTORIE OF THE TURKES' (1603), in Bullough, pp. 262-65. A new English translation by T. J. B. Spencer was published in *Elizabethan Love Stories*, ed. T. J. B. Spencer (Harmondworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1968), pp. 197-210.

with the Corporal ('Cassio'); in Shakespeare's version, Iago (the white male) is denied any such mitigating circumstances.[5] Disdemona and the Ensign's wife ('Emilia'), 'a fair and honest young woman',[6] have an affectionate and uncomplicated relationship from first to last; in *Othello*, relationships between women are, by contrast, problematised by the interplay between Desdemona and Emilia. The Ensign's wife is aware of his plan from the start, but it is her husband who steals the handkerchief: rather than using his wife, the Ensign uses his three-year-old daughter to distract Disdemona so that he can take the handkerchief from her girdle. By making Emilia unaware of Iago's cruel scheme but guilty of the deed which seals Desdemona's fate, Shakespeare at once exculpates her and makes her more central in the plot. In Cinthio she lives to tell the tale, whereas in Shakespeare she is murdered by her husband in parallel to Desdemona. Shakespeare hence transforms Emilia from a passive observer into a participant in the tragedy.[7]

In Bandello's story, the Albanian captain is inherently evil and there is no Iago. In choosing to include an Iago character who is the real brain behind the crime, Shakespeare moves the guilt from the racially othered character onto a representative of white hegemony. Around the time that Shakespeare wrote *Othello*, the Admiral's Men were performing *The Spanish Moor's Tragedy*, which is probably either an alternative title for or a separate play connected to *Lust's Dominion; or, The Lascivious Queen* (c. 1600), a play about an evil and manipulative Moor. Geoffrey Bullough suggests that perhaps 'Shakespeare consciously [wrote] a play in rivalry with the other theatre's *Lust's Dominion*, with a white man as the evil manipulator and the Moor as a good man betrayed'.[8] Even though Othello's gullibility and inability to control his feelings and his temper are reminiscent of stereotypical depictions of black people, and even though he be-

5 It should be pointed out, however, that the Ensign is still a villainous character, and that he does not have a name either.

6 Cinthio, in Bullough, vol. VII, p. 243.

7 According to Geoffrey Bullough, '[t]he Ensign's wife is a shadowy, ambiguous figure; "honest and fair" we are told, but her honesty is limited. She is intimate with Disdemona and sees much of her, but her affection for her is less than her fear of her own husband. She knows that the Ensign is plotting against her friend and refuses to be his accomplice, but she does no more to help Disdemona than warn her to try to keep the Moor's trust. Only after the Ensign's death does she reveal the whole story'; 'Introduction' to *Othello*, in *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. VII, pp. 193-238 (pp. 201-02).

8 Bullough, vol. VII, p. 207.

comes a murderer, the appropriative move away from Shakespeare's source is a move towards relative sympathy with the character. In present-day parlance, this may be termed an anti-racist gesture, even though the text still embodies traces of the racism that was present in the culture in which it was written.

Another interesting difference between *Othello* and its main source, 'Disdemona', is the function of the parents of the Desdemona character. In Shakespeare's play, Desdemona's mother is apparently dead. Brabantio finds out about Desdemona's marriage to Othello only after the wedding, and is wholly against it; indeed, it proves 'mortal to him'.[9] From his exclamation 'O heaven, how got she out?' (I.1.167) upon learning of his daughter's elopement, it can be inferred that he has taken steps to ensure she does not leave the house without his knowledge. In the context of the literary and dramatic conventions of his time, Shakespeare could be sure that his audience would suppose themselves expected to disapprove of such an overprotective father and be on the side of the young lovers.[10] Cinthio's story does not go into detail about who Disdemona's family are other than that she, too, has (or has had) a father. Though her 'relatives' are against the match between her and the Moorish captain, they do not absolutely forbid it, and there is no indication that the wedding is clandestine or that Disdemona is subsequently disowned:

> So propitious was their mutual love that, although the Lady's relatives did all they could to make her take another husband, they were united in marriage and lived together in such concord and tranquillity while they remained in Venice, that never a word passed between them that was not loving.[11]

When she discovers that her husband has changed, Disdemona says, 'I fear greatly that I shall be a warning to young girls not to marry against their parents' wishes; and Italian ladies will learn by my example not to tie themselves to a man whom Nature, Heaven, and manner of life separate from us'.[12] This explicit moral has left some traces in Shakespeare's play,

9 William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. A. E. J. Honigmann, revised ed. with a new introduction by Ayanna Thompson (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), V.2.203. Subsequent references will be to this edition (unless otherwise stated) and given parenthetically in the text.

10 See, for example, Ania Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race and Colonialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 102.

11 Cinthio, in Bullough, vol. VII, p. 242.

12 Ibid., p. 248.

and it seems to have given rise to an anxiety in present-day spectators/readers that this may indeed be the implicit moral of *Othello* and that such a moral would render the play racist. But when compared to its main source, *Othello* clearly steers away from such a moral reading of Desdemona's fate rather than invite it.

This difference can also be seen in the ending of Cinthio's story, where the Moor does not confess even though the Signoria torture him, having brought him back to Venice. They then exile him, and he is 'slain by Disdemona's relatives, as he richly deserved'.[13] Shakespeare, by contrast, invites sympathy for Othello and lets him confess, repent and punish himself – with the side effects that this sympathy is to some degree at the expense of sympathy for Desdemona, and that he escapes being tried and lawfully punished for the crime he has committed, instead being allowed a romantic death of his own orchestration. Cinthio's Ensign dies after being tortured in connection with an unrelated crime, and he is not connected with Disdemona's death until after his own. Iago, contrastingly, is apprehended and named at the end of the play as the person behind all three deaths when Lodovico says to him, 'Look at the tragic loading of this bed: / This is thy work' (V.2.361-62). The narratees in Cinthio's frame story agree that the Ensign, the Moor (for having 'believed too foolishly') and Disdemona's father (for giving her 'a name of unlucky augury') were all to blame.[14] In *Othello*, too, Brabantio implicitly carries some blame, as he is the first person to plant a seed of suspicion in Othello: 'Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see: / She has deceived her father, and may thee' (I.3.293-94).[15] There is also a sense that Desdemona, in leaving her father for her husband, goes from one possessive, controlling man to one that turns out to be equally possessive and controlling.

Interestingly, some modern productions of *Othello* have chosen motives

13 Ibid., p. 252.

14 Ibid. Morrison's *Desdemona* also contains the idea that Desdemona's name is unlucky: 'My name is Desdemona. The word, Desdemona, means misery. It means ill fated. It means doomed. Perhaps my parents believed or imagined or knew my fortune at the moment of my birth. Perhaps being born a girl gave them all they needed to know what my life would be like. That it would be subject to the whims of my elders and the control of men. Certainly that was the standard, no, the obligation of females in Venice when I was a girl. Men made the rules; women followed them. A step away was doom, indeed, and misery without relief. My parents, keenly aware and approving of that system, could anticipate the future of a girl child accurately. / They were wrong. They knew the system, but they did not know me. / I am not the meaning of a name I did not choose' (scene 1, p. 13).

15 Iago later takes up this line of argument when he says, 'She did deceive her father, marrying you, / And when she seemed to shake, and fear your looks, / She loved them most' (III.3.209-211).

for Iago's actions that are in the sources but not in Shakespeare's play: Iago's being in love with (or, at any rate, attracted to) Desdemona, and, perhaps more often, with Othello. Cinthio's Ensign loves Disdemona passionately and only resorts to his evil plan after multiple schemes to try to win her from the Moor; and in novella 9 in the introduction of *Gli Hecatommithi*, the female Iago figure is in love with the character who corresponds to Othello.

'Villainy, villainy, villainy': Ideological Challenges and Opportunities in *Othello*

Othello revolves around the events leading up to Desdemona's death. How the three people involved in her death are interpreted and performed is central to how her fate is perceived ideologically; and how Iago's motivation, Othello's racial otherness and Emilia's role in the story are treated in performance are particularly relevant aspects of the tension between gender and race.

It has been pointed out, perhaps more often by theatre practitioners than by critics, that *Othello* is at least as much about Iago's jealousy as about Othello's. Samuel Taylor Coleridge famously spoke of Iago's listing of motives as 'the motive-hunting of motiveless Malignity';[16] but Antony Sher, who played Iago in Gregory Doran's 2004 production at the RSC, rejects this idea, thinking it obvious that Iago's motive is precisely what he claims it to be, namely sexual jealousy: he suspects that 'the lusty Moor / Hath leaped into my seat' (II.1.294-95) and 'fear[s] Cassio with my night-cap too' (II.1.306). Sher is convinced that Iago genuinely believes that Emilia is unfaithful to him.[17] It has been pointed out by others that Iago's jealousy rather seems like a pretext; this interpretation is especially convincing as he does not seem to care much about Emilia. David Suchet, who played Iago in Terry Hands' RSC production in 1985, thinks that '[t]here is no doubt that Iago is *genuinely* jealous' about Cassio's becoming lieutenant before him, the possibility that Emilia and Othello 'have had an affair', Cassio's attentiveness to Emilia, the relationship between Desdemona and Cassio and that between Desdemona and Othello. It is true, Suchet argues, that Iago has no cause to be

16 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Works*, Vol. IV: Marginalia, ed. H. J. Jackson and George Whalley (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 862.

17 Antony Sher, 'Iago', in *Performing Shakespeare's Tragedies Today: The Actor's Perspective*, ed. Michael Dobson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 57-69.

jealous about these things; but there is no reason to look further for a cause than the explanation Emilia gives:

> But jealous souls will not be answered so:
> They are not ever jealous for the cause,
> But jealous for they're jealous. It is a monster
> Begot upon itself, born on itself. (III.4.159-162)[18]

The fact that Iago and Emilia both describe jealousy as a 'monster' indicates that they refer to a shared experience of jealousy. However, Suchet does not consider Emilia to be the only person that could possibly be the object of Iago's jealousy: Othello and Cassio are also strong candidates. At the middle of the twentieth century, psychoanalysts suggested that Iago's motive could be latent homosexual desire for Othello.[19] Laurence Olivier tried this interpretation when he played Iago, but with no great success.[20] Suchet, too, played Iago with a suggestion of homosexuality, but based on the fantasy of sharing a bed with Cassio rather than on his relationship with Othello. Still, the performance gave resonance to a number of phrases in the dialogue between Iago and Othello, for example 'I am your own forever' (III.3.482). Michael Billington remarked that 'Mr Suchet reclaims the role from cliche [*sic*] by giving us a deeply masculine homosexual prone to sudden, terrifying glimpses into his own iniquity: when he cries "Men should be what they seem / Or those that be not, would they might seem none" he stops short like a man who has peered into the abyss', and that 'instead of gloating over the poleaxed, epileptic hero, he stands over him stroking his hair'.[21] Certainly, Othello seems to be on Iago's mind more than Emilia; and whether his feelings towards Othello are interpreted as

18 Richard McCabe, who played Iago in Michael Attenborough's RSC production in 1999, quotes the same speech in his *Players of Shakespeare* essay, also citing it as evidence that whether Iago's 'paranoi[d]' and 'compuls[ive]' jealousy is founded in truth makes no difference for its potency as motivation. According to McCabe, it is 'unclear' whether it is true that it is 'public knowledge' that Othello and Emilia have had an affair, but '[c]ertainly the allegation is unfounded'; 'Iago in *Othello*', in *Players of Shakespeare 5*, ed. Robert Smallwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 192-211 (p. 196).

19 See E. A. J. Honigmann, 'Introduction' to *Othello*, 3rd ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), pp. 1-111 (pp. 50-51).

20 Marvin Rosenberg, *The Masks of* Othello*: The Search for the Identity of Othello, Iago, and Desdemona by Three Centuries of Actors and Critics* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1971), p. 158.

21 Michael Billington, *The Guardian* 26 September 1985, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 1985, p. 950.

sexual or not, jealousy over Othello's relationship with Desdemona, who has recently replaced Iago as Othello's closest 'partner', may provide an actor with a fruitful motive. In Iqbal Khan's 2015 production at the RSC, this point was brought home when Othello, arriving in Cyprus, went to greet Iago with a hug but caught sight of Desdemona and forgot about his ancient, who was left to stand looking forlorn.

Criticism on *Othello* sometimes debates whether it is possible to interpret the play as advocating sympathy for both Othello and Desdemona, and, by extension, whether it should be understood as incorporating what would today be described as racist or anti-racist and misogynist or feminist ideas.[22] The two ideologies of anti-racism and feminism seem to collide with each other, as Othello is both a man and a racial other. Feminist sentiment does not allow the wife-murderer Othello to be seen as a victim, but it may feel uncomfortable from an anti-racist perspective to cast a racialised character as the villain. In addition, Emilia, who is the character whose attitude can most readily be reconciled with a feminist outlook, employs racist discourse when speaking to and about Othello. Perhaps for this reason, appropriations of this play tend to stress either racial or gender-related aspects.[23]

There has long been a critical debate about whether Othello should be read and played as a Moor from sub-Saharan Africa or as one from North Africa. Some critics attach more significance to the description of him as 'black' with 'thick[ ]lips' (I.1.65), while others stress that Shakespeare may have based the character partly on the 'Moorish Ambassador' (Abd-el-Oahed ben Massoud, ambassador to Muley Hamet, King of Barbary) who visited London in 1600.[24] 'Black' could in Shakespeare's time mean simply 'dark' or 'swarthy' and be used to describe someone with a tan and/or dark hair without any racial connotations. Iago implies that Othello is originally from

22 See, for example, Marianne Novy, *Shakespeare and Outsiders* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 87-88.

23 A partial exception is *Harlem Duet*, where Djanet Sears avoids the problem of sympathy for Shakespeare's characters by focusing not on the Othello and Desdemona characters but on Othello's imagined (black) former wife; Sears, a British-born Canadian playwright of African-Caribbean descent who is particularly committed to writing from a black perspective in her output at large, thus manages to some extent to apply an intersectional analysis, but prioritises issues of race. Toni Morrison's *Desdemona*, while also primarily a reimagining of *Othello* from a black perspective, similarly touches on matters of gender and class. It may be telling in terms of which aspect of Shakespeare's play is more pervasive that both racially orientated appropriations also to some extent deal with gender, whereas neither of the gender-orientated appropriations deals with race.

24 See Honigmann, p. 2; Bullough, vol. VII, pp. 207-08.

Mauretania (IV.2.226), which was the Berbers' kingdom in North Africa, also known as Barbary and not to be confused with modern Mauritania. According to Michael Neill, the word 'Moor' could refer specifically to someone from Mauretania or generically to any African, any Muslim or any non-white person.[25] Coleridge criticised the convention of playing Othello as a 'blackamoor or negro', since he saw no reason to 'adopt one disagreeable possibility instead of a ten times greater and more pleasing probability'.[26] Honigmann presents Othello's status as either black or Arab as a question that 'all actors will want to ponder carefully' when planning their performance, disregarding the fact that both options are hardly available to any one actor, as Othello has by now entirely ceased to be performed by white actors in black make-up.[27] When it comes to casting, the most pragmatic

25 Michael Neill, 'Introduction' to *Othello*, ed. Michael Neill (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 1-179 (p. 115).

26 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, quoted in Ayanna Thompson, 'Introduction' in William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. A. E. J. Honigmann, revised ed. with a new introduction by Ayanna Thompson (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), pp. 1-116 (p. 58).

27 Honigmann, p. 14. James Stone points out that Othello and Desdemona had an affinity on Shakespeare's stage in that they were both played by actors who were not what they were portraying: a boy dressed as a girl and a white man in black make-up; *Crossing Gender in Shakespeare: Feminist Psychoanalysis and the Difference Within* (New York & Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), p. 78. Ira Aldridge was the first black actor to undertake the role, in the nineteenth century. After Laurence Olivier's blacked-up performance in John Dexter's 1964-66 production at the National and the 1965 film version, directed by Stuart Burge, most Othellos in major UK and US productions have been played by black actors, though there have been continuous discussions about whether this is a good idea from an anti-racist point of view. Anxiety about the racial aspects of casting *Othello* have contributed to the play not being as often performed as Shakespeare's other major tragedies. According to Adrian Lester (who played Ira Aldridge in Lolita Chakrabarti's play *Red Velvet* and the title role in Nicholas Hytner's 2013 production of *Othello*), since black actors started to play the role they have struggled with how quickly Othello is convinced of Desdemona's infidelity in III.3, which white actors had earlier attributed to his being black (Adrian Lester, interviewed by Ayanna Thompson, World Shakespeare Congress 2016, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 2 August 2016). Similarly, Hugh Quarshie has speculated that Shakespeare used Othello's blackness 'to save himself some psychological explanation' (Hugh Quarshie, video-recorded interview, 'Shakespeare in Ten Acts' [Act 6: 'Haply for I am black'], British Library, 2016). It is sometimes claimed that Ray Fearon was the first black actor to play Othello in an RSC production (in 1999, directed by Michael Attenborough) since Paul Robeson (in 1959, directed by Tony Richardson); but this statement is true only of the mainstage, as the Jamaican-born opera singer Willard White played Othello in Trevor Nunn's influential production at the studio theatre in 1989. At the time, Michael Coveney wrote in a prophetic review that 'White is probably the first genuinely monumental black Othello at Stratford since Paul Robeson's in 1959. A penny for the thoughts, then, of Robeson's Iago, Sam Wanamaker, who took time out on Thursday night from founding his Globe Theatre in Southwark to watch his daughter Zoë in what is surely destined to become another historic production'; *Financial Times* 26 August 1989, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 1989, p. 1126. When Ben Kingsley played the role in Terry Hands' 1985 production, some reviewers commented that he was too light-skinned and 'more the Indian mystic than the Moorish man of action' (Jack Tinker, *Daily Mail* 25 September 1985, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 1985, p. 949), though Michael Coveney remarked that 'this is the most genuinely ethnic Othello since Olivier

answer to the question is that if a particular production sees race as important for the play, then Othello may fruitfully be played by an actor of any 'race' that is subjected to racism in the culture where the play is staged. If, however, the production does not see race as important for the play, the colour of the actor's skin is of no importance.

Recent productions have found various ways of dealing with the play's perceived racism in performance. Both Emilia and Iago have been cast as black, possibly to counteract their racist comments about Othello.[28] Angela C. Pao mentions two American productions of *Othello* where Iago and/or Emilia were played by black actors, directed by Harold Scott and Penny Metropulos, respectively, as well as two appropriations that change 'the racial dynamics' of the play by making Iago and/or Emilia black: Charles Marowitz's *An Othello* (1972) and C. Bernard Jackson's *Iago* (1979).[29] Hugh Quarshie argued in 1999 that Othello is the one Shakespearean role that should not be played by black actors, as the text forces the actor to support a racial stereotype;[30] but he finally played the part himself in Khan's RSC production in 2015. According to Quarshie, the casting of Iago was preceded by a workshop in which both a white and a black Iago were tried, and it was found that the black Iago worked well, as this 'took the play out of the racial arena' and thus yielded greater freedom of exploration.[31] According to Anna Kamaralli, Yvonne Brewster's Talawa Theatre production from 1997 'cast black actors in several key parts', including Emilia and Bianca, which made a point about how differently the white Desdemona was treated to the two black women.[32] Ironically, considering her name, Bianca is a character who is relatively often played by a black actor; but this can be problematic, especially if she is the only black

who was stage Negroid rather than convincingly African'; *Financial Times* 25 September 1985, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 1985, pp. 950-51 (p. 950).

28 From a feminist perspective, it is especially problematic that Emilia conflates Othello's status as a Moor and his treatment of his wife, even as she lies dying as a result of her commitment to clearing Desdemona's name: 'Moor, she was chaste, she loved thee, cruel Moor' (V.2.247).

29 Angela C. Pao, 'Ocular Revisions: Othello in Text and Performance', in Ayanna Thompson (ed.), *Colorblind Shakespeare: New Perspectives on Race and Performance* (New York & London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 27-45 (pp. 29-31).

30 Hugh Quarshie, 'Second Thoughts About *Othello*', *International Shakespeare Association Occasional Papers* 7 (1999), quoted in Ania Loomba, 'Foreword', in Thompson (ed.), *Colorblind Shakespeare*, pp. xiii-xvii (p. xv).

31 Hugh Quarshie, video-recorded interview, 'Shakespeare in Ten Acts' (Act 6: 'Haply for I am black'), British Library, 2016.

32 Anna Kamaralli, *Shakespeare and the Shrew: Performing the Defiant Female Voice* (Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 145-46.

character besides Othello, as it may be seen as conforming to racial stereotypes. An effect of casting a black actor as Emilia, apart from attempts to cancel out her racist comments, is to connect her to Desdemona's mother's maid, Barbary, whose name suggests that she was black.[33] In Trevor Nunn's 1989 RSC production at The Other Place, set at the turn of the last century, the willow song was anachronistically set to a blues tune, which several reviewers commented on.[34] Stubbs herself has stated that her backstory was that since Desdemona has had a black nurse, Barbary, Othello's blackness does not seem alien to her.[35]

The idea of Desdemona's having grown up with a nurse figure who was black recurs in Toni Morrison and Rokia Traoré's *Desdemona*, where Desdemona was very close to her mother's maid, whom she knew as Barbary. When she meets Barbary after death, Morrison's Desdemona finds out that she was actually called Sa'ran and saw herself as Desdemona's slave. In Vogel's *Desdemona*, Desdemona refers to the colour of Othello's skin several times and exoticises her husband: 'I thought, if I marry this strange dark man, I can leave this narrow little Venice with its whispering piazzas behind – I can escape and see other worlds'. She is disappointed when she discovers that 'under that exotic façade was a porcelain white Venetian'.[36] In MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona*, the only reference to Othello's race occurs when Constance has just arrived in Cyprus and says in an aside, 'He's not a Moor' (II.1, p. 27).[37] The passage is listed as an optional cut in the production notes.[38]

33 Iago's reference to Othello as a 'Barbary horse' (I.1.110) connects Othello to Barbary and, by extension, to Emilia. In Vogel's play, Emilia is Irish, a different kind of racial other – and a portrayal that is, like that of Shakespeare's Othello, stereotypical and misinformed, for example in the rendering of regional turns of phrase such as 'I never could be after embroiderin' a piece of linen with fancy work to wipe up the nose' (scene 1, p. 236).

34 For example, Bill Pannifer noted that Imogen Stubbs's rendition of Desdemona's 'black-sounding "Willow" song exactly captures the tone of a precocious, fragile white teenager trying to sing the blues; *The Listener* 7 September 1989, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 1985, pp. 1127-28 (p. 1128).

35 Commentary track with Trevor Nunn, Ian McKellen and Imogen Stubbs, *Othello*, dir. Trevor Nunn (Primetime Television Ltd.; BBC, 1990) [on DVD].

36 Paula Vogel, 'Desdemona: A Play about a Handkerchief', in *Adaptations of Shakespeare: A Critical Anthology of Plays from the Seventeenth Century to the Present*, ed. Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 236-54 (scene 11, p. 242). Subsequent references will be to this edition (unless otherwise stated) and given parenthetically in the text. See also Paula Vogel, *Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1994).

37 Ann-Marie MacDonald, *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 1998 [1990]), II.1, p. 27. Subsequent references will be to this edition and given parenthetically in the text.

38 Ibid.

Adrian Lester, who played the title role in Nicholas Hytner's 2013 production of *Othello* at the National, has said that Hytner wanted to help the audience not interpret the play as being about race. To counteract the stereotypical portrayal of Othello as violent, black actors were cast in several minor parts, and these characters recoiled in horror when Othello hit Desdemona; Hytner also took pains to avoid Rory Kinnear's Iago getting audience laughs for racist lines.[39] Peter Sellars' 2009 production (co-produced by the Public Theater and the LAByrinth Theater Company) cast a Latino actor, John Ortiz, as Othello, in a multicultural cast. Ayanna Thompson sees this production as dealing specifically with race, as she does Jette Steckel's production at the Deutsches Theater in Berlin (2009 and 2011), where Othello was played by the white actress Susanne Wolff. According to Thompson, the Deutsches Theater production 'made *Othello* wholly unfamiliar by disrupting the normal performance modes for race'.[40] In 1997, Patrick Stewart played a white Othello in Jude Kelly's production for the Shakespeare Theater Company in Washington, D.C., with the rest of the company made up of African-American actors. Based on an idea by Stewart for how to explore the workings of racism outside any particular racialised group, the production was described by Kelly as 'photo negative'.[41] Hytner's version, then, cast a black actor as Othello but tried not to make the production be about race; Sellars' production cast a non-white but not black actor as Othello to explore racial themes in the play; Steckel's production cast a white actress as Othello to represent race in a non-mimetic way; and Kelly's production cast a white actor as Othello to hold up a mirror to racism. The only production out of these four where Othello was played by a black actor was the only one that set out not to be a production 'about race'.[42] As for the question of whether the

39 Adrian Lester, interviewed by Ayanna Thompson. World Shakespeare Congress 2016, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 2 August 2016. This production can instead be seen as problematic from a class perspective, as Rory Kinnear's Iago was played as working class and Lester's very sympathetic Othello was played as upper middle class.

40 Ayanna Thompson, 'Productively Racialized: The Deutsches Theater Berlin's *Othello*', unpublished paper, 'Reading Shakespeare Adaptations Historically', World Shakespeare Congress 2016.

41 J. Wynn Rousuck, '"Othello" Goes Where None Has Gone Before – Review: Patrick Stewart Stars in a Production that Reverses the Play's Racial Lines', in *The Baltimore Sun* 19 November 1997 <http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1997-11-19/features/1997323051_1_othello-iago-patrick-stewart> [accessed 31 January 2017].

42 In the student production of *Othello* that I directed, I cast a white actor as Othello and removed all references to skin colour and any overtly racist comments. I replaced the phrase 'the Moor' with 'the General' or 'Othello' throughout the script. As I was working with my own translation, it was

play is racist, anti-racist or neither, it is incontrovertible that Othello is racialised by other characters in the play and that Shakespeare based the character's personality on contemporaneous beliefs about typically African character traits.[43] In any country in the world where racism is and has been a problem, it is difficult to present *Othello* as not being about race, especially given the performance history of the play. Arguments can be made both for its being racist and for its being anti-racist, but none of these arguments seems to be useful when it comes to making sense of the play as a whole.

Reading *Othello* as a feminist play, however, is a particularly fruitful approach that is much less often attempted.[44] I would go so far as to argue that gender is at the core of *Othello* to a greater extent than race, and that it is ultimately a story of two men who kill two women, rather than a story of a white person who tricks a black person into killing another white person. Read as a piece of social critique, *Othello* shows the destructiveness of patriarchal structures. One of the social phenomena that *Othello* observes is the assumption of heteronormative societies that while marriage or other sexual and romantic relationships, which tend to be valorised more highly than other kinds, are and should be between men and women, communication and trust are confined to homosocial rela-

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easy to do this and still keep the verse intact.

43 Bullough notes that Leo Africanus wrote 'of the Moors of Barbary (among whom he had been brought up)' that they were '"most honest people … and destitute of all fraud and guile; not onely imbracing all simplicitie and truth, but also practising the same throughout the whole course of their lives. … They keepe their covenant most faithfully; insomuch that they had rather die than breake promise. No nation in the world is so subject unto jealousie; for they will rather leese their lives, then put up any disgrace in the behalfe of their women"' [*sic*]; Leo Africanus, *The History and Description of Africa*, trans. John Pory (1600), quoted in Bullough, p. 209. The English translation of Africanus's work was published shortly before *Othello* was written.

44 Honigmann claims that 'Shakespeare, who helped to bring about many cultural changes, including feminism, saw feminine tenderness, quite unsentimentally, as a moral force to be reckoned with', p. 55. Perhaps the strongest argument against reading Iago as homosexual is that as a misogynist, according to feminist interpretations of *Othello*, Iago represents patriarchy, and it may be felt inappropriate to make a homosexual man the representative of patriarchy – not because individual gay men may not (just like individuals of any gender and any sexual orientation) do things to uphold patriarchal structures, but because patriarchy specifically benefits heterosexual cis-men in comparison with everyone else. It must be noted, however, that Shakespeare's characters are not representatives or symbols but created to resemble individuals. It is political appropriations, and to some extent productions, of the plays that turn the characters into representatives of whole groups of people or symbols of societal structures.

tionships rather than taking place across gender boundaries.[45] Philip C. Maguire convincingly shows how the play can be seen as 'challeng[ing] […] the notion – deeply embedded in English-speaking cultures over the centuries *Othello* has been performed […] – that marriage has primacy among the relationships humans form'.[46] But the play also shows that simply reprioritising their own personal relationships is not enough, as that leaves the characters with undervalued marriages without trust and well-functioning communication, which proves to be a dangerous situation: Othello's trust in Iago is destructive for everyone involved, and the women do not manage to turn Emilia's advice into action to save each other or themselves. When Emilia finally, irrevocably sides with Desdemona against Iago, Desdemona is already dead and Emilia will soon follow, her fate sealed by the very act of standing up for her mistress and telling the truth about her husband.

Carol Thomas Neely, writing in the late 1970s, finds that most critics of *Othello* can be divided into 'Othello critics' and 'Iago critics'; they see the play from the point of view of their chosen male character and take his views of the female characters at face value.[47] These critics, like Iago and Othello, 'badly misunderstand and misrepresent' the female characters, which leads to 'distorted interpretations of the entire play.' The 'central theme', according to Neely, is not 'good versus evil' and the 'central conflict' not 'Othello versus Iago'. Rather, the central theme is love, 'especially marital love', and the central conflict is 'between the men and the women'.[48] Conflicts not only between men and women, but between men on the one hand and women on the other, and between same-sex relationships

45 As Philip C. Maguire puts it, 'By having Emilia in her final moments subordinate her marriage to Iago to her relationship with the lady she serves, the play both repeats and varies the realignment of priorities Othello carries out at the conclusion of act 3, scene 3, when he subordinates his marriage to Desdemona to his relationship with Iago […]. In each instance, the bond between two persons of the same sex overrides the bond between husband and wife'; Philip C. Maguire, 'Whose Work Is This? Loading the Bed in *Othello*', in *Shakespearean Illuminations: Essays in Honor of Marvin Rosenberg*, ed. Jay L. Halio and Hugh Richmond (Newark: University of Delaware Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1998), pp. 70-92 (p. 84).

46 Maguire, p. 84.

47 According to Carol Thomas Neely, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, A. C. Bradley, H. Granville-Barker, G. Wilson Knight, John Bayley and Helen Gardner are Othello critics, while T. S. Eliot, F. R. Leavis, A. P. Rossiter, H. A. Mason, William Empson Leo Kirschbaum and Lesley Fiedler are Iago critics; 'Women and Men in Othello: "What should such a fool / Do with so good a woman?"', in *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare* (Urbana, Chicago & London: University of Illinois Press, 1980), pp. 211-39.

48 Neely, pp. 211-12.

on the one hand and man-woman relationships on the other, are important in the play, according to Neely.[49] Emilia is in Neely's reading a central character in the play, and the character that most connects *Othello* to Shakespeare's comedies, as she resembles a comic heroine in her 'role of potential mediator' in the play's 'central conflict' between men and women. Neely goes as far as saying that 'Emilia is dramatically and symbolically the play's fulcrum'.[50]

David Mann, on the other hand, thinks it is a mistake to speak of Desdemona and Emilia as human, believable characters at all, as they are nothing more than stereotypes without consistent personalities (Desdemona the 'Good Woman' and Emilia the 'Shrew'), functions that 'serve […] dramatic [effect]'.[51] According to Honigmann, on the other hand, Shakespeare leads the audience to expect the female characters to conform to these stereotypes but then thwarts their expectations.[52] Mann further sees Desdemona as two completely different characters as she appears in Venice and in Cyprus respectively, and the Emilia who obeys her husband at the beginning as totally irreconcilable with the outspoken Emilia of the final scene.[53]

Kamaralli's reading of Emilia is the opposite of Mann's:

49 Neely argues that 'Emilia's and Desdemona's lack of competitiveness, jealousy, and class consciousness facilitates their growing intimacy, which culminates in the willow scene. The scene, sandwiched between two exchanges by Iago and Roderigo, sharply contrasts the genuine intimacy of the women with the hypocritical friendship of the men. Emilia's concern for Desdemona is real and her advice well meant, whereas Iago's concern for Roderigo is feigned, his advice deadly[.] [---] In this play romantic love is destroyed by male friendship which itself soon disintegrates. Meanwhile, friendship between women is established and dominates the play's final scene. Othello chooses Iago's friendship over Desdemona's love temporarily and unwittingly; Emilia's choice of Desdemona over Iago is voluntary and final'; pp. 224-25.

50 Neely, p. 213.

51 David Mann, *Shakespeare's Women: Performance and Conception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 150-53.

52 Honigmann elaborates: 'Emilia reminds us of the bawdy serving woman, Bianca of the aggressive prostitute. We are encouraged to expect these stereotypes, which Shakespeare had used in other plays, and find that each one fails our expectations. Othello himself takes the process even further: first his civilized voice and deportment contradict Iago's account of him as a lustful barbarian, then, reacting to Iago's lies, he slides into just such a role, that of a cruel, sex-driven savage, finally recovering his "civilized" manner and yet standing apart from the Europeans and his former self ("O thou Othello, that were once so good", 5.2.288), weeping unashamedly. As we get to know him and the other characters we realize that all stereotypes are misleading'; p. 61.

53 Mann, p. 150-53.

> Why is Emilia a shrew? Because her husband says she is, because she tells another woman the truth, in private, about men, and because in her last scene she exposes the villain, but he happens to be her husband. Shakespeare was obviously familiar with the shrew as a theatrical conventional type, but it permits him only a crude grasp of its uses to assume, as David Mann does, that Emilia is no more than this, and her voice should therefore be dismissed.[54]

Kamaralli calls Emilia the 'hero in a play that was in danger of having none', and stresses that the Iago/Emilia story should be seen in parallel to the Othello/Desdemona one.[55] Quoting Richard Eyre's film *Stage Beauty* (based on the story of the first-ever professional actress on the London stage), in which the male actor playing Emilia feels upstaged by the female Desdemona and exclaims 'Emilia dies too!', Kamaralli makes the point that 'the focus on the central couple' is so strong 'that it is easy to forget that two husbands kill their wives in *Othello*'.[56] According to Kamaralli, Emilia is a prime example of the Shakespearean trope of a bold woman who defends a more conventionally well-behaved woman who is treated unjustly by men. Out of all these women, including Beatrice and Paulina, Kamaralli sees Emilia as 'the most heroic', since she actually dies to save Desdemona's reputation – though Kamaralli points out that Beatrice and Paulina would probably have done the same had they not been spared that fate by being situated in comedies.[57] Kamaralli sees the line 'Perchance, Iago, I will ne'er go home' (V.2.224) as possibly the bravest in the whole Shakespeare canon, as it both challenges the patriarchal idea that wives should obey their husbands, is suggestive of a wife leaving her husband (an impossibility at the time *Othello* was written) and forebodes Emilia's imminent sacrifice of her life.[58] Where Mann thinks that the obedient and outspoken versions of Emilia cannot realistically represent the same person, Kamaralli argues that Emilia and Desdemona during the willow scene 'have attained the kind of closeness that makes Emilia's final sacrifice for [Desdemona] believable', and that when Emilia at the end of the play

54 Kamaralli, p. 144. Honigmann agrees with feminist critics that Emilia is often 'simplified and misrepresented in the theatre', but for very different reasons: she should be played as young and attractive, because if she is 'middle-aged and unattractive […] one wonders why Iago married her, and the thought that Othello may be her lover […] becomes ludicrous' (!), p. 43. One may in a similar vein wonder how young and attractive Iago and Othello are.

55 Kamaralli, p. 152.

56 Ibid., p. 143.

57 Ibid., pp. 143-44.

58 Ibid., pp. 146-47.

conforms to the image Iago incorrectly gave of her at the beginning, that of a 'disobedient wife', outspoken and loud, she has finally developed into a hero who stands up for justice and honesty.[59]

Carol Chillington Rutter also sees Emilia as central to the plot in her chapter 'Remembering Emilia: Gossiping Hussies, Revolting Housewives', especially as performed by Zoë Wanamaker in Nunn's 1989 production. According to Rutter, Wanamaker 'told the story of Emilia's distance, watchfulness. She made spectators see Emilia, not Iago, as the principal observer'.[60] Wanamaker herself has commented that Lyndsey Marshal's performance in Hytner's 2013 modern-dress production, where Emilia was a soldier in Othello's army, took the development of Emilia a step further.[61] During the last couple of decades, Emilia seems to have been put centre stage to an increasing extent.

Emilia's soliloquy when picking up the handkerchief is the play's only soliloquy spoken by a woman:

> I am glad I have found this napkin,
> This was her first remembrance from the Moor.
> My wayward husband hath a thousand times
> Wooed me to steal it, but she so loves the token
> – For he conjured her she should ever keep it –
> That she reserves it evermore about her
> To kiss and talk to. I'll have the work ta'en out
> And give't Iago: what he will do with it
> Heaven knows, not I,
> I nothing, but to please his fantasy. (III.3.294-303)

Trevor Nunn's production, uniquely at that time, placed the interval just before Emilia's finding the handkerchief and delivering this soliloquy and just after Desdemona drops the handkerchief, in the middle of III.3, thus putting emphasis on the handkerchief and on Emilia. This can be compared to the more frequent placing of the interval after Iago's words 'I am

59 Ibid., pp. 151, 152.

60 Carol Chillington Rutter, *Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare's Stage* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 161.

61 National Theatre Discover, 'Gawn Grainger and Zoë Wanamaker in Conversation – National Theatre at 50' (NT platform), chaired by Angus MacKechnie, 2013. Video recording <www.youtube.com/watch?v=e2xScLNrX6I> [accessed 18 October 2016]. Emilia's status as a soldier changes the dynamics between the characters and makes it less clear why Othello trusts Iago so implicitly but does not trust Emilia.

your own forever' (for example Terry Hands' 1985 production, Michael Attenborough's 1990 production, Gregory Doran's 2004 production and Nicholas Hytner's 2013 production), which puts more emphasis on the relationship between Iago and Othello. Sam Mendes' 1997-98 production at the National placed the interval at the same point as Nunn, but it continues to be an unusual choice.[62]

According to Marianne Novy, '[s]uspicion of women' is different from other types of discrimination depicted in Shakespeare's plays, because although '[s]everal plays emphasize a central character's mistrust of women', the women 'go against that stereotype and are finally vindicated'. Shylock, for example, continues to be a bad person, and even Othello fulfils Brabantio's suspicions; but Desdemona, like Hero and Hermione, proves to be innocent.[63] According to Novy, the similarity in Iago's attitude to Othello and Desdemona shows the similarity of the situations of Othello as a black person and Desdemona as a woman and invites the audience to consider Iago's behaviour more broadly as a representation of prejudice.[64] In addition to this, Novy notes that it is unusual to find a Shakespearean character who hates two different groups of people, in the way that Iago hates both Moors and women.[65]

Novy also raises an interesting question in connection with Bianca: is Bianca a prostitute? It is usually assumed that she is, in critical readings as well as in productions of the play. Behind her back, Cassio and Iago refer to her as a 'customer' (IV.1.120) and a 'strumpet' (IV.1.97); but then both Desdemona and Emilia are also called whores and strumpets by the male characters.[66] All that Bianca herself says on the matter is, 'I am no strumpet' (V.1.121), a line she speaks only in the final act of the play.[67] Granted, 'whore' and 'strumpet' are the primary invectives available for insulting women in Renaissance drama, hurled at many a female character who is never actually suspected of being unchaste, let alone a prostitute. Iago is much more specific when he tells the audience that Bianca 'by selling her desires / Buys herself bread and clothes' (IV.1.95-96). Still, Iago is not gen-

62 My student production placed its interval after Emilia's finding the handkerchief but before the soliloquy, to put even more focus on Emilia.

63 Novy, *Shakespeare and Outsiders*, pp. 7-8.

64 Ibid., pp. 14-15.

65 Ibid., p. 114.

66 Novy points out that 'at some point every woman in this play will be called a whore by the man closest to her'; *Shakespeare and Outsiders*, p. 104.

67 This is in response to Emilia's calling her a 'strumpet' to her face.

erally seen as a trustworthy character in other respects. There is no reason why this claim about Bianca should be taken at face value more than any other claim Iago makes. The comments Iago and Cassio make about Bianca and the revelation that they do not tally with how she sees herself (or how she sees her relationship with Cassio) could be seen as a comment on how easy it is to brand a woman as a whore and how readily people will believe it – Othello of Desdemona, the audience of Bianca.

In *Goodnight Desdemona*, it is just as easy to clear a woman's good name as it is in Shakespeare's play to stain it. By intercepting the handkerchief in the interim between Emilia's giving it to Iago and his giving it to Cassio, MacDonald's main character, Constance, manages to prevent disaster. Interviewed by Rita Much for the book *Fair Play: 12 Women Speak: Conversations with Canadian Playwrights*, Ann-Marie MacDonald says that *Goodnight Desdemona* is the kind of play that is always going to be 'too feminist for some people and not nearly enough for others': 'there are a lot of sexist jokes which I find hilarious because of the context, but a purist might take offence. Yet the entire situation is a feminist situation'. According to MacDonald, the feminism of the play hinges on the fact that it is about 'a woman who's been done wrong and in the end she gets her own'.[68] When asked if she considers herself to be a 'feminist playwright', MacDonald answers that she is 'a feminist through and through' and her feminism is 'woven through everything I do, though I don't write agitprop and I am not specifically issue-oriented at this point'. To MacDonald, to be a feminist writer and 'theatre artist' means to recognise such 'self-evident facts' as 'over fifty percent of the human race' having been 'largely wasted or buried' through history, but without 'sacrific[ing] aesthetics'.[69] According to Mark Fortier, who interviewed MacDonald between the 1988 and the 1990 runs of *Goodnight Desdemona*, she thinks that it would be more correct to describe the play as 'humanist through a woman's point of view, or through feminist language' than as 'feminist'. MacDonald admires Shakespeare's 'ability to challenge a heterogeneous audience' and wants her own work to 'appeal to men as well as women', with any 'message' in it 'sugar-coated with entertainment value'.[70]

68 Ann-Marie MacDonald, quoted in Judith Rudakoff and Rita Much, *Fair Play: 12 Women Speak: Conversations with Canadian Playwrights*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Simon & Pierre, 1991 [1990]), p. 134.

69 Ibid.

70 Mark Fortier, 'Shakespeare with a Difference: Genderbending and Genrebending in *Goodnight Desdemona*', *Canadian Theatre Review* 59 (Summer 1989), 47-51 (pp. 50, 51).

According to Banuta Rubess, who directed the original production, the reason why *Goodnight Desdemona* was 'one of the first Canadian feminist plays that has elicited interest from the big boy theatres' is that it is 'largely based on Shakespeare'.[71] In writing *Goodnight Desdemona*, MacDonald appears to have been partly driven by her frustration at the attitude she had often met as an actress that Chekov's and Shakespeare's female characters should be played as a 'gossamer thing' or 'a wimp' and that all it takes for a woman to be good at acting is the ability to cry on demand. MacDonald describes parodying stereotypical portrayals of women as 'opening up a trunk that used to be full of instruments of torture and now everything has turned into toys': 'When you reclaim and transform ideas and methods that have been used against you as a woman, you become empowered. Subversion of this kind is healthy'.[72] The female roles in *Goodnight Desdemona* are certainly not stereotypical or 'wimpy': as Rubess says, '[t]he women of *Goodnight Desdemona* are always active, always pushing the piece forward, threatening, seductive, giving up, rallying, stabbing, kissing, embracing, thinking'.[73] Constance is, moreover, a clear main character – according to Rubess, she has more lines than Hamlet, at least in the 1988 version of the script.[74] In creating substantial and stereotype-defying roles for women, MacDonald applies a practical feminist approach in *Goodnight Desdemona*. But she also applies a more theoretical approach when she uses the Jungian idea of the archetypes of the unconscious to tell a story of female self-realisation, steering clear of what she perceives as Jung's sexist tendencies, and thereby appropriates Jung's theory for feminist purposes.[75]

In *Othello*, the willow scene, with Emilia's speech on the double standard, is the part of the play that is most conducive to a feminist staging. Apparently as an afterthought to her musings on what it would take for her personally to commit adultery, Emilia breaks out into a sort of apologia for all women who are accused of infidelity:

71 Banuta Rubess, quoted in Rudakoff and Much, p. 65.

72 MacDonald, quoted in Rudakoff and Much, p. 142.

73 Banuta Rubess, 'Introduction', in Ann-Marie MacDonald, *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 1998 [1990]), pp. xi-xiii (p. xiii).

74 Ibid., p. xi.

75 MacDonald, quoted in Rudakoff and Much, p. 142.

> But I do think it is their husbands' faults
> If wives do fall. Say that they slack their duties
> And pour our treasures into foreign laps;
> Or else break out in peevish jealousies,
> Throwing restraint upon us; or say they strike us,
> Or scant our former having in despite,
> Why, we have galls: and though we have some grace
> Yet have we some revenge. Let husbands know
> Their wives have sense like them: they see, and smell,
> And have their palates both for sweet and sour
> As husbands have. What is it that they do
> When they change us for others? Is it sport?
> I think it is. And doth affection breed it?
> I think it doth. Is't frailty that thus errs?
> It is so too. And have not we affections?
> Desires for sport? and frailty, as men have?
> Then let them use us well: else let them know,
> The ills we do, their ills instruct us so. (IV.3.85-102)

This speech exists only in the Folio version of the text, not in the Quarto, and was often omitted in performance in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[76] In 1911, Ellen Terry commented on the speech in her lecture on Shakespeare's 'Pathetic Women':

> Emilia's life has made her cynical about virtue. No wonder! For one thing, Iago is her husband! She would not be surprised at frailty in any woman, even in Desdemona. And, after all, is this frailty anything to make a fuss about? There is a curious anticipation of modern ideas in Emilia's attitude.[77]

It is important to make the distinction that rather than endorsing or advocating infidelity – or any kind of revenge – the speech points out that infidelity in women is not in its nature worse than infidelity in men and that husbands have more power, opportunity and licence to treat their wives badly than the other way around.[78] The willow scene is a key com-

76 See, for example, Novy, *Shakespeare and Outsiders*, p. 111. Large parts of the scene, including the willow song, are unique to the Folio.

77 Ellen Terry, *Four Lectures on Shakespeare*, ed. Christopher St. John (London: Martin Hopkinson, 1932).

78 Novy's reading of the speech is that '[i]f Desdemona had actually committed adultery […] it would have been fair retribution for the suspicion and violence with which Othello has been treating her – rather than an unforgivable betrayal rightly, or at least understandably, punishable by death'; *Shakespeare and Outsiders*, p. 110.

ponent of any feminist reading of *Othello*. However, the scene has often been heavily cut or even excluded in productions, which has perhaps contributed to feminism not being as closely associated with the play as it might have been.

In Vogel's *Desdemona*, Desdemona's and Emilia's arguments in the discussion about infidelity are reversed, so that Desdemona asks if Emilia has 'deceived [her] husband', to which a shocked Emilia replies, 'I'd never cheat – never – not for all the world I wouldn't' (scene 11, p. 242), in parallel to Shakespeare's Desdemona's 'Beshrew me, if I would do such a wrong / For the whole world!' (IV.3.77-78). In Vogel's play, it is Desdemona who answers, 'The world's a huge thing for so small a vice' and adopts Shakespeare's Emilia's logic by saying that it is no worse for women to be unfaithful to their spouses than it is for men. When Emilia finds out that the actual remuneration for fornication is 'five bob' and '[t]uppence for tips' in just one night, she is impressed; and Desdemona says, 'How large now the world for so small a vice, eh Mealy?' (scene 21, p. 247). Joanna Mansbridge reads Shakespeare's portrayal of the innocent and chaste Desdemona and of the 'sexual opportunist' Emilia as class-related. Vogel, she argues, reverses this norm by presenting '[w]orking-class sexuality' as 'chaste and devout' and 'aristocratic sexuality' as 'restless and insatiable'.[79] Mansbridge also suggests that it is 'possible to read a homoerotic subtext' into Emilia's speech: 'Emilia's insistence that women can desire like men' may suggest not only that women can desire men but that 'women can desire women like men desire women'.[80] While this interpretation of the text may be a little far-fetched, Emilia does fall in love with Desdemona in the willow scene in the sense that during the course of the scene she grows to care so much about her mistress that she is prepared to die for her. There is no particular reason to interpret this love as romantic, but such an interpretation would not be in conflict with the text and would afford possibilities for fresh readings of many aspects of the character. Indeed, Emilia's relative coldness towards Desdemona could support this interpretation, though it can be explained by many other factors, such as professionalism, a difference in social standing or envy because Desdemona, unlike Emilia, is successful, happy and loved. There is a value in por-

79 Joanna Mansbridge, *Paula Vogel* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2014), pp. 36-37.

80 Ibid., p. 37.

traying female friendship as just that rather than sexualise it. Still, in view of the fact that Iago has been performed as homosexual on several occasions, it is striking that this path has not been explored in performances of Emilia.[81] According to Mansbridge, Vogel's play develops what she perceives as the 'homoerotic subtext' of the willow scene.[82] Any 'homoerotic desire' that Emilia may feel for Desdemona is certainly not emphasised in *Desdemona* either; however, it is perhaps possible to discern some homoerotic overtones when Vogel's Bianca teaches Desdemona how to behave when requested by a customer to engage in SMBD.

While the only characters in Vogel's play are Shakespeare's three female characters – Desdemona, Emilia and Bianca – there is no Bianca and no Emilia in MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona*. However, the theme of female companionship, an important dimension in Shakespeare's play, is made possible by the presence of the twentieth-century female academic Constance and Juliet from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. *Goodnight Desdemona* ends not only with the three characters making friends after trying to, alternately, seduce and kill one another, but with Constance's realisation that Desdemona and Juliet are archetypes of her own unconscious and that in embracing them both she can find her true self and achieve balance in her life. In *Desdemona,* Bianca's friendship with Desdemona takes second place to her hopes for marriage to Cassio, and Emilia only overcomes her class resentment when it is too late to save Desdemona. Mansbridge notes that Vogel's Emilia's opinion that there is no such thing as friendship between women is validated within the play when Bianca ends her friendship with Desdemona out of jealousy over Cassio when she finds out that the handkerchief he has given to Bianca had belonged to Desdemona.[83] In *Othello*, Emilia's staunch support of Desdemona in IV.2, when Othello has 'bewhored' her, and in V.2, when he has killed her, shows her potential as a truly heroic, convention-defying rescuer. Yet, in her direct communica-

81 I have never seen or heard of a production that explicitly showed Emilia as being in love with Desdemona. In connection with one of the final rehearsals of the *Othello* production that I directed, our Desdemona presented this notion, more as an idea for a hypothetical production than an actual suggestion for ours. The actors decided they wanted to try to implement it in that rehearsal, and we realised that it worked very well in the scene. We agreed it was too late to make such a fundamental change to Emilia's story and character, but the discovery coloured her final performance and added a depth of feeling to the two women's friendship that set it up convincingly as a matter of life and death for the final scene.

82 Mansbridge, *Paula Vogel*, pp. 37, 39.

83 Ibid., p. 41.

tions with Desdemona, she appears to be held back by formality. The two women's mutual but ultimately ineffectual efforts at intimacy in the willow scene seem to imply that a timely friendship between Desdemona and Emilia – or indeed, though less likely, between either of them and Bianca – might have saved their lives.[84]

How the three deaths of the final scene are represented on stage is an important aspect of considering *Othello* from a feminist perspective. A question which has preoccupied actresses for well over a century is whether Desdemona should fight for her life or accept her fate – in other words, how actively or passively she should die. Edward Pechter astutely points out that Othello's lines 'Down, strumpet!' and 'Nay, if you strive –' (V.2.78, 80) are 'textually embedded stage directions that call unambiguously for Desdemona's physical struggle'.[85] Throughout the nineteenth century, however, any actress's apparent attempt to escape death in the final scene of *Othello* was met with considerable resistance.[86] Helen Faucit and Fanny Kemble shocked contemporary audiences by fighting back; according to Faucit, Macready, who played Othello, praised her for 'add[ing] intensity to the last act by "being so difficult to kill"'.[87] More recently, Imogen Stubbs has expressed incomprehension at the very idea that Desdemona would take it lying down; however, that was long the prevalent performance practice.[88]

Emilia's death presents another dilemma. Although Emilia clearly asks to be laid 'by my mistress' side' (V.2.235), very few directors pay attention

84 Rutter says specifically about Nunn's production, a version that made the most of the willow scene, that '[t]he poignancy of the scene registered in the painfully tentative moves Emilia and Desdemona made towards and away from each other, parallel to but wholly unlike the obscene, aggressive homoerotic bonding of Othello and Iago in 3.3' (p. 171), and that '[t]he awful failure of words between the women [in the willow scene] was the critical subtext that underwrote their final scene together, 5.2'; *Enter the Body*, p. 174.

85 Edward Pechter, Othello *and Interpretive Traditions* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999), p. 121.

86 See Pechter, pp. 122-23.

87 Helena Faucit Martin, *On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011 [1885]), p. 61. See also Honigmann, p. 43.

88 Commentary track with Trevor Nunn, Ian McKellen and Imogen Stubbs. *Othello*, dir. Trevor Nunn (Primetime Television Ltd.; BBC, 1990) [on DVD]. Fanny Kemble remarked that 'the Desdemonas that I have seen on the English stage have always appeared to me to acquiesce with wonderful equanimity in their assassination. On the Italian stage they run for their lives'. The nightgown Kemble wore in the scene would not allow running, but she did put up a fight; quoted in Rosenberg, *The Masks of* Othello, pp. 136-37.

to this stage direction.[89] Instead, productions tend to let Emilia die on the floor, in favour of the married couple alone together on the bed. Wanamaker's Emilia – though Gratiano, to whom she addressed the request, ignored it – crawled to the bed and did indeed sit on it next to Desdemona while talking and singing to her, but then stumbled to a chair, where she spoke her final lines before falling dead to the floor. As Maguire points out in 'Whose Work Is This?: Loading the Bed in *Othello*', the television version of Nunn's production places a special focus on the two women's mutual situation, as a close-up shows their left hands, each with a wedding ring, as Emilia reaches for Desdemona; but it also gives Emilia less focus than the stage version can have done, as Othello's body hides hers completely from the camera at the moment when she dies.[90] The only time to date that I have seen Emilia actually die on the bed beside Desdemona was in Hytner's 2013 production. Maguire observes that James R. Siemon's study of 58 promptbooks from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries shows that none of these productions placed Emilia on the bed, and that Marvin Rosenberg's *The Masks of* Othello, 'an exhaustive study of the play's stage history', does not mention any production where Emilia was laid 'by [her] mistress' side'.[91] On a smaller scale, I have looked at five promptbooks from the RSC and the National Theatre from the last few decades, and out of these only the 2013 production places Emilia's dead body on the bed rather than the floor.[92] The choice of not letting Emilia lie dead on the bed does not only mean valorising marriage, even when it ends in tragedy, above female friendship, but it excludes Emilia from being part of 'the tragic loading of this bed' (V.2.361) and her death from being part of the tragedy of the play.

89 It is a stage direction not so much in the way of 'Down, strumpet!', which is an instruction to the actors, as in the way of 'I die' or 'Here comes my lord', which is information conveyed to the audience. Because not everyone in the audience of an Elizabethan playhouse would have a good view of the stage (and because not everyone would retain focus while waiting for something important to happen), all necessary information is incorporated into the text, and the physical world of the play should not be understood as being potentially in conflict with that information. Maguire suggests the less likely interpretations of Emilia's line as a request to be buried beside Desdemona or to be laid on the floor 'alongside' the bed rather than on it; pp. 76-77.

90 Maguire, p. 80.

91 Ibid., pp. 78-79; James R. Siemon, '"Nay, that's not next": *Othello*, V.ii in Performance, 1760-1900', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 37:1 (Spring, 1986), pp. 38-51.

92 The promptbooks for Terry Hands' 1985 production, Trevor Nunn's 1989 production and Gregory Doran's 2004 production are held in the RSC archive, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, at the Shakespeare Centre in Stratford-upon-Avon; the promptbooks for Sam Mendes's 1997 production and Nicholas Hytner's 2013 production are held at the National Theatre Archive in London.

As Maguire states, the Quarto version of the text adds the stage direction '*She dies*' after Emilia's words 'I die, I die' but no information about how or where she dies.[93] In the six editions studied by Maguire, published between 1962 and 1992, only one, David Bevington's edition of Shakespeare's complete works from 1992, mentions Emilia's physical position in the stage direction marking Montano's exit to pursue Iago: '*Exit [with all but Othello and Emilia, who has been laid by Desdemona's side]*'.[94] This departure from editorial practice, Maguire claims, is connected to the growing concern with gender issues, both in Shakespeare studies and in general.[95] This concern, according to Maguire,

> allows one to see how, collectively and cumulatively sustained over the centuries, the editorial silence regarding where Emilia lies arises out of and reinforces long-standing cultural values and assumptions so deeply embedded that they have been hidden from sight'.[96]

Maguire sees this 'editorial silence' in a sinister light, as effectively taking Iago's part in the scene.[97]

Like Emilia's, Othello's death is not specified further than '*He dies*' in the Quarto and '*Dyes*' in the Folio; but here twentieth-century editions tend to add extra information: the six editions that all except one ignore where and how Emilia dies all render the stage direction regarding Othello's death as either '*Falls on the bed and dies*' or – in accordance with Othello's final words, 'I kissed thee ere I killed thee: no way but this, / Killing myself to die upon a kiss' (V.2.356-37) – '*He kisses Desdemona and dies*' (or variations thereupon).[98] But the two acts of kissing Desdemona and falling onto the bed have not always formed part of Othello's death in performance. Between the late eighteenth century and the middle of the nineteenth century, the norm was for Othello to attempt but fail to get to the bed and kiss his wife before he died. This includes iconic performances

93 Maguire, p. 77. In the Folio, Emilia's dying words are 'alas, I die', and there is no stage direction.
94 Ibid., p. 78.
95 Ibid.
96 Ibid.
97 Maguire elaborates: 'The silence that editors overwhelmingly observe with respect to where Emilia's body lies is, effectively if not intentionally, an extension of the "work" Iago does when, responding to her defiance, he mortally stabs her. […] By treating the wife who speaks in defiance of her husband's command as a character unworthy of attention or comment, editorial authority aligns itself with the husbandly authority that Iago murderously asserts'; p. 78.
98 Ibid., pp. 71, 73-74.

such as Edmund Kean's and Edwin Booth's. As Maguire puts it, '[t]hose productions established a gap between the death Othello envisions for himself and what actually occurs'[99] – much as the gap that has been established on the present-day stage between the wish and reality of Emilia's death. According to Maguire, Othellos started to reach the bed and 'die upon a kiss' only in the second half of the nineteenth century; but they still fell to the floor when dying so that Desdemona lay alone on the bed at the end.[100] Close to the middle of the twentieth century, however, the performance practice of Othello dying on the bed, either beside or on top of Desdemona, after kissing her and sometimes still embracing her in death, was firmly established and is still prevalent.[101]

It seems that performance history and editorial practice have worked to reinforce each other throughout the twentieth century with regard both to Othello's kissing Desdemona and dying on the bed and to Emilia's being refused her wish to be laid beside Desdemona and dying elsewhere. Maguire exemplifies performance practice in the second half of the twentieth century with four film or television productions, three of them based on stage productions: Stuart Burge's 1965 film with Laurence Olivier, based on John Dexter's National Theatre production, Jonathan Miller's BBC version from 1981, Janet Suzman's 1988 television version of her Market Theatre production in Johannesburg, and Trevor Nunn's 1990 television version of his RSC production. All four Othellos kiss Desdemona and die on the bed (though in Miller's version it is implied rather than shown), in accordance with theatrical and editorial practice during the same period; none of the four Emilias is laid next to Desdemona and none of them dies on the bed, but all four manage to get to or near the bed on their own before dying.[102] However, Oliver Parker's film from 1995 does place the death of Emilia on the bed, though the viewer is not shown how she ended up there, as the shot of her and Desdemona on the bed follows a shot showing Iago being chased and captured. Then, as Othello kisses Desdemona, 'Emilia's face disappears from view – eclipsed, so to speak, by the reunion of husband and wife';[103] once Othello is dead, only he and neither Emilia nor Desdemona is visible.

99 Ibid., p. 72.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid., p. 73.
102 Ibid., pp. 79-60.
103 Ibid., pp. 84-85.

Maguire wrote his essay fifteen years before the staging of Hytner's *Othello*, a theatrical production that did indeed show Desdemona, Emilia and Othello all together on the bed at the end of the play. But Maguire remarks that among the possible combinations of people on the bed there is another option, one that combines Emilia being laid on the bed or managing to reach it herself and Othello failing to do so before dying: 'Thanks in part to Bevington's stage direction and to feminist concerns, it is now easier to envision yet another, different loading of that bed, a loading that pairs Desdemona and Emilia in death rather than Desdemona and Othello'.[104] Maguire continues:

> The now-conventional sight of Desdemona and Othello together in death on the bed emphasizes the fact of miscegenation, thereby fostering the impression that the problem is a function of this particular marriage (including the race and personalities of these two spouses) and of society's racist response to it. The sight of Desdemona with Emilia (rather than Othello) is compatible with and thus authorized by the words of Folio and Quarto *Othello*, yet has long been hidden from view – absent from productions and ignored by editors and critics alike.[105]

It is interesting that while theatres in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries invented ways of avoiding the representation of a white woman and a black man together on a bed, it is apparently more unthinkable today to show two women joined on that bed.[106] The staging suggested by Maguire

104 Ibid., p. 81. In my production of *Othello* – though I was not aware at the time of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century practice of letting Othello fail to kiss Desdemona and die on the floor, but only of the present practice of his dying 'upon a kiss' and the bed, and had not yet reflected on the fact that several recent Emilias, while not assisted to the bed, have made their own way there – I chose to have Emilia ask the audience to be laid next to Desdemona and then crawl onto the bed herself and die lying on the bed facing her mistress, and to have Othello reach to kiss Desdemona but die just before he could touch her, rolling onto the floor, the result being Desdemona and Emilia on the bed together and Othello beside them on the floor – an inversion of the common practice from the last few decades of having Othello on the bed and Emilia on the floor. In this pared-down production, only the four main characters were on stage during V.2, and the audience, placed around a purpose-built thrust stage, was addressed instead of Lodovico, Gratiano and Montano, to reflect the passive witnesses to domestic violence in real life. The actor playing Lodovico spoke the line 'O thou Othello, that wert once so good, / Fallen in the practice of a cursed slave, / What shall be said to thee?' (V.2.288-290) from the audience, and the performance ended after Othello's death, without any comment and without Iago being caught, to reflect that many real-life perpetrators of domestic violence escape without punishment or without the crime even being reported. After the curtain-call, the company sang the willow song as they walked out through the auditorium, with Desdemona and Emilia remaining on stage last and singing the final line of the song on their own.

105 Maguire, p. 81.

106 Perhaps the aspect of the pairings considered inappropriate in these two different time periods is rather the fact that the former are a couple who may be inferred to have a sexual relationship while

would encourage a reading of the tragedy in terms of gender rather than in terms of race.[107]

Conscious choices about who dies where in the final scene, then, is a significant component of any feminist production of *Othello*. Other ways in which productions may position themselves as feminist include giving more attention to Emilia throughout the play than she has conventionally received; a careful exploration of the relationship between Emilia and Desdemona in the willow scene; and a staging that highlights the male characters' physical and psychological violence against the female characters, particularly against their own wives.

'[O]r say they strike us': Men, Women and Domestic Violence

Among Shakespeare's four major tragedies, *Othello* is the most domestic one, the only one to be about the common man rather than monarchs and nobles and to take place almost entirely in the private sphere. The play's exploration of what goes on between people behind closed doors is as relevant today as it ever was. In 1984, Ruth Nadelhaft published a paper on domestic violence in literature, which had 'not been identified, let alone studied, systematically' before.[108] Out of all literary works ever written, the example that she chooses to begin her paper with is 'the moment in Act IV when Othello strikes Desdemona'.[109] According to Kamaralli, *Othello* can work as a powerful comment on present-day society:

> *Othello*, through modern eyes, is a desperately typical story of domestic violence and spousal murder. […] [Desdemona's and Emilia's] stories are very likely reflected in many of those (roughly two women per week, in Britain) murdered by their partner or ex-partner today. If Emilia's parallel murder is given enough attention

the latter pair consists of two people who certainly do *not* have a sexual relationship.

107 Maguire argues that '[w]ere audiences presented with […] such a sight [of Desdemona and Emilia dead on the bed together], they would find themselves challenged to face a gruesome truth about *Othello* that is too rarely acknowledged […]: what today's culture allows and prompts us to see as sexism is at least as virulent as the racism we can see there. What happens to *every* wife in this play is at least as bad as what happens to the only black person in it. Othello is horribly, wickedly misled, but his death is self-inflicted, a choice that he makes and carries out. No woman in the play gets a similar chance to give her own life its closing definition by bringing it to an end herself'; p. 81.

108 Ruth Nadelhaft, 'Domestic Violence in Literature: A Preliminary Study', *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 17:2 (1984), 243-59 (p. 244).

109 Ibid., 243.

> on stage, it can show such deaths to be the societal problem they are, rather than solely the isolated story of this black man and his white woman.[110]

What happens in Othello and Desdemona's marriage shows striking similarities to real-life domestic violence, nowadays sometimes with more precision called 'intimate-partner violence'.

Intimate-partner violence is defined by the World Health Organization as 'behaviour by an intimate partner or ex-partner that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours'.[111] Cases of a woman being abused by a male partner can be regarded as part of two different larger contexts: domestic violence (of which it is the most common form, even though both men and women can be both perpetrators and victims of violence in both mixed-sex and same-sex relationships) and violence against women. Violence against women is defined by the United Nations as 'any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life'.[112] The World Health Organization regards violence against women, especially intimate-partner violence and sexual violence, as 'major public health problems and violations of women's human rights'.[113] One in three women in the world experiences violence from a male partner in her lifetime; in England and Wales alone, one in four women experiences such violence, and, as pointed out by Kamaralli, two women every week are killed by a partner or former partner. The UK police receive on average one domestic assistance call every minute, but it is estimated that only 35% of all cases of domestic violence are reported.[114]

According to the US National Coalition of Domestic Violence, typical examples of 'abusive tendencies' include '[s]howing jealousy of the victim's

110 Kamaralli, p. 143.

111 World Health Organization <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/> [accessed 21 October 2016].

112 Ibid.

113 Ibid.

114 Refuge <www.refuge.org.uk> [accessed 21 October 2016]. On domestic violence and violence against women, see also Eva Lundgren, *The Process of Normalising Violence*, trans. Silje Lundgren (Stockholm: Riksorganisationen för kvinnojourer och tjejjourer i Sverige [ROKS], 2004); Nicky Ali Jackson (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Domestic Violence* (New York & London: Routledge, 2007); Jackson Katz, *The Macho Paradox: Why Some Men Hurt Women and How All Men Can Help* (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2006).

family and friends and time spent away', '[a]ccusing the victim of cheating', '[c]ontrolling every penny spent in the household', '[t]aking the victim's money or refusing to give them money for expenses', '[l]ooking at or acting in ways that scare the person they are abusing', and '[c]ontrolling who the victim sees, where they go, or what they do'.[115] Warning signs include '[e]xtreme jealousy', '[p]ossessiveness', '[u]npredictability', '[a] bad temper', '[v]erbal abuse', '[a]ccusations of the victim flirting with others or having an affair', and '[e]mbarrassment or humiliation of the victim in front of others'.[116] All these types of behaviour either apply directly to Othello or are mentioned by Emilia as particularly unacceptable behaviour in a husband. Strikingly, one of the main warning signals listed by the National Organisation for Women's Shelters and Young Women's Shelters in Sweden was for a long time phrased as 'Beware of jealousy'.[117]

It is a truism that *Othello* is about jealousy. But it is seldom pointed out that an aspect of jealousy that is particularly foregrounded in the play is conceptions of honour in a patriarchal society resulting in domestic violence. It is important to distinguish between the *feeling* of jealousy – anxiety about being replaced by another in a particular person's affections – and the kind of jealous (in the sense of possessive and controlling) *behaviour* that is manifest to a higher or lower degree in many more or less abusive relationships. The latter phenomenon, a man's 'honour'-based suspicion and abuse of his female partner, is the kind of jealousy depicted in *Othello*. There is, however, another character in the play who is jealous of a (perceived) partner: Bianca. Neely argues that Bianca's jealousy works as a foil to the male jealousy in the play. Unlike Othello, she confronts Cassio with her suspicions and continues to feel affection for him.[118] This is arguably a more constructive line of action to adopt for a victim of the green-eyed monster than the one Othello opts for.

Many scholars have commented on the so-called 'double time scheme' in *Othello*.[119] According to the 'short time scheme', which is based on ref-

115 National Coalition Against Domestic Violence <http://ncadv.org/learn-more/what-is-domestic-violence> [accessed 21 October 2016].

116 Ibid.

117 Cf. *Othello*, III.3.167. My translation; Swedish original: 'Se upp med svartsjuka'. It has now been changed to 'Is your partner often jealous?', but many local shelters keep the old phrasing on their websites. ROKS, the National Organisation for Women's Shelters and Young Women's Shelters in Sweden <http://www.roks.se/har-finns-hjalp/varningssignaler-och-rad> [accessed 1 February 2017].

118 Neely, p. 224.

119 See, for example, Honigmann, pp. 68-72.

erences to actual days of the week and hours of the day, the whole plot transpires during a couple of days, the time spent in Cyprus making up less than 48 hours. But Iago persuades Othello that Desdemona has 'the act of shame / A thousand times committed' with Cassio (V.2.209-210), which she would scarcely have had time for in the short time scheme. Also, Cassio has apparently known Bianca for considerably longer than a day, and there is no indication that there has been a hiatus in their relationship. According to the 'long time scheme', then, Othello and Desdemona have spent months or maybe years in Cyprus before Othello starts to become suspicious and abusive, as they do in Cinthio's version, where events move much more slowly. The extreme speed with which their marriage deteriorates in the short time scheme increases the dramatic nature of the events, while the long time scheme paints a more typical portrait of an abusive relationship.

Another way in which the play contrasts new and old abusive relationships is the parallel stories of Othello and Desdemona on the one hand and Iago and Emilia on the other. Emilia's description of married life is not particularly favourable:

> 'Tis not a year or two shows us a man.
> They are all but stomachs, and we all but food:
> They eat us hungerly, and when they are full
> They belch us. (III.4.104-107)

Iago repeatedly derides his wife, and, finding her on her own, he exclaims 'How now! What do you here alone?' (III.3.304), which may imply suspicious and controlling behaviour. In performance, Iago often snatches the handkerchief violently from Emilia. Rutter has observed the violence with which Ian McKellen's Iago answered Emilia's question about what he would do with the handkerchief 'by brutally pulling her on to his lap, grinding his fist into her crotch and his mouth on to hers until she gagged'.[120] When Emilia later says to Othello, 'Thou hast not half that power to do me harm / As I have to be hurt' (V.2.158-159), the possibility to read these words as implying that she is used to being hurt and therefore knows she can endure it may in performance add poignancy to an interpretation of Emilia as a victim of intimate-partner violence. Like her de-

120 Rutter, *Enter the Body*, p. 165.

scription of causeless jealousy (III.4.159-162), Emilia's enumeration of abusive behaviours in husbands, including 'strik[ing] us', may be read as the voice of experience.

That particular phrase, which describes something that has just happened to Desdemona, can be played as a poignant moment of recognition between the two women. Emilia's immediate change of subject to husbands 'scant[ing] our former having in despite' (IV.3.90), which has not happened to either of the two women in the play, and the tempo change that often follows in performance, may suggest that they are not yet ready to talk about their shared experience. Rutter argues that Wanamaker's performance indicated that the story Emilia saw take place between Othello and Desdemona was 'one she knew familiarly, a story of domestic abuse', with 'Othello playing Iago's part': 'When Othello roared for [the handkerchief], his voice slamming like a fist into Desdemona's shaken, uncomprehending face, Emilia seemed to be recognizing Desdemona for the first time. She knew that violence'.[121] Similarly, Kamaralli argues that Antony Sher played Iago as 'a misogynist wife-beater' opposite Amanda Harris's Emilia, 'a woman who had a long history of enduring domestic abuse' and whose husband finally killed her by stabbing her in the crotch.[122] In one review, Benedict Nightingale asked himself if there had 'ever been a better Emilia than Amanda Harris, a hard-drinking army wife whose disillusion with Iago, men and sex has become a scarily sweeping cynicim'; Aleks Sierz remarked that '[t]he sadistic relationship of Sher and [Harris] is strongly drawn', and that 'when he caresses his wife's neck, it looks as if he's going to strangle her'.[123]

In connection with the production of *Othello* that I directed, we organised a panel discussion with production members and the chairperson of the women's refuge in Lund, Agneta Idbohrn, about violence against women in and outside *Othello*. One phenomenon that Idbohrn talked about which we could particularly relate to the events in the play was that men who abuse their female partners often feel the need to dehumanise them in order to justify the violence and in order not to ruin their self-image as someone who 'would never hit a woman'. One way of doing this is to define their partner not as a woman but as, for example, a 'whore'.[124] Before Othello strikes

121 Ibid., pp. 165-66.

122 Kamaralli, p. 150.

123 Benedict Nightingale, *The Times* 5 June 2004, in *Theatre Record* Jan-June 2004, p. 746; Aleks Sierz, *Tribune* 2 July 2004, in *Theatre Record* Jan-June 2004, p. 866.

124 Agneta Idbohrn, panel discussion, 17 November 2015, Lund Student Theatre, The Academic

Desdemona he calls her 'mad' and '[d]evil' (IV.1.238-39); after the blow, he calls her a 'whore', a 'public commoner' and an 'impudent strumpet' (IV.2.73-74, 82, 91). As he is killing her, he calls her 'strumpet' repeatedly (V.2.76-78). One of the last things Iago says to Emilia before stabbing her is 'Villainous whore' (V.2.227). There is also an element of the 'Madonna-whore complex' in Othello's tendency first to idealise and romanticise Desdemona and his love for her and then to reject her completely as a 'whore' when she does not fit into the image he has forged of her.

According to Eva Lundgren, abusive husbands often 'alternat[e] violence and warmth', a strategy she refers to as 'the hand that alternates between striking and stroking'. This phenomenon creates 'confusion' and 'dependence' for the woman and 'control' for the man.[125] Battered wives often stress that their husbands are 'kind, nice, loving, considerate… sometimes' and see this as evidence that '[h]e is not mainly violent', but 'normal'. Lundgren argues that a little act of kindness, a friendly word or a 'peaceful moment' will take on greater significance than it ordinarily would when it is 'contrasted with […] a whole day's fear and pain'.[126] The same strategy can be seen in torture, where 'the effect […] is increased when pain alternates with care'.[127] A victim of domestic violence gradually begins to see the violence as the norm as she becomes increasingly isolated and 'internalises the man's violence, his reasons for the violence, and his expectations and demands on the woman'.[128] A typical course of events is, according to Lundgren, that '[w]hen the first blow hits her, the woman reacts. She is shocked. But she doesn't strike back, she seldom leaves him, and she does not tell anyone what happened'.[129] At this stage, she cannot explain why the violence has occurred, but may explain it away as an accident. The next stage is that she sees the man as the cause of the violence, but her perception quickly shifts so that she starts to blame herself, which causes shame and low self-esteem. She has internalised his worldview and the reasons he gives, and she therefore believes that he beats her because 'she does not correspond to the man's norm

Society, Lund.

125 Lundgren, pp. 27, 28. Lundgren's study is based on extensive empirical research.

126 Ibid., p. 26. Lundgren elaborates: 'The good is experienced in the light of what has come to be normal, the battering, the bad parts, and is "coloured" by that – both through being given more importance than the bad parts, and through appearing as more positive than it really is. This way, good and bad become relative and shifting concepts, and the distinction between them is erased'; pp. 26-27.

127 Ibid., p. 15.

128 Ibid., p. 29.

129 Ibid.

of femininity'.[130] From the battering men's point of view, Lundgren argues that they see it as beating their wives 'into place', in an attempt to make them conform to the men's idea of what their wives ought to be like, 'as a means to create correspondence between their norm of femininity and the "reality" of femininity, their partner'.[131]

Here, too, parallels can be drawn to *Othello*, where Desdemona upon first being struck (in performance a shocking moment for both her and the audience) is confident that 'I have not deserved this' (IV.1.240). In IV.2, Othello is on more than one occasion momentarily swayed from his abusive speech and behaviour by his affection for Desdemona and almost seems to repent, an aspect of the scene that is often emphasised in performance to increase suspense. This encounter leaves Desdemona confused. Though she does not know what she is supposed to have done, she says at the end of the scene that ''Tis meet I should be used so, very meet' (109), and she does not want to discuss what has happened with Emilia. She is still willing at this point to accept Iago's explanation that Othello is merely worried about his work and taking it out on her. As she lies dying, however, she blames herself and answers Emilia's 'O, who hath done / This deed?' with the lie that will according to Othello send her to hell: 'Nobody. I myself. Farewell. / Commend me to my kind lord' (V.2.121-23). Not only has she internalised Othello's violence so that it makes no difference which of the two is responsible, but she significantly refers to him as 'kind', a word that is often used by victims of intimate-partner violence to make excuses for their husbands.[132]

Othello's idea that he will 'kill thee / And love thee after' (V.2.18-19) suggests that he thinks of his violence as transforming Desdemona into his ideal of chaste femininity. It is evident in the scenes between the first blow and Desdemona's death that Othello has succeeded in 'beating her into place', since she suddenly becomes much more submissive and obedient. Margaret Loftus Ranald observes that though Desdemona has so far been strong-willed, she is 'extraordinarily obedient and the mirror of wifely humility when she is

130 Ibid., p. 30.

131 Lundgren, pp. 16-17.

132 In my *Othello* production, the actress decided that Desdemona's reference to 'my kind lord' was meant in opposition to 'my unkind lord', the version of her husband who had killed her. In this reading, Desdemona thinks that Othello is not being himself and that he might at some point recover from his madness and go back to being the 'kind' person she knows him as, and she does not want that person to blame himself or be punished.

publicly struck and humiliated'.[133] In the rhetoric of the play, Othello strikes Desdemona unpremeditatedly in the heat of the moment. In real life, however, Lundgren states that while 'there is a widely spread idea that men hit in "blind fury"' or 'use violence because of deficient impulse-control', this is seldom how the men themselves describe the situation; rather, they present it as a need to 'set limits', a conscious strategy for attaining control of the woman's 'life space'.[134] It bears repeating that the events in *Othello* should not be understood as a representative depiction of a violent relationship but as a compressed version of such a depiction, going at an incredible speed and thereby deconstructing the process of normalisation.

Coined in 1955 by John Todd in the paper 'The Othello Syndrome: A Study in the Psychopathology of Jealousy' (co-written with Kenneth Dewhurst), the term 'Othello syndrome' refers to a rare psychotic disorder featuring delusions about the infidelity of a partner, also known as morbid or delusional jealousy.[135] Paul Crichton has argued that Shakespeare's Othello does not answer to the description of a sufferer from the Othello syndrome, since he responds to Iago's deception rather than to a spontaneous delusion, and that 'the Othello syndrome' is therefore not an appropriate term for morbid jealousy.[136] When Antony Sher played Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*, he interpreted him as suffering from the Othello syndrome, since he spontaneously starts to suspect his wife of infidelity. Sher also connects the condition to *Othello*; but, interestingly, it is Iago and not Othello that Sher reads as suffering from it.[137] It should be pointed out that morbid jealousy is a very rare condition, and that the vast majority of men who behave as Othello does to Desdemona are not psychotic. According to Refuge, mental illness is not more widespread among abusive husbands than in the population at large.[138] Routinely ascribing violence against women to mental illness would be a way of exonerating the perpetrators from responsibility for their crimes.

133 Margaret Loftus Ranald, 'The Indiscretions of Desdemona', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 14:2 (Spring 1963), 127-39 (p. 136).

134 Lundgren, pp. 13-14.

135 John Todd and Kenneth Dewhurst, 'The Othello Syndrome: A Study in the Psychopathology of Jealousy', *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 122:4 (October 1955), 367-74.

136 Paul Crichton, 'Did Othello Have "the Othello Syndrome"?', *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry*, 7:1 (1996), 161-69.

137 Sher, 'Iago', pp. 57-59.

138 Refuge <http://www.refuge.org.uk/get-help-now/what-is-domestic-violence/myths-of-domestic-violence/> [accessed 31 January 2017].

Othello's murder of Desdemona may be read as an 'honour killing', the most extreme form of 'honour-based violence'. Othello even uses the word 'honour' to defend his killing: 'An honourable murderer, if you will, / For nought I did in hate, but all in honour' (V.2.291-92). According to Bullough,

> *Othello* is also a tragedy of Honour [as well as 'a Tragedy of Jealousy']. The tale is of a type common in the Renaissance, based on the notion of marital honour widespread in Mediterranean countries until our own time. In Spain or Italy an injured husband had the right – and the duty – to avenge himself on his wife and her lover in case of adultery. Vengeance should be secret if there had been no public scandal; otherwise it might be public. A man must preserve his reputation, his good name, above all else. A cuckold was a comic figure, so one must not publish one's shame in removing its cause.[139]

In recent years, honour-based violence in Muslim contexts has received a great deal of media attention. Though Shakespeare's text makes it clear that Othello is a Christian, his status as a Moor connects him connotatively to Islam. But the passage from Bullough serves as a reminder that not very long ago honour-based violence was mainly connected to the Mediterranean, Christian countries, and that it is a global, age-old problem that goes across religions and cultures.

Vogel's play, like Shakespeare's, leads up to the murder of Desdemona, but portrays her as guilty of the offence that Iago has accused her of. The play seems to ask, is it possible to sympathise with Desdemona even if she has been unfaithful to Othello? And regardless of whether it is possible to sympathise with her or not, can her right to live be defended?[140] It may be thought rather obvious that being smothered to death is not a fair price to pay for infidelity. However, according to Mansbridge, some reviews of early productions of *Desdemona* 'suggested that Vogel's Desdemona deserved what was coming to her'.[141] The connection between women's sexual fidelity and their perceived human worth is not restricted to fiction, but can also be found in real life. A recent experimental study of bystanders' behaviour showed that the participants, 303 Italian undergraduates,

139 Bullough, p. 236.

140 Mansbridge interprets *Desdemona* as suggesting that 'whether Desdemona was *actually* chaste or *really* a whore is beside the point. In the end, her sexuality remains circumscribed by a male symbolic and is not hers to define'; *Paula Vogel*, p. 42 [emphasis original].

141 Ibid., p. 47.

were less willing to help a victim of intimate-partner violence if she had admitted to adultery than if she had not, and that this was connected to 'guilty' victims being perceived as less human than 'innocent' ones.[142]

A further connection between *Desdemona* and violence against women occurs when Emilia tells Desdemona that Othello is waiting for her outside. Desdemona is '[*f*]*rightened*', but '*arranges her face into an insipid, fluttering innocence, then girlishly runs to the door*'. When she is offstage, a '*very loud slap*' is heard, and Desdemona '*returns, closes the door behind her, holding her cheek. She is on the brink of tears. She and EMILIA look at each other, and then EMILIA looks away*' (scene 5, p. 239). Like *Othello*, then, *Desdemona* includes an actual domestic-violence incident, though here it takes place offstage. This slap is contrasted with the scene in which Bianca educates Desdemona in her trade by strapping her and, after making sure that it is not painful, instructing her in what sounds to make in response – an experience which Desdemona finds 'smashing' (scene 22, p. 249). When she first hears of the phenomenon, however, Desdemona is astonished: 'You mean men actually pay to beat you?' (scene 21, p. 248). Here, the parallel between Desdemona's vulnerable position as a wife and Bianca's vulnerable position as a prostitute is highlighted.

'I took you for that cunning whore of Venice': Reimagining Desdemona

In Vogel's reimagined version, Othello would have some justification for his appraisal of Desdemona as a 'cunning whore'; but this is of course far from a conventional conception of Shakespeare's character. Nadelhaft sees Shakespeare's Desdemona's 'characteristics' as a victim of domestic violence as 'meekness, passivity, docility, tenderness' and 'self-loathing'.[143] According to Novy, however, Desdemona is a 'confident' character; but her 'confidence has been minimized by many directors, especially in the Victorian period, analysed by some critics as stepping too far out of women's place, observed admiringly by Carol Thomas Neely', and 'more recently critiqued by Ania Loomba, and in effect by playwrights such as Paula Vogel and Djanet Sears,

142 Anna Constanza Baldry, Maria Giuseppina Pacilli and Stefano Pagliaro, 'She's Not a Person… She's Just a Woman! Infra-Humanization and Intimate Partner Violence', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 30:9 (2015), 1567-82.

143 Nadelhaft, 243.

who exaggerate it in their rewritings of her, as showing her upper class white privilege'.[144] The difference between Novy's 'confident' Desdemona and Nadelhaft's 'self-loathing' one is the difference between Desdemona at the beginning and at the end of the play. Commenting on A. C. Bradley's description of Desdemona as a 'helplessly passive' person whose 'suffering is like that of the most loving of dumb creatures tortured without cause by the being he adores', Irene G. Dash argues that this does not describe the unmarried Desdemona: 'Unable to see a woman as a full-blooded person, the critic fails to realize how accurately Shakespeare portrays the transformation of a woman, even a strong woman, by marriage'.[145]

On the Victorian stage, Rosenberg states, Desdemona was a role with low status; indeed, Macready was surprised that Kemble was willing to play it.[146] Faucit saw Desdemona as 'unselfish, generous, courageous'. When she played her, she was unaware 'that Desdemona is usually considered a merely amiable, simple, yielding creature, and is also generally represented so on stage', since she had never seen the play performed and was therefore 'hampered by no traditions'.[147] Consequently, her Desdemona was unusually spirited, and this interpretation was followed by Kemble and Terry, who saw Desdemona as 'strong' rather than the 'ninny' she had commonly been 'miscon[ceived]' as.[148] Thompson argues that Faucit, Kemble and Terry 'helped to make Desdemona a character that stars wanted to play' and 'a character that was presented as both good and strong', paving the way for later performances, including those by Peggy Ashcroft, who played Desdemona opposite Paul Robeson in 1930 as a 'proto-feminist', and Maggie Smith, who was lauded for appearing to be 'angry' rather than 'hurt' in the 1964 production at the National Theatre.[149]

It has sometimes been pointed out that Shakespeare's Desdemona does not conform to Renaissance notions of proper conduct for wives but commits a number of errors and 'indiscretions', which would have made it easier for Shakespeare's audience to accept the ease with which Iago per-

144 Novy, *Shakespeare and Outsiders*, pp. 107-08.

145 A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on* Hamlet, Othello, King Lear *and* Macbeth, 2nd ed. (London & New York: Macmillan, 1905 [1904]), p. 179; Irene G. Dash, *Wooing, Wedding, and Power: Women in Shakespeare's Plays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), p. 126.

146 Rosenberg, *The Masks of* Othello, p. 135.

147 Faucit Martin, pp. 58, 59.

148 Terry, pp. 128-29.

149 Thompson, 'Introduction', pp. 94-96. Cf. Pechter, pp. 123-24.

suades Othello to suspect her.[150] Loftus Ranald, for example, compares Desdemona's behaviour in the play with recommendations in English courtesy books from the time – claiming that these books' representativeness of actual behaviour is supported by travel writing from the period – and concludes that Desdemona's 'stubbornness' and lack of 'humility in respect of her own wishes' should be seen as serious flaws. Some specific actions, including receiving Cassio without asking for Othello's permission, generally showing such a strong interest in Cassio or in anything not connected with her own household, and planning to make Othello's bed 'a school' – conduct books specifically warned against the so-called 'bolster lecture' – are also ill-advised, even though they are caused by her 'sympathetic nature'.[151] Loftus Ranald anticipates the reaction that this line of argumentation could mean that Desdemona should be blamed for what happens. She argues, however, that Desdemona changes so much towards the end of the play, becoming much more submissive and closer to the 'ideal wife', that the play does encourage sympathy for her when she dies. Her 'indiscretions' merely have the function of making Othello's actions more understandable.[152] From a feminist point of view, however, the idea that Desdemona may to some extent be responsible for her own fate is problematic, as it may be seen as amounting to victim-blaming.

Vogel's *Desdemona* and MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona* both encourage considerably less sympathy for Desdemona, and for the other female characters, than Shakespeare's play does. Vogel's Desdemona, especially, is an unpleasant character in her overbearing attitude to Emilia. Othello is also, as discussed above, justified in his suspicions against her in this version. There is a vague connection here to Shakespeare's character: in *Othello*, Desdemona falls in love with the brave warrior Othello as the second-best option since heaven has not 'made her such a man' when she hears him tell Brabantio of his life and travels, as Othello explains to the Senate:

150 Diane Elizabeth Dreher, on the other hand, argues that Desdemona's 'tragic fate' is caused by 'an excess of altruism' and 'conformity' to normative female behaviour; *Domination and Defiance: Fathers and Daughters in Shakespeare* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1986), p. 92.

151 Loftus Ranald, 134, 134-35. Loftus Ranald argues that Desdemona is 'by no means a frightened little girl, but a warm, vital, strong-willed, though rather inexperienced , woman'; 134.

152 Ibid., pp. 138-39.

> This to hear
> Would Desdemona seriously incline,
> But still the house affairs would draw her thence,
> Which ever as she could with haste dispatch
> She'd come again, and with a greedy ear
> Devour up my discourse; which I, observing,
> Took once a pliant hour and found good means
> To draw from her a prayer of earnest heart
> That I would all my pilgrimage dilate,
> Whereof by parcels she had something heard
> But not intentively. I did consent,
> And often did beguile her of her tears
> When I did speak of some distressful stroke
> That my youth suffered. My story being done
> She gave me for my pains a world of sighs,
> She swore in faith 'twas strange, 'twas passing strange,
> 'Twas pitiful, 'twas wondrous pitiful;
> She wished she had not heard it, yet she wished
> That heaven had made her such a man. She thanked me
> And bade me, if I had a friend that loved her,
> I should but teach him how to tell my story
> And that would woo her. (I.3.146-67)

In parallel to this, Vogel's Desdemona 'travels' vicariously by sleeping with men from all over the world. She talks about this experience to Emilia:

> [Bianca] and I share something in our blood – that desire to know the world. I lie in the blackness of the room at her establishment… on sheets that are stained and torn by countless nights. And the men come into that pitch-black room – men of different sizes and smells and shapes, with smooth skin, with rough skin, with scarred skin. And they spill their seed into me, Emilia – seed from a thousand lands, passed down through generations of ancestors, with genealogies that cover the surface of the globe. And I simply lie still there in the darkness, taking them all into me. I close my eyes and in the dark of my mind – oh, how I travel!
>
> (Scene 11, p. 242-43)[153]

153 Mansbridge argues that the speech can also be read as 'a metaphor for the way a feminist reader might derive knowledge and inspiration from the texts in the dramatic canon – which are also "passed down through generations of ancestors" – reimagining them as a tool of female agency'; *Paula Vogel*, p. 40.

The heading of one review of a production of Vogel's *Desdemona* astutely read '*Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief* Is Actually a Play About How Marriage Is Like Prostitution';[154] all three women in the play sell themselves to men, whether those men are their husbands or not. As Mansbridge points out, '*Desdemona* underlines the parallel structures of patriarchal marriage and prostitution' by emphasising that a wife is meant to 'preserv[e] her sexuality in exchange for material comfort'.[155] Mansbridge also argues, however, that the depiction of Desdemona as a 'strumpet' is also significant as an appropriative strategy: '*Desdemona* does not recuperate Shakespeare's heroine in order to sanctify her. Rather, the play transforms her from the abstraction of Virtue to a material product of Othello and Iago's fantasy'.[156] Sharon Friedman similarly calls Vogel's Desdemona 'Othello's worst nightmare, the transformation of Iago's pretence into reality'.[157] In this way, it may be argued that the Desdemona character in Vogel's play is not an appropriation of Shakespeare's Desdemona as she appears to the audience in the play but of the imagined Desdemona that Iago describes.

One review of Josh Leukhardt's production of *Desdemona* at Barons Court Theatre in 2001 saw the play as 'prod[ding] and pok[ing] the dilemma' that if Shakespeare's Desdemona is played with 'margarine-wouldn't-melt innocence' Othello may seem like 'an unreasoning heathen' but if she is played as a 'feisty flirt', 'however much we might wish it otherwise, the scale and reach of Shakespeare's tragedy is diminished'. According to this critic, *Desdemona* 'spans the gulf of those cut-out Desdemonas and creates a flesh and blood character, capable of arousing both our pity and our admiration'.[158] Claiming that her reason for appropriating *Othello* was that she was unable to identify with Shakespeare's Desdemona, Vogel says that

> in the 1970s, when I had read *Othello*, I was struck by the fact that my main point of identification, of subjectivity, was a man who is supposedly cuckolded, that I

154 Lily Janiak, '*Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief* Is Actually a Play About How Marriage Is Like Prostitution', *SF Weekly* <http://archives.sfweekly.com/exhibitionist/2011/10/03/desdemona-a-play-about-a-handkerchief-is-actually-a-play-about-how-marriage-is-like-prostitution> [accessed 10 November 2016].

155 Mansbridge, *Paula Vogel*, p. 39.

156 Ibid., p. 35.

157 Sharon Friedman, 'Revisioning the Woman's Part: Paula Vogel's "Desdemona"', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 15:1 (February 1999), 131-41 (p. 131).

158 Lucy Powell, *Time Out* 1 August 2001, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 2001, p. 930.

> was weeping for a man who is cuckolded rather than for Desdemona. And, of course, at that point in the seventies, in terms of women's studies, there was all the virgin/whore analysis coming out, and it wounded me a great deal that Desdemona is nothing but an abstraction and that I didn't find any way of identifying with her.[159]

According to Vogel, then, her flawed Desdemona is easier to identify with than Shakespeare's heroine. Friedman argues that *Desdemona* 'marks an important shift in the feminist critical perspective' in that it resists the ideology of how women are conventionally represented in drama rather than reveal Shakespeare's female characters as role models who have been misinterpreted, a strand of feminist Shakespeare criticism that can be exemplified by the anthology *The Woman's Part* from 1980.[160] Not only does Vogel reject the 'perfect' Desdemona, but Mansbridge points out that she switches round the three women's roles so that 'Emilia is the pious and faithful wife, Bianca the whore with the heart of gold,[161] and Desdemona the impudent hussy', each taking on a new female stereotype from drama and fiction.[162] For this Desdemona, Bianca is the embodiment of her idea of the perfectly emancipated woman; Bianca, however, dreams of being married to Cassio and living in a cottage by the sea.

MacDonald's play follows Vogel's in refraining from presenting women as better people than men.[163] Othello's character traits as incorporated into Desdemona's character have the function of making the spectator/reader think about gender roles and how certain qualities can be conceived of in different ways, depending on whether they belong to a man or a woman. The same qualities that make Othello 'brave' may not be so easy to appreciate in Desdemona. Constance complains that she is disappointed in

159 Paula Vogel, quoted in Christopher Bigsby, *Contemporary American Playwrights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 299-300.

160 Friedman, 'Revisioning the Woman's Part', 132; *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene and Carol Thomas Neely (Urbana, Chicago & London: University of Illinois Press, 1980).

161 Presumably, this is meant to describe Emilia in Shakespeare's play, where her outspokenness and her claim that she would be open to casual sex (though there is no evidence that she would be in practice) may perhaps qualify her as a tart-with-a-heart, though this kind of stock character is usually represented by actual sex workers rather than women who may or may not be entirely monogamous.

162 Mansbridge, *Paula Vogel*, p. 38.

163 In an article on *Goodnight Desdemona*, Laurin R. Porter comments that 'MacDonald does not simply villainize male characters, and valorize female ones'; 'Shakespeare's "Sisters": Desdemona, Juliet, and Constance Ledbelly in *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*', *Modern Drama*, 38:3 (1995), 362-77 (p. 377, n. 13).

Desdemona for this reason: 'I thought you were my friend, I worshipped you. But you're just like Othello – gullible and violent' (III.9, p. 86). The idea of Desdemona as someone interested in violence is not taken from nowhere: like Vogel's Desdemona's vicarious travelling, it is prompted by Othello's suggestion in Shakespeare's play that Desdemona was initially attracted to him mainly for his war stories, and that she even expressed a regret that she, as a woman, was not herself able to take part in wars. In *Goodnight Desdemona*, Constance comments on this to Othello:

> I've always thought she had a violent streak,
> and that she lived vicariously through you,
> but no one else sees eye to eye with me. (II.1, p. 26)

Beverley Curran observes that the parts of Othello and Claude Night are written to be doubled, which makes it ironic that Constance cannot spot the parallel to her own vicarious career as a ghost writer.[164] MacDonald's Desdemona turns out to be much more violent than Constance could have foreseen on the basis of Shakespeare's version: 'Boy, Shakespeare really watered her down, eh?' (II.2, p. 45). Desdemona interprets everything in terms of warfare, offers Constance a severed head as a gift, and, finally, tries to kill her out of jealousy. The story culminates in a pillow fight, a parody of the murder scene in *Othello*. The effect of making Desdemona jealous and violent is to subvert gender stereotypes and make the audience think about their own prejudices.[165]

When I taught 'Shakespeare's Women in Modern Drama', an elective course on Shakespearean tragedies and modern appropriations of them, the answers to the questionnaires I gave the students revealed that their opinions of Shakespeare's Desdemona had been modified by reading *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*. Before reading the appropriation, the 2013

164 Beverley Curran, 'Mingling and Unmingling Opposites: Bending Genre and Gender in Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*', in *He Said, She Says: An RSVP to the Male Text*, ed. Mika Howe and Sarah Appleton Aguiar (Madison & London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001), pp. 211-20 (pp. 213-14).

165 As Marta Dvorak points out, 'By representing Desdemona as an Othello in skirts, [MacDonald] refuses to associate the isotopies male/female with those of activity/passivity and victor/victim': 'if Victor and Victim are interchangeable, then there follow several postulates from the artist's stance. Woman is neither better nor worse than man; she is potentially the same. This amounts to a subversion of the male gaze that traditionally portrays woman as the Other. But it also denounces woman's active complicity in her own exploitation'; 'Goodnight William Shakespeare (Good Morning Ann-Marie MacDonald)', *Canadian Theatre Review* 78-80 (Autumn 1994), 128-33 (pp. 131, 132).

students were very appreciative of Desdemona in *Othello*, but after reading the appropriation they claimed to like Shakespeare's Desdemona less. However, rather than being influenced by the depiction of Desdemona in the new play and letting their impression of MacDonald's Desdemona tint their perception of Shakespeare's, the students exaggerated the contrast between the two versions of the character. After the first reading many of them said they saw Desdemona as 'strong', 'honest', a 'role model' and someone who 'stands up for justice'; but after reading the appropriation they tended to see her as 'weak', 'submissive', 'naïve', 'timid', 'not thinking for herself' and the 'opposite' of the corresponding character in *Goodnight Desdemona*. Most of the 2015 students, who read *Othello* only after reading *Goodnight Desdemona*, saw Shakespeare's character in a favourable light (unlike the 2013 students after reading *Goodnight Desdemona*): they described her as 'very loyal', 'faithful', with a 'strong sense of right and wrong', 'kind and caring', 'strong', 'open-minded and ahead of her time', 'not afraid of speaking her mind', 'brave […] to follow her heart', 'generous', 'passionate', '[p]ure and innocent', someone who 'stands up for herself', 'a loving wife' and 'a good person'. One student, however, claimed to think Desdemona does not seem 'very nice', as she 'lies to her father'; another characterised her as 'very naïve', and a third described her as simply being 'in the background'. The prevailing attitude, however, was closer to the 2013 students' opinions on their first reading than to their modified response after reading the appropriation. One of the 2015 students explicitly reflected on her expectations on Desdemona in *Othello* after reading *Goodnight Desdemona*: '[She is a] stronger character than I thought. She was strong in Goodnight Desdemona but I thought that was just for show. [In *Othello*,] [s]he shows that she knows what she wants, and that even though she is a woman she can do more than what is believed of women'.

In respect of *Goodnight Desdemona*, none of the students wrote that they identified with MacDonald's Desdemona. Interestingly, however, in *Othello* Desdemona was clearly the character that the highest number of 2013 students claimed to identify with after reading the appropriation (Desdemona 5, Othello 2, Cassio 1, no one 1), which was not the case before (Desdemona 2, Cassio 2, Emilia 1, Emilia and Bianca 1, all three women 1, Othello 1, Iago 1). This means that more students identified with Desdemona during the reading when they did *not* like her. In the 2015 group, no trend was discernible as to which specific character was most often

identified with, but no students said that they identified with a character of a different gender from their own. The female students identified with Desdemona (2), Emilia (2), both Desdemona and Emilia (1), or no one (3), while the male students identified with Cassio (3) or Brabantio (1). No one identified with Iago or Othello, even though most students thought of at least one of them as a main character in the play. In *Goodnight Desdemona*, all except two students identified with Constance.

'Sure there's some wonder in this handkerchief': Saving Desdemona

After seeing a performance of *Othello* at the Cockpit on Drury Lane, Samuel Pepys recorded in his diary on 11 October 1660 that 'a very pretty lady that sot by me cried to see Desdimona smothered' [*sic*].[166] Present-day actors have similarly noted gasps and other audible reactions from audiences during the murder of Desdemona; notably, Olivia Vinall, who played Desdemona in Nicholas Hytner's production, remembers that 'a member of the audience […] screamed out "No!"' when Othello put the pillow over Desdemona's face.[167] Readers also react strongly to the text. In *Talking Back to Shakespeare*, Martha Tuck Rozett quotes some of her students' responses to *Othello*:

> Students found themselves wanting quite literally to talk back to the characters: 'I felt like screaming to Othello not to listen to Iago'; 'I knew exactly what Iago was going to do, but I couldn't yell out and warn anyone. To put it simply, Iago made me feel quite helpless'; 'I would have loved to have been there with them in Cyprus, to … tell Cassio he was being set up … Shakespeare keeps our attention by frustrating us'; 'I really had an urge to enter the play and tell Othello and Cassio of Iago's knavery'; 'I wanted to shake [Desdemona] and say: "Look at your husband and do something to help yourself instead of trying to help Cassio."'[168]

When I taught 'Shakespeare's Women in Modern Drama', the students' overwhelming response to reading *Othello* was 'Why did Desdemona have

166 *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, vol. 1: 1660, ed. Robert Latham and William Matthews (London: J. Bell and Sons, 1970), p. 264.

167 National Theatre, 'Shakespeare at the National Theatre' <www.youtube.com/watch?v=MiVZIj8CD9k> [accessed 18 October 2016].

168 Martha Tuck Rozett, *Talking Back to Shakespeare* (Newark: University of Delaware Press; London & Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1994), p. 28.

to die?'. When I gave them the task of imagining they were Othello as he was trying to decide whether to kill Desdemona and make a list of pros and cons, some of them could not refrain from addressing Othello directly with phrases such as 'Don't do it, Othello!', rather than trying to enter the character's mind.

It seems that a feeling of regret and incomprehension at the apparently inevitable death of Desdemona and a desire to step in and prevent it are common reactions to *Othello*. This type of reaction also constitutes the starting point for *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* and for Constance Ledbelly's thesis in that play. In her thesis draft, Constance dramatically exclaims:

> O Othello, O Tragic Man, stop your ears against the false yapping of that cur, Iago. The divine Desdemona, despite her fascination with violence and her love of horror stories, and aside from the fact that she deceived her father to elope with you, is the very embodiment of purity and chastity. (I.1, p. 9)

Constance feels that the deaths of Desdemona and Juliet are contingent on such trifling circumstances and could so easily have been averted that the plays simply do not make sense as tragedies; her hypothesis is therefore that Shakespeare used two unknown comedies, where all misunderstandings are cleared up at the end and everybody survives, as sources for *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Constance is subsequently sent into the plays literally to step in and take action to prevent the two heroines' deaths, thereby turning the tragedies into comedies. As Beverley Curran points out, Constance functions as a female spectator/reader 'located within the play'.[169]

Both *Goodnight Desdemona* and *Desdemona: A Play about a Handkerchief* deal with the issue of whether the murder of Desdemona is inevitable, and both plays read the lost handkerchief as the determining factor in Desdemona's fate. *Desdemona* even has a dumb-show prologue in which Emilia finds the handkerchief. It is somewhat surprising, considering that *Goodnight Desdemona* is usually read as a feminist play and that the handkerchief is so central in it, that Emilia (who is arguably the feminist centre

169 Curran, pp. 211-12. Another connection to the question 'Did it have to happen?' in *Goodnight Desdemona* was brought to my attention by accident when I taught 'Shakespeare's Women in Modern Drama'. In Act III, Romeo's pet turtle, Hector, is ripped in two when Romeo and Juliet fight over him (III.2.55.56). When the students were discussing the play in groups, I overheard one of them exclaim, 'Why did Hector have to die?!' – the same response that spectators/readers often have to Desdemona's death in Shakespeare's play.

of *Othello* and closely connected to the handkerchief) is not even mentioned in MacDonald's play. In *Desdemona*, Emilia is a central character; and the play deals, among other things, with her active decision not to tell Desdemona about stealing the handkerchief, even after she has realised the significance of the action. But Vogel's Emilia does not follow Shakespeare's in expressing feminist sentiments or solidarity with other women.

Why, then, should the handkerchief be seen as so significant? In *Othello*, Desdemona dotes on the strawberry-'[s]potted' handkerchief, since Othello gave it to her as a love token (III.3.438).[170] Emilia knows this and has qualms about taking it, but decides that she will make a copy and give that to Iago. Then Iago suddenly turns up, suspicious and cross with her, and she presents him with the original handkerchief, apparently to appease him. Emilia does not tell Desdemona that she knows where it is, but she does not realise the significance of her theft until the final scene. The most obvious aspect of the significance of the handkerchief is that it is instrumental in making Othello want to kill Desdemona. He sees the 'fact' (as he believes) that Desdemona has given the handkerchief to Cassio as the final proof of her infidelity. As soon as Iago says that he has seen 'Cassio wipe his beard' with a handkerchief resembling Desdemona's (III.3.440-42), Othello vows to kill both her and Cassio – though he has threatened to 'tear her all to pieces' already after Iago's tale of Cassio's erotic dream (III.3.416-34).

Another aspect of the handkerchief, which is often forgotten, is that it is also the reason why Emilia herself is murdered. Emilia takes the handkerchief because Iago has asked her to. Because of this, Othello's mention of it as proof of Desdemona's guilt makes Emilia realise the full extent of what Iago has done. When she reveals it, Iago kills her. In addition to this, the handkerchief has several symbolic significances. Othello warns Desdemona that, according to a prophecy, if a wife loses the handkerchief, her husband will hate her:

170 It is interesting to note that Shakespeare's Othello cannot quite make up his mind about the origins of the handkerchief: in III.4, he tells Desdemona that 'an Egyptian' gave it to his mother and that '[s]he, dying, gave it me / And bid me, when my fate would have me wive, / To give it her' (65-67), but in V.2 he says that 'it was an antique token / My father gave my mother' (214-15). According to Honigmann, '[s]ome think he wanted to frighten Desdemona in 3.4, but the contradiction may be an oversight'; p. 321, n. 215.

> That handkerchief
> Did an Egyptian to my mother give,
> She was a charmer and could almost read
> The thought of people. She told her, while she kept it
> 'Twould make her amiable and subdue my father
> Entirely to her love; but if she lost it
> Or made a gift of it, my father's eye
> Should hold her loathed and his spirits should hunt
> After new fancies. (III.4.57-65)

A lost handkerchief therefore comes to represent a husband who suddenly, for no apparent reason, turns against his wife, changed from the man she fell in love with into an abuser. According to Neely, the handkerchief first symbolises 'female power' and 'sexuality controlled by chastity', but when it is 'lost' and misused it starts to represent men's 'power over women'.[171] According to Dash, the handkerchief is a 'device' used 'to expose the fragility of marriage and to question the standards that govern the behavior of a husband and wife', but it also works as a 'symbol of fidelity and infidelity, of a woman's obedience and disobedience, of the cultural gap between Othello and Desdemona'.[172] It is also significant that it is a domestic, 'female' item, as well as being emblematic of Emilia's betrayal of Desdemona.

Vogel's *Desdemona* relies on the audience's knowledge that Emilia has stolen the handkerchief. In this version, she persists in her lie, even though Desdemona and Emilia both know that Othello suspects Desdemona and Cassio (the only man in Cyprus she has not slept with), and even though they think that finding the handkerchief will be seen as proof of Desdemona's innocence. Desdemona tries to find the handkerchief simply to acquit herself. The handkerchief itself is not important to her; in contrast to the magical words associated with the handkerchief in *Othello*, Vogel's Desdemona refers to it as a 'crappy little snot rag' (scene 1, p. 237). In the end, the handkerchief turns out not to be as significant as it seemed, since Othello has also searched for other evidence of Desdemona's infidelity and may well have found it. In MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona*, Constance saves Desdemona by taking the handkerchief back from Iago. This simple action turns the tragedy into a comedy, even a 'farce' (II.1, 25). In this version, everything depends on the small detail of the handkerchief; the significance can be said to lie in its apparent insignificance.

171 Neely, pp. 228-31.
172 Dash, p. 120.

Fabric generally is foregrounded in *Desdemona*. Emilia hangs laundry and explains the arduous process of washing sheets in Cyprus in comparison to Venice – where she 'could open the window and dunk them in the canal' (scene 1, p. 237). The bridal sheets are scrubbed clean of chicken's blood, bought from Bianca to resemble hymeneal blood for the traditional display, where they have hung 'bakin' in the sun for a month' with '[h]alf the garrison c[o]me to see [them] flapping in the breeze': 'Young chick's blood's no good for bridal sheets', complains Emilia, 'it's the devil to come out' (scene 2, p. 237). This can be compared with the wedding sheets in *Othello* – the sheets that Desdemona asks Emilia to lay on the bed when she has been beaten by Othello and that she asks to be shrouded in when she is dead. According to the 'short' time scheme, these are the same sheets that they used the night before, if we are to regard the first night in Cyprus as their wedding night. In fact, critics do not even agree on whether Othello and Desdemona have had time to consummate their marriage, as Iago interrupts every time – first by alerting Brabantio to their elopement and then by starting the drunken brawl.

Janet Adelman connects these two pieces of cloth, the handkerchief and the wedding sheet, claiming that the red strawberries symbolise blood stains.[173] On a more down-to-earth level, the sheets are important because Othello uses them to search for evidence of Desdemona's infidelity, both in Vogel's play, where Emilia has seen Othello '*smelling the sheets for traces of a lover*' (scene 27, p. 253) and in certain productions of Shakespeare's play, where sheet-smelling has been known to form part of the looking through Desdemona's belongings that an Othello will often engage in during his interrogation of Emilia at the beginning of IV.2.[174]

Vogel's play emphasises the inevitability of Desdemona's death and the idea that uxoricide is wrong regardless of whether the victim is an adulteress. *Desdemona* ends with the equivalent of the willow scene, the evening before the murder, with Emilia brushing Desdemona's hair a hundred strokes and the knowledge of what will happen when she gets to a hundred and leaves Desdemona alone in her bedroom. MacDonald, on the other hand, stresses that Desdemona's death is avoidable. In this version, the murder is averted and the tragic outcome is exchanged for a happy ending.

173 Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays,* Hamlet *to* The Tempest (New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, 1992), pp. 67-68.

174 David Harewood's Othello, for example, smelt the sheets on the bed and rummaged through the dressing-table in Sam Mendes's 1997 production.

However, neither appropriation includes the event of Desdemona's death, and both eliminate her body being shown dead on stage. In Shakespeare's play, Emilia and Desdemona die on stage, unlike Lady Macbeth, Cordelia and Ophelia. Like Cordelia and Ophelia, Desdemona's and Emilia's dead bodies feature on stage, especially Desdemona's. In fact, Desdemona dies some twenty minutes before the end of the play, and her body remains on stage. This leads both to Othello getting the final word and most of the attention, and, on a practical level, to poor working conditions for the actress playing Desdemona.

One of the purposes of saving Desdemona (in MacDonald's play) or ending the play before she dies (in Vogel's) is to avert the typical tragic ending of the female suffering (or dead) body. Shakespeare's tragedies usually only end when the male main character dies – his lifespan defines the extension of the play. The actress consequently gets less stage time, and the character's dead body (and the actress's living body) is objectified as a spectacle for the audience and the other actors to watch. And it is not only a question of the female character's suffering body but of the actress's. Twenty minutes is a long time to lie completely still, during which the actress usually has to endure some quite rough handling from the actor playing Othello and is prevented from defending herself as she has to act dead. Imogen Stubbs has commented that, in Trevor Nunn's 1989 production, it was difficult not to breathe perceptibly as she would be out of breath after the fight preceding Desdemona's death, and Sinéad Cusack that she had to lie still in pouring rain during an open-air performance at Ludlow Castle and then stand up for the curtain call in her by then completely transparent nightgown.[175] These circumstances may sound trivial,

175 Commentary track with Trevor Nunn, Ian McKellen and Imogen Stubbs, *Othello*, dir. Trevor Nunn (Primetime Television Ltd.; BBC, 1990) [on DVD]; Sinéad Cusack, interviewed by Roy Plomley, *Desert Island Discs*, BBC Radio 4, 28 May 1983. According to Rosenberg, Victorian Othellos were sometimes dangerously violent when killing Desdemona. Kemble was worried about being really hurt by Macready, who had already broken her finger in *Macbeth*; *Masks of* Othello, pp. 135-36. Of course modern theatres have health-and-safety regulations and carefully plotted stage-combat plans, so it is seldom a question of anyone coming to actual physical harm. Accidents do happen, but the practice of victim-control should mean that the person being subjected to fictional violence is not at more risk than anyone else on stage. It is therefore a question of discomfort rather than danger.

but they give a new dimension to the concept of the male gaze on the female suffering body. [176]

Comparing it to *Desdemona: A Play about a Handkerchief*, Novy states that *Goodnight Desdemona* 'is much more affectionate and thus more likely to appeal to an audience drawn by the Shakespearean names in the title'.[177] Similarly, one reviewer of Magdalen Elwes' 1994 production, the first theatrical production at Turtle Key Arts Centre in London, 'enjoyed the *jeu d'esprit* by someone with a sense of humour, a gift for pastiche, and a love of Shakespeare', and another found that the 'revisionism [was] always underpinned by an affection and respect for the originals'.[178] It is true that both MacDonald as a writer and the fictional character Constance, in her attempts to change the plots of the Shakespearean tragedies she is landed in, seem to be driven first and foremost by a love for Shakespeare, his characters and his language. MacDonald herself has said that the idea of Shakespearean heroines as 'wimps' on which *Goodnight Desdemona* builds does not originate in Shakespeare's writing, but in the traditions that have developed at the Stratford Festival in Ontario and how the characters are depicted in those

176 In Shakespeare's productions of *Othello*, the bed would have had bed curtains which Othello would draw before admitting Emilia. If the curtains hid the view of Desdemona on the bed for a substantial part of the scene, this would mean very different conditions with regard to both the necessity for lying completely still and the spectacle aspect, though it would perhaps have given even less attention to Desdemona and more to Othello throughout the scene. Gregory Doran's 2004 production did have bed curtains, made out of mosquito net, but they were transparent and therefore emphasised rather than concealed what took place behind them. Another difference from most present-day productions is that Shakespeare's performances would have taken place in shared light; the fact that the actor playing Desdemona could see the audience as Desdemona was dying and possibly even dead makes the relationship between actor and spectator more equal, whereas the objectification of the character/actor is highlighted by spectators watching the actor from a dark auditorium. One spectator at a performance by The King's Men in Oxford in 1610 describes Desdemona's death in a way that can be interpreted as saying that the actor was watching the audience as he silently implored them to pity his character: 'But that Desdemona, murdered by her husband in our presence, although she always pled her case excellently, yet when killed moved us more, while stretched out on her bed she begged the spectators' pity with her very facial expression' [Latin original: 'At vero Desdimona illa apud nos a marito occisa, quanquam optime semper causam egit, interfecta tamen magis movebat, cum in lecto discumbens spectantium misericordiam ipso vultu imploraret']; Henry Jackson, letter, September 1610, trans. Dana F. Sutton. The Philological Museum <http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/jackson/> [accessed 1 February 2017].

177 Marianne Novy, 'Saving Desdemona and/or Ourselves: Plays by Ann-Marie MacDonald and Paula Vogel', in *Transforming Shakespeare: Contemporary Women's Re-visions in Literature and Performance*, ed. Marianne Novy (Basingstoke & London: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 71-85 (p. 71).

178 Benedict Nightingale, *The Times* 9 June 1994, in *Theatre Record* Jan-June 1994, p. 721; Neil Smith, *What's On* 15 June 1994, in *Theatre Record* Jan-June 1994, p. 721.

productions.[179] Friedman points out that Constance displays 'both a reluctance and a will to challenge cultural and institutional authorities' and is '[d]issatisfied with the characters her revision has generated'.[180] In fact, Constance has so much respect for Shakespeare's work that, when she realises that saving Desdemona is going to detract from the play's artistic quality, for a moment she tries to persuade Othello into killing Desdemona after all:

> CONSTANCE
> Omigod, what have I done? (*She grabs the handkerchief from* OTHELLO *and tries unsuccessfully to stuff it back into* IAGO*'s pocket.*) Look, just forget you ever saw me here, okay?! […]
> (*Aside*) I've wrecked a masterpiece. I've ruined the play.
> I've turned Shakespeare's *Othello* to a farce. (II.1, pp. 24-25)

There are two aspects to Constance's process of turning *Othello* into a comedy: making it funny and making the ending happy. The latter is achieved simply by taking the handkerchief. The former depends on Constance's role as the Fool, with her introduction of modern North American colloquialisms into the blank verse all the characters speak and with expectations and experiences that stand in contrast to the dramatic events of the playworld.

Constance is not the only critic to have seen traces of comedy in *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*. According to Igor Djordjevic, 'the plays seem to open with one genre in mind, and then change directions in midstride'.[181] *Othello* presents versions of traditionally comic stock characters such as the trickster (Iago) and the cuckolded husband (Othello).[182] Honigmann remarks that jealousy is a more conventional theme for comedy than for

179 Quoted in Ellen MacKay, 'The Spectre of Straight Shakespeare: New Ways of Looking at Old Texts in *Goodnight Desdemona* and *Mad Boy Chronicle*', *Canadian Theatre Review* 111 (2002), 10-15 (13).

180 Sharon Friedman, 'The Feminist Playwright as Critic: Paula Vogel, Ann Marie MacDonald, and Djanet Sears Interpret Othello', in *Feminist Theatrical Revisions of Classic Works: Critical Essays*, ed. Sharon Friedman (Jefferson, North Carolina, & London: McFarland & Company, 2009), pp. 113-34 (pp. 123, 126).

181 Igor Djordjevic, '*Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*: From Shakespearean Tragedy to Postmodern Satyr Play', *Comparative Drama*, 37:1 (2003), 89-115 (p. 92; see also p. 93). See also Susan Snyder, *The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare's Tragedies:* Romeo and Juliet*,* Hamlet*,* Othello*, and* King Lear (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 56-90; Neely, pp. 214-19, 233-34; Kamaralli, pp. 143-44; Honigmann, pp. 75-77. For a discussion on comedy in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Goodnight Desdemona*, see Chapter 5.

182 Djordjevic suggests that Othello is a version of the 'braggart soldier'; 92.

tragedy.[183] According to Neely, the removal to Cyprus (a sort of 'green world'[184]), Desdemona's leading role in her 'courtship' with Othello and the superior sense of the female characters are all reminiscent of Shakespearean romantic comedy. But whereas the women in the comedies take charge and civilise and educate the men, *Othello* 'ends as it began, in a world of men – political, loveless, undomesticated'.[185] The handkerchief, Neely argues, 'is like the givens of the comedies – the fairy juice, the caskets, the disguises, the identical twins; it is trivial and ridiculous but symbolically all-important'.[186] *Othello*'s parallel in comedy is the Claudio/Hero storyline in *Much Ado About Nothing*. What makes this a 'comedy' in contrast to *Othello* is simply that Hero survives. With comic elements already present in *Othello*, the addition of Desdemona's survival therefore transforms it into a comedy.

Vogel's Desdemona knows, or at least suspects, that she is going to die, and does what she can to avoid it.[187] The end of the play is a grisly countdown to the murder: it is too late for either Desdemona or Emilia to prevent it. Emilia still does not own up about the handkerchief, and in any case its importance turns out to have been overrated. Very early on in MacDonald's play, Desdemona's death turns out to be possible to avert. The wise fool (Constance) simply takes the handkerchief, and Desdemona survives. In this version, the handkerchief is important, though it may seem a mere detail. MacDonald averts Desdemona's death, whereas Vogel shows the events leading up to it from Desdemona's and Emilia's perspective. Both plays, however, change the character of Desdemona beyond recognition.

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Most people would agree that *Othello* is about wife-murder, that wife-murder is connected to domestic violence, and that what most wife-murderers, in the real world as well as the two in the play, have in common is being male. Nevertheless, discussions about *Othello* continue to prioritise race over gender, and domestic violence is a largely neglected aspect of the play.

183 Honigmann, p. 75.

184 See Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 182-84.

185 Neely, p. 215.

186 Ibid., p. 214.

187 This can be connected to the question of whether Shakespeare's Desdemona fights for her life or accepts her fate.

Whereas *Goodnight Desdemona* is about the successful prevention of domestic violence and uxoricide in a specific case, Vogel's *Desdemona* sees domestic violence and, by extension, marriage as a societal problem. On a character level, however, where Shakespeare had taken some guilt off Emilia's shoulders in comparison with his sources, Vogel puts the guilt back. Shakespeare had also suggested a class perspective in that Iago and Emilia seem to be of a lower social class than Othello and Desdemona; Vogel takes this aspect of the characters several steps further. Bianca is a sex worker in Vogel's play; but, as has been discussed, that is not unambiguously the case in Shakespeare's version. Vogel's presentation of Emilia as a middle-aged servant and of Bianca as a prostitute conform to popular conceptions of the characters, but not necessarily to what is in Shakespeare's text. The most significant character change, however, is that Vogel's Desdemona is unfaithful to Othello. The purpose of Desdemona's guilt in this play is to challenge the view that the wrongness of Othello's decision to kill his wife is connected to the fact that Desdemona is innocent and that her innocence therefore compounds the tragedy of the ending.

Like appropriations of *King Lear* and *Macbeth*, each of the two re-visions of *Othello* studied here introduces a new condition that changes the premises for the story. In *Goodnight Desdemona*, the game changer is the fact that Desdemona is violent and gullible, much as Othello is in Shakespeare's play, and the answer to the question 'Did it have to happen?' is, 'No, it did not', as Constance manages to avert the tragedy by taking the handkerchief from Iago and revealing his plot, thereby dissuading Othello from murdering Desdemona. In *Desdemona*, the new condition is that Iago and Othello are justified in their suspicions of Desdemona. All through the play, she searches for the handkerchief but cannot find it – nor will Emilia tell her what has happened to it – and without the handkerchief Desdemona will not be able to clear herself, which means that the answer to the question is, 'Yes, it had to happen'.

5.
Romeo and Juliet and the Possibility of Romantic Comedy 'What might have happened?'

In the animated film *Gnomeo and Juliet*, directed by Kelly Asbury, the banished garden gnome Gnomeo, when told by a statue of William Shakespeare how the original *Romeo and Juliet* ends, tells the statue that it is a 'tragedy' only in the sense of 'rubbish', and that 'there's got to be a better ending than that'. The statue's answer is, 'I suppose that [Romeo] could have made it back in time to avert disaster, but I liked the whole death part better'. The question of what might have happened if Romeo and Juliet had survived have occupied many spectators/readers, and it forms the basis for two of the three appropriations studied in this chapter: Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* (1988; 1990) and Perry Pontac's *Fatal Loins: Romeo and Juliet Reconsidered* (2001). The third appropriation, Allison Williams' *Drop Dead, Juliet!* (2006), also toys with the idea of Romeo and Juliet not killing themselves, but this play rewinds the story to the beginning instead of testing the lovers' continuing relationship.

It is perhaps not a coincidence that all three appropriations that conform to the selection criteria of this study are light-hearted comedies. For all the 'woe' of the final act of this tragedy of 'star-crossed lovers' and 'their parents' strife', the earliest scenes of *Romeo and Juliet* abound in witticisms and frivolity as much as any of Shakespeare's comedies. As Constance Ledbelly, the main character of *Goodnight Desdemona*, puts it in her thesis,

> If only Romeo would confess to Tybalt that he has just become his cousin-in-law by marrying Juliet. Such is our corrupt response that begs the question, "Is this

> tragedy?!" Or is it comedy gone awry, when a host of comic devices is pressed into the blood-soaked service of tragic ends?[1]

There are, however, serious undertones all the way through *Romeo and Juliet*, not only in the depiction of conflicts between sections of the population and between generations, but perhaps most of all in Juliet's arranged, and indeed forced, marriage to Paris. With its starting-point in these sinister aspects of the plot, this chapter traces the story's transformation from tragedy into comedy in *Goodnight Desdemona*, *Fatal Loins* and *Drop Dead, Juliet!*

'From ancient grudge': *Romeo and Juliet*'s Sources and Appropriations

According to Geoffrey Bullough, a woman taking a sleeping-draught to avoid a marriage was a popular theme in Renaissance Italy.[2] Among the Italian stories featuring this motif, the one most directly linked to Shakespeare's play is *Istoria novellamente ritrovata di due Nobili Amanti* (c. 1530), a story about Romeo and Giulietta by Luigi da Porto.[3] Bandello's adaptation of this story, in *Le Novelle del Bandello* (1554), was translated into French by Boiastuau; this translation was in turn translated into English by William Painter and published in his story collection *The Palace of Pleasure* (1566-67). Painter's prose version, which was in more recent years reprinted in T. J. B. Spencer's *Elizabethan Love Stories*, may have been a source of Shakespeare's play; but the main source, according to Bullough perhaps the only direct source, was Arthur Brooke's narrative poem *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet* (1562), which was also based on Boiastuau's translation of Bandello's version.[4]

Romeo and Juliet has come to hold the position as the most widely known and loved Shakespeare play, and as such it has of course been

1 Ann-Marie MacDonald, *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 1998 [1990]), I.1, p. 13. Subsequent references will be to this edition and given parenthetically in the text.

2 Geoffrey Bullough, 'Introduction' to *Romeo and Juliet*, in *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. I: 'Early Comedies; Poems; Romeo and Juliet' (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), pp. 260-83 (p. 269).

3 Bullough, vol. I, p. 270.

4 Bullough, vol. I, p. 274; William Painter, 'The Story of Romeo and Julietta' (from *The Palace of Pleasure*, vol. 2, 1567, trans. from Bandello), in *Elizabethan Love Stories*, ed. with an introduction and glossary by T. J. B. Spencer (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1968), pp. 51-95; 'THE TRAGICALL HISTORYE OF ROMEUS AND JULIET written first in Italian by Bandell, and nowe in English by Ar. Br.' (1562), in Bullough, vol. I, pp. 282-363.

adapted and appropriated many times and in many different forms, sometimes with a focus on social, political or religious conflicts. The most famous appropriation is probably Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim's musical *West Side Story* from 1957 (and the subsequent film version from 1961, directed by Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins), in which the feud is between one Puerto Rican and one white gang in mid-twentieth-century New York. Another play from the same time that draws on the Montague/Capulet feud is Peter Ustinov's *Romanoff and Juliet* (1956), a love story between a communist's son from the Soviet Union and a capitalist's daughter from the United States during the Cold War.[5] Some productions of *Romeo and Juliet* have similarly interpreted the conflict between the Capulets and the Montagues as being due to racial, cultural or political differences. For example, in Tim Supple's 2000 production at the National Theatre the Capulets were played by white actors and the Montagues by black ones.[6] Many critics found that this approach did not serve the play, however. Katherine Duncan-Jones, for example, wrote that

> [t]he racial differentiation of the Capulets and Montagues turns out to throw this well constructed play badly off balance. Their 'ancient grudge' no longer looks like pointless prolonged feuding between families whose culture and ambitions are identical, for it appears to derive from antagonisms between races that are all too recognizable, and recognizably intransigent.[7]

Similarities to present-day political conflicts may also be implied by more subtle means than making a racial distinction between the two families. In Rupert Goold's 2010 RSC production, for example, the Northern Irish

5 Peter Ustinov, *Romanoff and Juliet*, with an introduction by E. R. Wood (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1967).

6 The Friar and Mercutio were white and had Irish and Northern Irish accents, respectively; the Prince was black.

7 Katherine Duncan-Jones, 'Grudge Fudged', *Times Literary Supplement* 20 October 2000, 19. National Theatre Archive. File: 'Press reviews and articles for the 2000 production of *Romeo and Juliet* in the Olivier'. An advantage of the racial interpretation, however, is that it enables spectators who are not familiar with the play to distinguish between the two 'households'.

accent of Jonjo O'Neill's Mercutio gave special poignancy to the line 'A plague a' both your houses!'[8]

The tendency to update and popularise *Romeo and Juliet* and to aim it particularly at young audiences exists within both appropriation and performance. A particularly popular updated adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* is Baz Luhrmann's modern-dress film *Romeo + Juliet*, from 1996. Reviewers have blamed both *West Side Story* and *Romeo + Juliet* for what they perceive as audiences' expectation that every subsequent production of *Romeo and Juliet* will be 'hip' and 'multiracial' with a 'funky soundtrack' and a 'modern, streetwise feel'.[9] The National Theatre's 2013 one-hour version for children, directed by Bijan Sheibani at the Shed, is one example of this kind of production. In this version, too, the conflict was depicted as vaguely racial, as the Capulets were played as a family from South Asia and the Montagues as a family with African roots.[10] In the National Youth Theatre's 2013 production of *Romeo and Juliet*, directed by Paul Roseby, the text had been 'adapted' by Lolita Chakrabarti in the sense of Shakespeare's text being rather more heavily edited than usual and some words and names being replaced to tie in with the setting in present-day London. For example, references to 'Verona' and 'Mantua' were replaced by 'Camden' and 'Manchester'; and rather than 'gold', Romeo specified that he gave 'twenty quid' to the apothecary, who was played as a drugs dealer.

8 William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. René Weis (London: Methuen Drama, 2012), III.1.101-02; 108. Subsequent references will be to this edition (unless otherwise stated) and given parenthetically in the text. Goold's production was not set in any particular political context; there was certainly nothing to suggest that the Capulets and Montagues represented the Irish and the British or Catholics and Protestants. The conceptual conceit seemed to be that Romeo and Juliet were present-day teenagers transposed to Renaissance Verona. The production started with Romeo, as a tourist in a foreign town, with a camera, listening to an audio-guide reading the prologue in an Italian accent. The costumes were a combination of traditional and modern dress, with everyone except Romeo and Juliet in predominantly Renaissance costumes. The extreme youth, as well as the modernity, of the two main characters was emphasised: they wore hoodies and canvas shoes, Sam Troughton's Romeo rode a bicycle, and Mariah Gale's Juliet kept playing with a yoyo.

9 Aleks Sierz, 'Testament to Youth', *Tribune* 13 October 2000, 9. National Theatre Archive. File: 'Press reviews and articles for the 2000 production of *Romeo and Juliet* in the Olivier' [review of Tim's Supple's production]; Patrick Carnegy, *Spectator* 15 July 2000, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 2000, pp. 906-07 (p. 906) [review of Michael Boyd's RSC production].

10 This was reflected in the casting of the two nuclear families, and also implied in the costumes worn by the two clans. This version 'for young audiences' did not cut all instances of sexual innuendo in the text, but did avoid showing physical intimacy on stage: falling in love was represented with glitter, balloons and disco lights; when Juliet was just going to kiss Romeo in the balcony scene, she heard the Nurse call and, saying 'I've really got to go, sorry', left him; as a representation of the wedding night, Romeo and Juliet took polaroid pictures of each other.

Inspired by the idea that Romeo and Juliet are divided by racial prejudice and segregation, Marjorie Blackman's *Noughts and Crosses* (2001), the first part of a novel series for young adults, describes a dystopian society where the population is divided into two groups of people, Crosses (the ruling class) and Noughts (former slaves). In a reversal of white supremacy, the Crosses are black while the Noughts are white. In 2007, *Noughts and Crosses* was adapted for the stage by Dominic Cooke, who also directed the RSC production of the play, in which the Crosses were played by black actors and the Noughts by white ones.[11] Sharon M. Drapier's novel *Romiette and Julio* (2001) draws on the feud in Shakespeare's play to portray a racist gang's disapproval of a relationship between an African-American and a Hispanic-American teenager in the present-day United States. Caleen Sinnette Jennings' *Playing Juliet* (1999), the companion piece to *Casting Othello*, is about a 'biracial' cast rehearsing *Romeo and Juliet*.[12] Two plays for young people about students rehearsing *Romeo and Juliet* are Terry Ortwein's *Act Three, Scene Five* (1986) and Joe Calcaro's *Shakespeare's R & J* (1997).[13] James Zager's *Juliet* (2010), created as part of a project for performing-arts students at Carroll University in Wisconsin, is a play that puts together only Juliet's scenes from Shakespeare's play, with Romeo and Juliet speaking Shakespeare's original text and everyone else's lines paraphrased in contemporary English.[14] Commissioned as part of the National Connections Scheme to create new plays for and about teenagers, Sharman Macdonald's *After Juliet* (1999) is a time- and placeless sequel to *Romeo and Juliet* which focuses on Rosaline.[15] According to Abigail Rokison, *After Juliet* 'encourages young people to think about the proximity of the action of the play to their lives and to own the play for themselves'.[16] Rather than racial segregation or present-day teen culture, however, *Goodnight Desdemona*, *Fatal Loins* and *Drop Dead, Juliet!* are concerned with negotiating the proportions of comedy and the conventions of romantic love in Shakespeare's play.

11 Dominic Cooke and Marjorie Blackman, *Noughts and Crosses* (London: Nick Hern, 2008).

12 Caleen Sinnette Jennings, *Playing Juliet / Casting Othello* (Woodstock, Illinois; London; Melbourne: Dramatic Publishing, 1999).

13 Joe Calcaro, *Shakespeare's R & J* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1999); Terry Ortwein, *Act Three, Scene Five* (Los Angeles: Baker's Plays, 1987).

14 James Zager, *Juliet* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2010).

15 Sharman Macdonald, *After Juliet* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001).

16 Abigail Rokison, *Shakespeare for Young People: Productions, Versions and Adaptations* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 170.

'An if thou dar'st, I'll give thee remedy': The Friar's Plan

Aspects of a literary text that may be perceived as being 'flawed' seem to be particularly conducive to the appropriative impulse, especially if they are found in a work that enjoys a high status. *Romeo and Juliet* is notable for its 'annoying' ending and plot 'flaws'. Several reviewers of productions of the play have commented that certain elements in the plot prevent them from liking the play. An aspect that is mentioned as particularly annoying is that the ending would have been so easy to avoid and that Friar Laurence's plan does more harm than good. For example, Robert Gore-Langton writes that '[f]amous though it is as a love story, [*Romeo and Juliet*] can irritate like no other Shakespeare play. All that winsome acting and a plot dependent on undelivered messages can easily put you off these "star-crossed" lovers whose families are feuding'.[17] Charles Spencer similarly muses that

> I sometimes worry it reveals something nasty about my soul, but I almost always find myself seriously bored by *Romeo and Juliet*. It's partly because the tragedy is so glibly mechanical. Had Friar Laurence employed a more reliable postal service, the play could just as easily have turned out as a romantic comedy.[18]

In his foreword to Perry Pontac's *Codpieces*, Alan Bennett quotes the fictional Uncle Matthew, in Nancy Mitford's *The Pursuit of Love* (1945), who, upset with the unhappy ending of *Romeo and Juliet*, exclaims '"All the fault of that damned padre"'.[19] The same sentiment is discernible in the title of the musical *The People vs Friar Laurence: The Man Who Killed Romeo and Juliet* (2010), by Phil Swan and Ron West.[20] To claim that the Friar killed the young couple may be to take matters too far, but it is a natural inference to draw from Shakespeare's play that Friar Laurence uses the two adolescents for his own, political purposes; they are effectively sacrificed. His main aim is not to help them achieve their goal of living together but to make peace between their families (though he hopes to be able to do both). Juliet puts her faith in the Friar because he is the only one who can help her. He has the power to 'remedy' the situation; but in trying to kill

17 Robert Gore-Langton, *The Express*, 7 July 2000, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 2000, p. 907.
18 Charles Spencer, *The Daily Telegraph* 7 July 2000, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 2000, p. 908.
19 Quoted in Alan Bennett, 'Foreword' to *Codpieces* (London: Oberon, 2011), pp. 9-11 (p. 10).
20 Phil Swan and Ron West, *The People vs Friar Laurence: The Man Who Killed Romeo and Juliet* (New York: Samuel French, 2010).

two birds with one stone, he makes a mess of it instead.

Friar Laurence first conceives the idea of staging a mock death when Juliet threatens to kill herself to avoid marriage to County Paris: to her assurance that unless he gives her 'some present counsel […], / 'Twixt my extremes and me this bloody knife / Shall play the umpire' and that 'I long to die, / If what thou speak'st speak not of remedy' (IV.1.60-67), he responds that 'If rather than to marry County Paris / Thou hast the strength of will to slay thyself, / Then is it likely thou wilt undertake / A thing like death to chide away this shame, / That cop'st with death himself to scape from it' (71-76). There is no evident reason for the Friar's favouring the complicated plan of drugging and burying Juliet, conveying a message to Romeo, and waiting for him to come and 'bear [her] hence to Mantua' (IV.1.117), instead of the more obvious plan of availing himself of Juliet's having obtained permission to go to confession to simply take her to Mantua straightaway, or, if this is impractical, hiding her in his cell until it is convenient to bring her to Mantua. The plan seems especially inept since it involves Romeo's returning to Verona, whence he has been banished.

There are some pragmatic advantages for the young couple of Juliet's parents' supposing her dead. They will not come looking for her; but since they are unaware of her connection with Romeo, why would they look in Mantua if she simply disappeared? Also, this solution avoids the scandal of an elopement; but it appears it was always the Friar's intention to come clean at some point, so the avoidance would only be temporary and the scandal probably all the bigger when the truth finally came out. The implication seems to be that the Friar's main motive is his hope that the Capulets' grief will make them more disposed to feel that a daughter married to a Montague is better than a dead daughter, and to put their feud with the Montagues behind them when the truth is revealed. But even this aspect of the plan is flawed: the grief they have experienced will hardly make them ready to listen to Friar Laurence, since he is responsible both for marrying Juliet to Romeo behind her parents' backs and for feigning Juliet's death.[21] The only way in which his plan could have the desired effect

21 Kiki Lindell observes that 'Whereas Juliet's parents will doubtlessly be happy to be told, ultimately, that Juliet is not dead, they are likely to be less pleased about the fact that she returns to life married *to* a scion of the arch-enemy of the Capulet family, and married *by* the Friar. They may forgive Juliet, but the poor Friar might not be so easily forgiven for his part in these shenanigans'; 'Putting the Fun Back into Funerals: Dealing/Dallying with Death in *Romeo and Juliet*', *Comparative Drama* 50:2&3 (Summer & Autumn 2016), 165-81 (p. 172).

on the feud is if it results, as it does, in both Romeo's and Juliet's actual deaths.

Even so, Juliet's feigned death should be understood in the wider context of 'mock death', which is an often recurring motif in the Shakespeare canon and especially prevalent in young female characters. As Susan Snyder remarks, Juliet's 'faked death' is a 'comic formula'. According to Snyder, 'Shakespeare's later uses' of this device 'are all in comedies'.[22] Martha Tuck Rozett specifies that 'Shakespeare used the device of the heroine's feigned or reported death in five of his comedies and romances' (*Much Ado About Nothing*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline*) and proceeds to discuss the effects of a heroine's mock death on a Shakespearean plot in a comic context:

> Each time, the play concludes with a reunion of the married or betrothed couple. In every case the heroine's feigned death is part of a sequence of events that tests her virtue and endurance. Even when much of the action occurs offstage, she generally emerges as a strong (or at least stronger) character who overcomes adversity and upholds the play's comic values – perseverance, loyalty, and the ability to forgive.[23]

In the comedies, it is not only (and, I would argue, not primarily) the mock-dead woman who is tested and transformed, but her (intended) spouse and family – or, in other words, the men who have wronged her. Claudio, Leontes, Posthumus and Cymbeline all repent and go through a transformation to become worthy while they think that Hero, Hermione and Imogen are dead; and they all unquestioningly forgive Hero, Hermione and Imogen when they are revealed to be alive. Even Leonato, who is aware all along that Hero's death is only a rumour, spread by himself, is persuaded by Friar Francis's mock-death plan not to disown her and once more becomes a loving father who no longer wishes his daughter dead, even before her innocence is proved: it is apparently the feigned grieving process, rather than the disproval of Hero's unchastity, that changes his

22 Susan Snyder, '*Romeo and Juliet*: Comedy into Tragedy', *Essays in Criticism: A Quarterly Journal of Literary Criticism*, 20:4 (1970), 391-402 (p. 399). This disregards at least one instance in a tragedy: Cleopatra's brief feigned death.

23 Martha Tuck Rozett, 'The Comic Structures of Tragic Endings: The Suicide Scenes in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 36:2 (1985), 152-64 (p. 154). There are also instances of mock death that affect another character than a heroine, for example Claudio's reported death in *Measure for Measure*.

mind. In the tragedy *Othello*, by contrast, Othello's discovery (whether she actually stirs or whether he mistakes Emilia's voice for hers) that Desdemona is 'not quite dead' – and consequently that during the moments after he has killed her 'for the first time' she was only mock-dead – results not in Othello's repentance but in his killing her again to make sure that she is dead and does not 'linger in [her] pain'.[24] In this tragic context, the man who believes himself to have been wronged by his wife does not take the opportunity of her (believed) resurrection to realise his mistake and forgive her. In comedy, the untimely death of a woman and the subsequent cancellation of that death form a Shakespearean trope that is connected to atonement and redemption in the same way that a daughter's forgiveness of her father is in both tragedy and comedy (as in *King Lear* and *The Winter's Tale*). Had *Romeo and Juliet* been a comedy, the Friar's mock-death plan would in all likelihood have been successful. The idea that the Capulets will forgive Juliet, both for marrying Romeo and for exposing them to unnecessary grief, is not in itself more absurd than the idea that Claudio will forgive Hero, both for her supposed infidelity (which Friar Francis cannot know they will be able to disprove) and for making him go through the process of mourning without cause. The tragic structure of *Romeo and Juliet* prevents death from being annulled and the mock death from having its full effect. Here, Juliet's real death rather than her mock death is needed for atonement.[25]

On a metafictional level, it can be argued that the Friar, who unlike the audience has not heard the prologue, believes he is situated in a comedy rather than a tragedy and therefore miscalculates the effect of a mock death. But within the world of the play, it is more difficult to account for his actions. Snyder argues that Friar Laurence is 'less ambitious and more desperate' than his equivalent plotters in other Shakespearean plays (for example Friar Francis in *Much Ado* and Paulina in *The Winter's Tale*) and therefore 'does not hope that Juliet's death will dissolve the families' hatreds but only that it will give Romeo a chance to come and carry her off'.[26]

24 William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. A. E. J. Honigmann (London: Bloomsbury, 2016 [1997]), V.2.85-87.

25 Tuck Rozett states that '[i]n nearly all of Shakespeare's comic renditions of the false death and resurrection motif, timing is an essential element. The comic characters suffer temporary setbacks and mishaps due to accidents of timing, but ultimately good fortune, assisted by the manipulative skills of the stage manager character, brings events to a satifying conclusion'; 154.

26 Snyder, '*Romeo and Juliet*: Comedy into Tragedy', 399.

At one point, Juliet herself speculates that there is a risk that the Friar has given her real poison to avoid the professional misconduct of helping her to commit bigamy:

> What if it be a poison which the Friar
> Subtly hath ministered to have me dead,
> Lest in this marriage he should be dishonoured,
> Because he married me before to Romeo? (IV.3.24-27)

She discards her fear, however, since Friar Laurence has so far 'still been proved a holy man' (29). The reason why the plan fails, however, is not that the poison does not work as the Friar says, but that Friar John, whom Friar Laurence trusted with the errand of delivering a letter explaining the plan to Romeo, was put in quarantine after going to look for a fellow Franciscan who was 'visiting the sick' and was therefore not allowed to go to Mantua.

As with those reviewers who comment on the unreliable 'postal service' between Verona and Mantua, Pontac's *Fatal Loins* sees Friar Laurence's relying on Friar John to get the message to Romeo as the weak link in the plan. In fact, Bennett comments that Uncle Matthew might have liked Pontac's version of the story better than Shakespeare's.[27] Pontac's Friar has enough forethought to distrust the 'postal service' and travels to Mantua to deliver the message in person:

> FRIAR I have a message for thee – which at first
> I thought to have entrusted to Friar John,
> But fearing he might meet with some mischance
> Improbable, I bring it to thee now.[28]

The Friar's plan still nearly fails, as both he and Romeo are in disguise (wearing a false beard and a toupee, respectively; but fortuitously he stops to ask Romeo for directions, and, after Romeo has marvelled for some time at the extent of coincidental similarity between himself and the gentleman the stranger is looking for, all is revealed. In this appropriation, then, the 'flaw' in the Friar's plan is corrected, and the rest of the play is a story of

27 Bennett, p. 10.

28 Perry Pontac, 'Fatal Loins: Romeo and Juliet Reconsidered', in *Codpieces* (London: Oberon Books, 2011), pp. 63-95 (scene 1, p. 69) [emphasis original]. Subsequent references will be to this edition and given parenthetically in the text.

what might have happened if the plan had been successful, including the possibility that a plan so well carried out makes more of an impression on Romeo than the Friar had bargained for.

In *Drop Dead, Juliet!* – a metatheatrical comedy in which Juliet refuses to go on stabbing herself night after night and tries to rewrite the story to include more girls, more love and less death – Juliet expresses her disapproval of the 'postal service' aspect of Shakespeare's plot: 'The messenger gets delayed my foot!' Friar Laurence agrees: 'That part is a little far-fetched. If I needed a man to go with me, why would I enter the plague-stricken house?' Shakespeare (a character in Williams' play) is convinced and agrees to change the story to the version that we know: 'Fine, fine, I'll give that bit to Friar John. He's the stupid one'.[29] Later on, the by then regendered Sister Laurence gives Juliet a bottle of real poison on the 'spur of the moment' because she 'thought it would be a fun plot twist'. Juliet, threatening Romeo with her dagger, forces Sister Laurence to marry them (which has not happened yet in this version). Romeo, who is still in love with Rosaline, drinks the poison and dies. Juliet's response is 'Well, that's two and forty hours to unpack the wedding gifts and set up housekeeping', but Sister Laurence reveals that her plan is never going to work and that Juliet would have died when she drank from the vial (28). After this, Shakespeare finally manages to persuade Juliet that his version was better, and she agrees to stab herself to bring about the tragic ending. Sister Laurence's plan is one of many things that go wrong, prompting the story towards its inevitable conclusion and away from the ending that Juliet works for. But the plan is also in an immediate sense what causes the deaths of Romeo and Juliet, since the poison is real.

In *Goodnight Desdemona*, the Friar's plan and the attempt to impart it to Romeo are interpreted more as damage control than as the root of the tragedy. And since Tybalt is prevented from killing Mercutio in this version, Juliet never has to turn to the Friar for a plan B. The possibility of romantic comedy that Constance perceives in *Romeo and Juliet* does have some connection to the Friar's plan in one of Shakespeare's possible sources, however: in Boiastuau's version, Julietta wants to disguise herself as a pageboy and go with Romeo to Mantua; but he does not like this scheme. When she asks the Friar to help her 'flee in disguise', he instead comes up

29 Allison Williams, *Drop Dead Juliet!* (Crystal Beach, ON: Theatrefolk, 2006), p. 6. Subsequent references will be to this edition and given parenthetically in the text.

with the mock-death plan.[30] If Julietta had gone with her initial plan rather than the Friar's, the story would indeed have turned into a Shakespearean-style comedy. In Boiastuau's version, then, it is unquestionably the Friar's plan that averts the comedy and turns it into a tragedy.

'Younger than she are happy mothers made': Children and Adults

The main part of Pontac's play takes place when Romeo and Juliet are in their thirties and have their own children. In MacDonald's play, Romeo and Juliet are clearly very young; but their parents do not feature in the story. Williams' play does not attach any significance to the age of the characters. Shakespeare's play, however, highlights the main characters' status as children to their parents and their vulnerability as children in a world where adults make the rules. According to Michael Bogdanov, *Romeo and Juliet* is a play about '[t]wo youngsters trying to make sense of a senseless world, a world in which they were ahead of their time'.[31] *Romeo and Juliet* is known primarily as a 'great romantic tragedy', but it is also a story of children who are victims of the older generation. Coppélia Kahn, for example, reads Romeo and Juliet as 'a pair of adolescents trying to grow up' and their parents' feud as 'an extreme and peculiar expression of patriarchal society, which Shakespeare shows to be tragically self-destructive' and 'which fosters the rash, choleric impulsiveness typical of youth by offering a permanent invitation to and outlet for violence'.[32] To some extent, it is also a story of two people who are victims of their conception of romantic love. However, Juliet kills herself not only because she cannot be with Romeo but to save herself from marriage to Paris, alternatively from her father's punishment. The implication that either of these would be a fate worse than death amounts to serious social critique, both in Shakespeare's time and now.

Even in the present age, it is not unusual for a forced marriage to be, like Juliet's intended marriage to Paris, arranged between the bride's father and the groom (or his father). According to Refuge, the UK's largest or-

30 Bullough, p. 272.

31 Michael Bogdanov, *Shakespeare the Director's Cut: Essays on the Tragedies, Comedies and Histories*, revised ed. (Edinburgh: Capercaillie Books, 2013 [2003]), p. 47.

32 Coppélia Kahn, 'Coming of Age in Verona', in *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz et al. (Urbana, Chicago & London: University of Illinois Press, 1980), pp. 171-93 (pp. 171, 172).

ganisation combatting domestic violence, the types of duress that are often used to coerce someone into a marriage to which they have not consented include 'psychological, sexual, financial or emotional pressure and physical violence'.[33] Capulet uses more than one of these when trying to persuade Juliet to go ahead with the wedding he has planned for her. He threatens to 'drag [her] on a hurdle' to church (III.5.155), never to speak to her again ('Hang thee, young baggage, disobedient wretch! / I tell thee what: get thee to church a' Thursday / Or never after look me in the face' [160-62]), to throw her out of his house ('Graze where you will, you shall not house with me' [189]), and, finally, to disown her, even if it kills her, if she does not marry Paris ('An you be mine, I'll give you to my friend; / An you be not, hang, beg, starve, die in the streets, / For, by my soul, I'll ne'er acknowledge thee, / Nor what is mine shall never do you good' [192-95]). He also expresses a wish that she had never been born: 'Wife, we scarce thought us blessed / That God had lent us but this only child, / But now I see this one is one too much, / And that we have a curse in having her' (164-67).[34] Though it is not explicitly called for in the text, apart from Capulet's saying that his 'fingers itch' (164), there is a strong norm in performance practice for Capulet to use physical violence in III.5, for example striking Juliet, throwing her onto the bed or dragging her by the hair. Juliet's mother, though she initially thinks that Capulet is too angry, ultimately takes his side against her daughter: 'Talk not to me, for I'll not speak a word, / Do as thou wilt, for I have done with thee' (203-04).

Juliet's young age means that this is a case not only of forced marriage, but of child marriage. The present-day definition of child marriage is a marriage where at least one spouse is under eighteen, something that still happens to 15 million girls every year worldwide.[35] To apply this definition to *Romeo and Juliet* would of course have been anachronistic. But at thirteen, as René Weis notes, Juliet can 'barely' be 'pubescent'.[36] It was indeed legal for girls in Elizabethan England to marry as young as twelve years old (with their parents'

33 Refuge <http://www.refuge.org.uk/get-help-now/forced-marriage> [accessed 1 November 2016].

34 Cf. *Much Ado About Nothing*, where Leonato says, 'Grieved I, I had but one? / Chid I for that at frugal Nature's frame?/ O, one too much by thee! Why had I one? / Why ever wast thou lovely in my eyes?' (IV.1.125-28); William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, ed. R. A. Foakes (London: Penguin, 2005 [1968]).

35 Girls not Brides <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/about-child-marriage> [accessed 1 November 2016].

36 René Weis, 'Introduction', in William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. René Weis (London: Methuen, 2012), pp. 1-116 (p. 2).

approval). This was, however, far from the norm: the average age for entering into matrimony was around twenty-five for both men and women.[37] In fact, the minimum age of twelve applied mainly to alliances between aristocratic families, and these marriages were usually not consummated until many years later. By contrast, as B. J and Mary Sokol point out, '[i]t is evident that Paris as well as Juliet's father and mother expect her to cohabit immediately following the arranged marriage, having no plans for the young couple to live apart for several years'.[38] It seems that it is common for girls to be married at twelve years of age, or even younger, in this fictional version of Verona, even though this was not the practice in Elizabethan England. Lady Capulet claims that she gave birth to Juliet at the age of thirteen (though Weis suggests that this might be intended as a joke, as it seems unlikely that she is now merely twenty-six years old[39]):

CAPULET'S WIFE Younger than you,
Here in Verona, ladies of esteem,
Are made already mothers. By my count,
I was your mother much upon these years
That you are now a maid. (I.3.70-74)

Paris shares Lady Capulet's opinion that thirteen is not exceptionally early to start a family, but Capulet initially wants to wait two more years before Juliet marries:

CAPULET […]
My child is yet a stranger in this world;
She has not seen the change of fourteen years.
Let two more summers wither in their pride
Ere we may think her ripe to be a bride.
PARIS Younger than she are happy mothers made.
CAPULET And too soon marred are those so early married.
(I.2.8-13)

Capulet is of course right that childbearing is a major health risk at the age of twelve or thirteen, both because such an early debut makes it likely that

37 B. J and Mary Sokol, *Shakespeare, Law, and Marriage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 140, 194.

38 Ibid., p. 39. We never in fact learn whether Paris is young. Capulet regards him as his 'friend', and his parents have apparently no say in the matter of his marriage. In performance, Paris is sometimes portrayed as significantly older than Juliet.

39 Weis, p. 153, n. 72.

there are many more confinements to come and because many girls of that age are still growing, which may lead to complications during childbirth, especially without the possibility of giving birth by caesarean section. Bogdanov senses something 'bitter' in Capulet's reply and speculates that 'maybe his marriage to a twelve-year-old hasn't worked out so well'.[40] Hence, it can be argued that the unease about Juliet's age that present-day spectators/readers may experience is not an anachronism but is implied in the text itself. Another strong indication that Juliet's extreme youth is significant is that Shakespeare has lowered it from his sources: Julietta is sixteen in Brooke's version and Giulietta is seventeen in Painter's.[41] From these combined circumstances, it can be inferred that Juliet's youth would have been seen as extreme by Elizabethan audiences.

However, there is also an aspect of Juliet's contemplated suicide that is not connected to her youth: Juliet considers killing herself not only to escape her father's punishment or being married too young to someone with whom she does not want to be married, but also to escape committing bigamy. The Nurse encourages her to marry Paris even though she is already married to Romeo:

JULIET O God! O Nurse, how shall this be prevented?
My husband is on earth, my faith in heaven.
How shall that faith return again to earth,
Unless that husband send it me from heaven
By leaving earth? Comfort me, counsel me.
[…]
What sayst thou? Hast thou not a word of joy?
Some comfort, Nurse.

NURSE [---]
Then, since the case so stands as now it doth,
I think it best you married with the County.
O, he's a lovely gentleman!
Romeo's a dishclout to him. (III.5.205-220)

40 Bogdanov, p. 41.

41 In Painter's version, Romeo and Giulietta are secretly married for several months. When, some time after Tybalt's death, her mother perceives that Giulietta is sad, she thinks it is because all her friends are married but her parents have not found her a husband yet. Her father says that he will be controlled in his choice by Giulietta's inclination rather than by trying to find a good match for her. But when he suggests Paris, Giulietta says that she will rather die than marry him. Her father gives a long speech in response, ending with the Lear-like words 'except the promise be kept which I have made to the Count Paris, I will make thee feel how great the just choler of an offended father is against a child unkind'; Painter, p. 77.

But, unconvinced by the argument that her husband is a 'dishclout', Juliet still believes bigamy to be wrong and makes it clear that she would rather die. In this impossible situation, all adults fail Juliet: her father tries to force her to marry Paris, her mother supports him, and even the Nurse (who has so far been her confidante and her accomplice in the clandestine marriage) thinks she should agree. As Bogdanov paraphrases the situation,

> Romeo is banished and [according to the Nurse] a husband who is not in the bed may as well be dead. [---] Juliet is abandoned. The Nurse, having wrung the last drop out of her love […], tosses Juliet aside like a rag doll. The Nurse has had her fun. Back to the reality of a proper marriage, there's a good girl. Sleep tight.[42]

Brenda Bruce, who played the Nurse in Ron Daniels' RSC production in 1980, gives her view on the situation:

> Anything is better than family rejection, starvation. There would be nothing for a girl, alone on the world – only begging in the streets. Parental control and approval and marriage were the only possibilities for a woman. Independence for the Juliets of that time was out of the question.[43]

In Bruce's reading, the Nurse sees Juliet as her own child and feels she has to give her the advice that is most likely to save her life, even if she knows it is morally reprehensible and illegal. Bruce goes though a number of other reactions that the Nurse could have given to Juliet's plea for advice and comfort, but remarks that *Romeo and Juliet* would not have been a tragedy had it included any such solution: 'Nurse could advise Juliet to run away with her to Friar Laurence, seek refuge in a nunnery, follow Romeo to Mantua, call her mother and father, confess to them, pray for their understanding and forgiveness, and with their help plead with the Prince to forgive Romeo'.[44] As for the Nurse's assurance that 'Romeo's a dishclout to [Paris]', Bruce wanted the audience's reaction to be shock rather than a laugh, and thinks that the key to making the audience 'feel

42 Bogdanov, p. 48. As Tuck Rozett observes, the Nurse's abandonment of Juliet is an addition to Shakespeare's sources: 'In the spirit of practical accommodation to the inevitable, the Nurse advises Juliet to marry the County. Her homely comparison of the two men […] is a daring use of comic language in a situation that is inherently tragic […]. Juliet's expectations of loyalty and support – and the audience's similar expectations – are cruelly overturned and Juliet is truly alone' (157).

43 Bruce, Brenda. 'Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*', in *Players of Shakespeare 1*, ed. Philip Brockbank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 91-101 (p. 100).

44 Ibid., p. 99.

let down by someone, whose motives they have trusted' is to make the Nurse sound as though she does not believe what she is saying herself.[45] When Juliet realises she cannot even trust the Nurse, she turns to the Friar, who represents her last chance. She decides to trust him even though she has her doubts, because she sees no other way; but his plan fails.

When Juliet is discovered 'dead', her nurse and parents (and Paris) each has a speech in which they lament Juliet's death. These speeches are felt by some to be exaggerated, or even too close for comfort to Pyramus's speeches as performed by Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.[46] The Nurse's speech, in particular, is ludicrously repetitive; but, on the other hand, so are most of her other speeches. All the mourning speeches are written in a comic way, but the content prevents them from being funny. Coleridge commented that '[a]s the *Audience* knows that Juliet is not dead, this Scene is perhaps, excusable […]. It is difficult to understand what *effect*, whether of pity or laughter, Shakespear [*sic*] meant to produce'.[47] Kiki Lindell points out that if the audience has at this point in the play 'relaxed, allowed [themselves] to laugh at the exaggerated expressions of grief, and snickered at the poor clueless father, who is so utterly ignorant of the plans of his wayward daughter and her clever lover', that is likely to make them experience the tragedy when the mock death turns into real death all the more acutely.[48] Charles B. Lower connects the comedy of the scene to a stage direction in Q1: '*All at once cry out and wring their hand*[*s*]', which results in a 'cacophony of four characters wailing simultaneously'.[49] According to Lower, Shakespeare invites laughter in this scene to let the audience know that Juliet is not actually dead, which would not have been obvious to an audience who was not already familiar with the play: '[b]elieving Juliet dead and laughing', Lower argues, 'are mutually exclusive'. The encouragement to laugh is, according to Lower, amplified by the mock-death scene's position between two other comic scenes: the wedding-preparations scene and the scene with Peter and the musicians.[50] The fact that these two scenes are often cut in modern productions may contribute to present-day actors'

45 Ibid., p. 100.

46 See Weis, p. 306, n. 49; Lindell, 168-69.

47 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Works*, vol. IV: Marginalia, ed. H. J. Jackson and George Whalley (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 742.

48 Lindell, 170.

49 Charles B. Lower, 'Romeo and Juliet, IV.v: A Stage and Directional Comedy', *Shakespeare Studies* 8 (1975), 177-94 (p. 178).

50 Ibid., 184-85.

and audiences' tendency not to read the mourning of the mock death as comic.

In Bogdanov's production, the parents seemed even more melodramatic than the Nurse, and the Friar's speech on the absurdity of mourning for their child's soul being in heaven was chiding rather than comforting. The choice of playing the Capulets' grief as comically exaggerated underlines the parents' hypocrisy and how much the older generation fails Juliet. Bogdanov compares it to Romeo's genuine mourning: 'Contrast the crocodile tears of melodramatic falsehood from the family, on the fake death of Juliet, with the real emotion of both Romeo and Juliet at their respective deaths'.[51] However, modern acting techniques (and perhaps modern conventions – can the loss of a child ever be funny? Even when the death is only pretended?) mean that the Capulets' grief is often acted as genuine. And when this is the case, it can be a very moving scene.[52]

The playing of genuine grief shows just how cruel a trick Juliet and the Friar are playing on her parents. What makes it particularly ruthless is that this is not, as has been demonstrated, Juliet's only way out. It must be presumed that most people would be genuinely affected by the death of their child, even if they lack a close bond with their children and leave the real parenting to servants, or even if they believe it is for the best to marry their daughters off to family friends at the age of fourteen. Spectators/readers may feel sympathy even for Paris's disappointment ('Have I thought long to see this morning's face, / And doth it give me such a sight as this?' [IV.5.41-42]). It is, of course, ironic that Juliet's parents have so recently wished the life out of her and now display such grief at the wished-for event. It does reveal that they are hypocrites, and their treatment of Juliet in the previous scene shows them to be unlikeable characters in dramatic terms, especially her father, as well as lacking in parenting skills – at least seen from a present-day perspective; but there is nothing to suggest that early modern audiences would not see it in the same way. The point is, however, that the pain inflicted on them is unnecessary: it is not needed for Juliet's escape to Mantua, and it is difficult

51 Bogdanov, p. 50.

52 As Lindell puts it, 'Juliet's first "death," false though it is, *is* still mourned by those that love her (the Capulets, the Nurse, and Paris) – and despite the fact that we know her to be alive, modern audiences, conditioned not to laugh at, but rather sympathize with, grief, have at least partly lost (together with the taste for bearbaitings and public executions, perhaps) the ability to see the humor in such a situation', 167-68.

to see how it is relevant for the Friar's plan to make peace between the Capulets and the Montagues, especially as it would presumably not affect the Montagues in the slightest.

But adults start failing Romeo and Juliet long before matters come to this point of no return. If tragedy were to be avoided, these two adolescents should not have been allowed to marry on an impulse after one evening's acquaintance in the first place. The Nurse goes behind her employer's back and helps them to get married without a plan for how to live afterwards. According to Bogdanov, 'the desire to extract vicarious pleasure from the thought (and act) of Juliet losing her virginity, leads [the Nurse] to abandon all sense of her position and her responsibility'.[53] The Friar agrees to marry them without their parents' permission, even though he has just blamed Romeo for changing his love interest so suddenly. There is no evidence that he has their personal best interests in mind; but it seems that this decision, too, is part of the hope which the Friar entertains of making peace between the two families. Hence, both the Nurse and the Friar are guilty of serious professional misconduct.

However, an aspect of the older generation's ill-treatment of the lovers that is more frequently commented upon than the Friar's and the Nurse's allowing them to get married, namely the feud that makes it impossible for them to marry openly, is in fact less evident in the text. When Romeo turns up at the party uninvited and Tybalt thinks he should be thrown out or worse, Capulet is surprisingly easy-going about the gate-crashing. The reason he states is that his impression of Romeo is a favourable one:

> Content thee, gentle coz, let him alone.
> 'A bears him like a portly[54] gentleman
> And, to say truth, Verona brags of him
> To be a virtuous and well-governed youth.
> I would not for the wealth of all this town
> Here in my house do him disparagement. (I.5. 64-69)

This hardly indicates that Capulet sees the whole Montague clan as his mortal enemies. The only ones to take the feud really seriously seem to be Tybalt and the servants (Samson and Gregory, from the house of Capulet, and Abraham, for the house of Montague). Is it possible that the younger

53 Bogdanov, pp. 47-48.
54 Weis glosses 'portly' in this context as 'proper/handsome'; p. 171, n. 65.

generation exaggerate the conflict? When Juliet asserts that 'If [her kinsmen] do see thee, they will murder thee', could it be that she is simply imagining the worst? Or could it be that the motive behind such a murder would be that Romeo is trespassing, rather than the bare fact of his speaking to the daughter of the house? Most critics seem to take the legitimacy of the feud at face value. But the adults in the play are apparently indifferent to their own grudge prior to Tybalt's death (which understandably causes the Capulets to resent Romeo). This suggests that the monumentality of the feud and the utter impossibility of a 'mixed' marriage are, at least to begin with, to some extent a case of the self-dramatising of teenagers. Even though the 'ancient grudge' between the Capulets and the Montagues is real, there is no way of knowing that the deaths of Juliet and Romeo constitute the only thing that could have made the parents get over the grudge. The prologue's insistence that 'naught could remove' the 'parents' rage' 'but their children's end' (10-11), like any of Shakespeare's choric passages, should not be taken at face value.[55] In *Goodnight Desdemona*, the disclosure of the marriage is enough to make the two families see sense. In *Fatal Loins*, Romeo and Juliet flee and it is not clear whether their parents ever find out about their marriage, or about Juliet's survival. *Drop Dead, Juliet!* moves at breakneck speed and does not wait to find out how the parents are affected, but it must be inferred that the conclusion has the same effect as Shakespeare's. None of the appropriations focuses on the grudge, and none of them focuses on the aspects of the plot that depend on Romeo and Juliet's status as children. This shift of focus forms part of the move from tragedy to comedy.

'For never was a story of more woe': Romantic Love

If audiences come to watch *Romeo and Juliet* with one expectation, it is that it will be a tragic love story. The fact that this play has become emblematic of romantic love in an era with very different ideas about love and marriage to those of the period in which it was written leads to routinely anachronistic readings. According to Lawrence Stone, a number of 'mod-

55 On the use of choruses in early modern drama to express stance in complex and ambiguous ways, see Eric Pudney, 'Chorus and Stance in Early Modern English Drama', in *Subjectivity and Epistemicity: Corpus, Discourse and Literary Approaches to Stance*, ed. Dylan Glynn and Mette Sjölin (Lund Studies in English, 2014), pp. 41-61.

ern, Western, culture-bound preconceptions' stand in the way of understanding the Medieval and Renaissance attitude to marriage:

> The first is that there is a clear dichotomy between marriage for interest, meaning money, status or power, and marriage for affect, meaning love, friendship or sexual attraction; and that the first is morally reprehensible. In practice in the sixteenth century, no such distinction existed; and if it did, affect was of secondary importance to interest, while romantic love and lust were strongly condemned as ephemeral and irrational grounds for marriage. The second modern preconception is that sexual intercourse unaccompanied by an emotional relationship is immoral, and that marriage for interest is therefore a form of prostitution. The third is that personal autonomy, the pursuit by the individual of his or her own happiness, is paramount, a claim justified by the theory that it in fact contributes to the well-being of the group. To an Elizabethan audience the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet, like that of Othello, lay not so much in their ill-starred romance as in the way they brought destruction upon themselves by violating the norms of the society in which they lived'.[56]

Even today, the deaths of two teenagers must surely be regarded as a greater tragedy than the circumstance that two teenagers are not allowed to live together. Whether Romeo and Juliet themselves are blamed (if not exactly for being disobedient and breaking norms, then at least for meddling with things beyond their level of maturity – and, in Romeo's case, for killing his wife's cousin), or their parents and respective confidants are blamed for pushing them into life choices with which they are uncomfortable and for not giving them sufficient support, the marriage between Romeo and Juliet is ultimately responsible for their deaths. Hence, the impossibility of the romance is not the tragedy itself, but the source of the tragedy of the death of two young people.

Even so, Shakespeare's attitude to romantic love is more similar to prevalent ideas in the contemporary world than the attitudes expressed in his sources. Da Porto says that he shows 'what great risks and what rash deeds lovers will commit in the name of love and in some cases their follies lead them even to death itself'.[57] Bullough states that whereas Bandello's story of Romeo and Julietta is 'intended "to warn young people that they should govern their desires and not run into furious passion"', Boiastuau's version 'condone[s] Friar Laurence's conduct because he loved the young couple

56 Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), pp. 86-87.

57 Quoted in Bullough, vol. I, p. 276.

and hoped to make peace between their families'.[58] Bullough further asserts that although the *Address to the Reader* which precedes Brooke's version accuses Romeus and Juliet of '"[abusyng] the [honorable] name of lawfull [mariage] to cloke the shame of stolne contractes" and even "by all meanes of [unhonest] [lyfe], hasting to most [unhappye] deathe"', Brooke is less judgmental in the poem proper, where his 'sympathy is with the lovers'.[59] According to Bullough, Shakespeare is also sympathetic towards Romeo and Juliet in his version, and it would be a mistake to read Friar Laurence's line 'These violent delights have violent ends' as the moral of the play.[60]

One aspect of the literary convention of romantic love is 'love at first sight'. The first meeting between Romeo and Juliet, with their famous shared sonnet, is usually staged in a way that suggests instant mutual attraction. But it is actually not clear from the text that Juliet is interested in Romeo until she asks the Nurse who he is. Put in very simple terms, what happens during the sonnet is that Romeo asks Juliet if he can kiss her; she says no; he kisses her anyway. She does keep the conversation going, which indicates engagement with her interlocutor, her sentences fitting perfectly into the metre of the sonnet – though, perhaps significantly, she never completes a rhyme initiated by Romeo. In Bogdanov's production, Sean Bean's Romeo clearly made the first move. He first saw Niamh Cusack's Juliet dancing with someone else; when he saw her sitting by herself on the stairs, he went to stand behind her; when she left, he followed her. She did not appear to have noticed him until he started to speak. Though Cusack describes Juliet in her first dialogue with Romeo as 'obviously feeling enormous passion' and 'almost overwhelmed by the feeling',[61] the staging of the scene as Romeo pursuing Juliet rather than the two of them locking eyes across the room opens up for the realisation that there is no explicit consent on her part in the text. Cusack goes on to say that '[n]ever before has [Juliet] met anyone so in tune with her as to be able to exchange lines with her in a sonnet, who so exactly complements her, anyone with whom she doesn't have to compromise'.[62]

58 Ibid., pp. 271, 276.

59 Ibid., pp. 276-77. (When quoting the passage in his introduction, Bullough amends some but not all of the archaic spelling. I reproduce the spelling as rendered on p. 285.)

60 Ibid., p. 277.

61 Niamh Cusack, 'Juliet', in *Players of Shakespeare 2*, ed. Russell Jackson and Robert Smallwood (Cambridge, New York & Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 121-35 (p. 126).

62 Ibid.

David Tennant, who played Romeo in Michael Boyd's 2000 production, proposes a somewhat less conventional understanding of the function of the sonnet: he believes it is not the first time Romeo has used that first quatrain as a 'chat-up line'. But, for the first time, the reply is a second quatrain, which shows Romeo that 'he has met his match intellectually'.[63] This interpretation came out of the realisation that though 'these two people may be the most famous couple in the English-speaking world', 'at this point *they have never met before*'. This may be obvious; but as Tennant points out, 'simply to play the text' is difficult when 'the familiarity of the text […] transcends its meaning'. After Tennant and Alexandra Gilbreath had initially 'tried to imbue the scene with every delicate romantic thought we could muster until every word dripped with unspoken meaning', they attempted to strip off all the 'baggage' the scene comes with and ended up playing it 'as a battle of wits'.[64] The chat-up-line interpretation of such an iconic moment in such an iconic play may seem like a form of sacrilege. Seen pragmatically, however, it defers the actual falling in love until the characters have at least spoken to each other and makes them seem more like real people than an iconic romantic couple.

An additional aspect of this 'love at first sight' is that Romeo falls in love with Juliet even though he is up until that moment in love with Rosaline. The Friar berates him for this changeability:

> Holy Saint Francis, what a change is here!
> Is Rosaline, that thou didst love so dear,
> So soon forsaken? Young men's love then lies
> Not truly in their hearts but in their eyes. (II.3.61-64)

In *Drop Dead, Juliet!*, by contrast, Romeo never falls out of love with Rosaline, despite Juliet's best efforts, and the lovers' first meeting plays out very differently from Shakespeare's version:

63 David Tennant, 'Romeo', in *Players of Shakespeare 5*, ed. Robert Smallwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 113-30 (pp. 122-23).

64 Ibid., pp. 122-24.

ROMEO	Excuse me, miss, have you seen Rosaline?
	Oh, she doth teach the torches to burn bright.
JULIET	What?! (*ROMEO turns away. JULIET grabs SHAKESPEARE.*) He's supposed to fall in love with me!
SHAKESPEARE	Don't you think love at first sight is a little contrived? *JULIET strides over to ROMEO.*
ROMEO	Did you find Rosaline?
JULIET	She couldn't come. She's entering a convent tonight. In Sicily.
ROMEO	Ay, me!
[---]	
JULIET	Isn't there something you want to say to me here?
ROMEO	So, uh, how long has Rosaline been your cousin?
JULIET	Some sort of sonnet? (17-18) [emphasis original]

In the balcony scene, Romeo is still harping on Rosaline, but Juliet is having none of it:

ROMEO	Do you need me for this or can I just go find –
JULIET	What is your thing with Rosaline!?!
ROMEO	She's a lot easier to get along with! And I thought, as long as we're changing the story anyway, maybe I can just end up with –
JULIET	It's called Romeo and Juliet, not Romeo and Rosaline!
ROMEO	What's in a name? (20)

Once Juliet has started to interfere with the plot, things change that are beyond her control: without the literary convention of dying for love, there can be no love at first sight. In *Goodnight Desdemona*, the convention of love at first sight is used to comic effect when Romeo falls in love with Constance as soon as he meets her and when Constance relates her first encounter with Professor Claude Night: 'I loved him from the moment I first saw him / across the crowded cafeteria. / He looked so dignified, and irritated. / I stood second in the line for lunch. / […] / "He has important things to do," I thought, / and so I offered up my place to him' (III.5, p. 70).

Another literary convention connected to romantic love is that it continues 'happily ever after', and an implied assumption of many present-day readings of *Romeo and Juliet* seems to be that the couple would have gone on to live a long and happy life together if circumstances had not got in

the way. The main question which the appropriations ask of Shakespeare's play is 'For how long would Romeo and Juliet have lived happily had they not died?'. *Fatal Loins* explicitly states this question as its *raison d'être* in its prologue:

CHORUS Two households both alike in dignity,
A boy and girl by Fortune cursed and blessed,
A look, a dance, a kiss, a balcony,
A wedding, several killings, and the rest;
A tale of fatal loins and famous lines,
Of star-crossed lovers and inept divines.

But O! if stars like theirs could be *un*crossed,
If grief converts to joy and gore to glory,
A message is delivered that was lost
Which alters the direction of our story…
If Juliet and Romeo survive,
Will their eternal passion stay alive? (Prologue, p. 67)

MacDonald's answer to the question is 'Not beyond the wedding night' – if that long. As early as the morning after the wedding, the following dialogue takes place, comically reminiscent of the equivalent scene in *Romeo and Juliet*:

JULIET Ay me. (*Yawn*)
ROMEO (*Half-asleep*) Was that the lark?
JULIET It was the luncheon bell.
ROMEO Oh no! (*Leaps out of bed*)
Julie-e-et, where be my blue doublet?!
JULIET Under the bed, where thou didst leave it, dear.
(*ROMEO retrieves his doublet*)
JULIET & ROMEO (*Both aside*) Th'affections of our love's
first-sighted blood,
have in the cauldron of one hot swift night,
all cooled to creeping jelly in the pot. (III.2, p. 54)

Since Constance has disclosed their secret marriage and since Romeo has not killed Tybalt, there is no reason for Romeo to rise early to go to Mantua and no need for the couple to keep their relationship a secret, and as soon as everyday life asserts itself the two teenagers tire of each other. Here, Juliet is presented as a thrill-seeker, obsessed with romance and suicide

pacts, but not too interested in domestic bliss. She even asks Hymen to '[m]ake [her] a maid again' so that she can 'plunge once more in love's first firey [*sic*] pit, / to hover there 'twixt longing and content' (III.2, p. 57). In addition to this, Romeo has already fallen in love with 'Constantine', whom he met on his wedding day, and he has fallen out of love with Juliet as quickly as he did with Rosaline.

In *Drop Dead, Juliet!*, Juliet believes that all will be well if only she and Romeo can avoid killing themselves. According to her, 'Love stories don't end with funerals, they end with weddings! And with people living happily ever after!' (6). But when she finds out that Romeo is in love with someone else when they meet, Juliet starts to question the validity of love at first sight:

JULIET	What a weenie! So how do I know he's really in love with me? What if it's just another passing fancy?
SHAKESPEARE	It probably is.
JULIET	What?!?
SHAKESPEARE	Come on, you're thirteen, he's sixteen, you'll get over it.
JULIET	No I won't!
SHAKESPEARE	That's what they all think. (12-13)

As it turns out, Romeo and Juliet never even begin to live happily in this version.

In Pontac's play, the couple's happiness lasts a little longer. When Romeo and Juliet have been safely reunited in the vault, the story skips ahead twenty years into their marriage. They now have 'numberless children':

FRIAR	So many little ones of every age – Alfredo, Giovanni and Bianca…
JULIET	(*Taking up the list.*) …Musetta, Guido, Bescalo and Tremi, Sylvestra, Octorino and Renata, Claudio, Ferabosco and the triplets.
FRIAR	Most blest art [*sic*] thou and Romeo.
JULIET	(*Continuing.*) …Sophia, Falopia, Angelica, Rigatoni, Nardinia, Marcellina and Modesta, Marco, Picca, Servio and the babies. (Scene 3, pp. 80-81)

After countless pregnancies, Juliet has grown 'spherical and orbed', as she herself says:

JULIET [---] Great am I:
No stool, no chair, no sofa can suffice
To bear my mighty bulkage. As a girl
I was as gossamer, hither and thither blown
By light contending winds. Now 'tis not so,
And Romeo – he hath noticed it I know. (Scene 3, p. 81)

Juliet confides to the Friar her suspicion that Romeo '[f]inds solace with… another' (scene 3, p. 81), and the Friar promises to look into the matter, only to find that he himself is the object of Romeo's secret passion:

ROMEO […]
'Tis thou, dear Friar, 'twas ever ever thou!
Thy noble qualities have long seduced
My heart and senses to a love of thee.
Such purity of purpose, courage, zeal,
Sweet service – marrying Juliet to me,
Finding me in fragrant Mantua,
Thy message given, the fondness it expressed,
Thy constant aid and counsel e'er bestowed,
Thy many lofty virtues all bespeak
A man of spotless saintliness sublime.
[…]
But, Friar Laurence, 'tis thy person too:
Thy rugged visage, wise and strangely plain,
Thy piercing eyes, complexion without stain.
Thy tonsure – that sweet circle past compare,
Like a pink lotus in a sea of hair.
Thy noble ankles and the very toes
That peep out of thy sandals in neat rows.
[…] (Scene 4, pp. 85-86) [emphasis original]

Juliet's fear that Romeo's waning interest in her is caused by the stout frame with which her many confinements have left her also proves to be justified. When Friar Laurence admonishes Romeo by reminding him that it is 'bearing [his] prodigious progeny […] [t]hat hath enlarged her to her present bounds', Romeo's answer is 'The more she doth produce, the more she is, / For both are infinite' (scene 4, p. 84).

While MacDonald's play shares this kind of revelling in wordplay and Shakespearean references used to comic effect, it has a message in a way that Pontac's play does not pretend to have. Primarily a comedy about

Shakespeare and Academia, *Goodnight Desdemona* may not be as strongly feminist as some of MacDonald's other writing. Still, it questions the literary convention of romantic love (everlasting and at first sight) in a more serious way than *Fatal Loins* does, even if it does so by using comedy. The concept is also challenged in a more explicit way than in Pontac's play, for example in the following extract, where Juliet's romanticised view of love is compared to Constance's rather more mundane experience:

CONSTANCE I don't believe in love-at-first-sight.
JULIET Say then that thou dost not believe in air!
Or in the solid ground on which we tread!
Nay, love's a force of nature, can't be stopped;
the lightning waiteth not upon my thought
to thus endow it bright; it doth but light!
CONSTANCE Nay, love's a bond of servitude;
a trap that sly deceptors lay for fools –
fools they use then throw away,
or trade in like a lib'ry book
they've read, then lost, then found beneath the bed
all coffee-stained and dust-bunnied,
all dog-eared, thumbed and overdue.
JULIET Thou art one that loved and lost.
CONSTANCE Well. I will admit I had a crush –
delayed post-adolescent fantasy.
JULIET Seek not to excuse thy one true love.
CONSTANCE No. I refuse to say that I felt love
for someone who did grind my mind to pulp,
and lined a gilded bird-cage with the dust.
He played the parrot: I fed him great lines,
and he pooped on my head.
JULIET Unrequited love.

(III.5, pp. 69-70)

At the beginning of the play, Professor Night accuses Constance of being 'an incurable romantic' (I.1, p. 16); and when she has found out that he will marry someone else and take the lecturing post for which she had hoped he would recommend her, she shows that she does indeed have a kind of romantic imagination, but one that takes humorously bathetic turns:

> I can't feel anything. I'm perfectly fine. I'll call the Dean and resign. I'll go back to my apartment and watch the plants die and let the cats copulate freely. I'll order

> in groceries. Eventually I'll be evicted. I'll smell really bad and swear at people on the subway. Five years later I run into Professor Night and Ramona: they don't recognize me. I'm selling pencils. They buy one. Suddenly, I drop dead. They discover my true identity. I'm awarded my doctorate posthumously. Professor Night dedicates his complete works to me and lays roses on my grave every day. My stone bears a simple epithet: 'Oh what a noble mind is here o'erthrown.' … There's no time to lose! I have to start right now if I'm going to sink that low in five years. (I.1, pp. 21-22)

Though the presentation of the dramatic end that Constance imagines for herself is amusing, it is also clear that Professor Night has taken advantage of her, and the spectator/reader is invited to connect this kind of everyday oppression of women in the workplace and in romantic relationships to the more extreme forms of oppression depicted in Shakespeare's tragedies.

Fatal Loins does not contain any such comparisons to modern life or to any 'real' world outside Shakespeare's play. It is written as a loving parody of Shakespeare with the primary aim to make the audience laugh. It does not shy away from reiterating common stereotypes, including ones that may be described as misogynist, for example by making fun of overweight women. Still, the play ridicules men to an even greater extent, and misogyny is both exploited and exposed. For example, Pontac refers to 'Romeo's unnecessary rudeness to the poor old Nurse' as an instance of 'very bad behaviour towards women by men'. But while Pontac in hindsight can see that *Codpieces* contains a number of gender-related issues and can to some extent be read as criticising misogyny he did not, he says, have a deliberately feminist agenda when writing the parodies, though he suspects that his personal feminist opinions may shine through. His idea of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is not at all that their relationship would have been doomed to fail if they had lived; according to him, he invented this plotline solely for comic purposes.[65]

Like *Fatal Loins*, *Drop Dead, Juliet!* is a comedy without any pretence to a political agenda. It does, however, question the literary convention of romantic love in a very literal way: Juliet feels that a love story should contain more romance and less death and threatens to sabotage Shakespeare's other plays unless he lets her finish this one in some other way than by killing herself. Throughout the play, Juliet and Shakespeare negotiate the proportions of love and death and the play's proximity to the original

65 Perry Pontac, personal correspondance, 17 March 2014.

plot. At the end, Juliet is persuaded that dying is the most poetic way of ending the play; and though she has discovered that Romeo is 'a pathetic weenie', she is prepared to put up with falling in love with him and marrying him every night since they 'only have four scenes together'. Shakespeare, however, has likewise been persuaded that Juliet is 'a strong character' and claims to have got some ideas for future revisions from her (29). All three appropriations may well encourage an audience to think further about romantic love as a concept, as well as about what constitutes a tragic or happy ending in literature.

'Henceforth I never will be Romeo': Transforming Gender and Genre

Unlike *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet* includes the name of the female as well as that of the male main character in its title, and the play focuses at least as much on Juliet as on Romeo. Weis goes as far as saying that 'the play's double title notwithstanding, its focus rests squarely on Juliet', and that its final words 'Juliet and her Romeo' is 'a hierarchy more truly reflective of the essence of the drama' than the title 'Romeo and Juliet'.[66] Although Romeo is a slightly larger part than Juliet counted as a percentage of lines, the difference is very small: Romeo speaks 20% of the text and Juliet 18%, which makes her the second largest part in the play. Counted with reference to the absolute number of speeches, Juliet, with 118 speeches amounting to 571 lines altogether (although Romeo has 163 speeches), is the third most talkative character among all of Shakespeare's women, beaten only by Cleopatra (204 speeches; 693 lines) and Rosalind (201 speeches; 686 lines). Portia, even though she is the character in *The Merchant of Venice* with the greatest proportion of text, speaks less

66 Weis, p. 7. It should be noted, however, that the syntax of the play's final sentence is not an invention by Shakespeare, as Brooke's poem ends with the words 'There is no monument more worthy of the sight, / Then [*sic*] is the tombe of Juliet, and Romeus her knight' (lines 3019-20, p. 363 in Bullough, vol. I). In the 2013-14 situational-comedy series *Big School*, written by David Walliams and The Dawson Brothers and directed by Tony Dow, the drama teacher announces that the school play will be 'Juliet and Romeo', a 'gender-reimagining of Shakespeare's text', with the justification that 'Juliet has taken second billing for four hundred years'. This is a send-up of exactly the kind of re-visioning that this thesis deals with. But a comparison with other Shakespeare plays, and other kinds of gender imbalances in them, might have suggested to the teacher that *Romeo and Juliet* is not the play in most need of gender-reimagining, especially since, as Weis states, the focus on Romeo indicated by the order of the names in the title is not carried out in the text proper.

than Juliet (117 speeches; 557 lines).[67] *Romeo and Juliet* evinces an additional dissimilarity to the major tragedies in that Juliet dies after Romeo. This means that the audience gets to see the heroine's gaze on the hero's dead body rather than the other way around, which subverts the gender stereotype of plays like *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Hamlet*, as well as sparing the actress the customary manhandling.[68]

One reason for these differences between *Romeo and Juliet* and some of Shakespeare's other tragedies may be its affinity to comedy. Constance Ledbelly in *Goodnight Desdemona* is certainly more justified in finding seeds of comedy in this play than in *Othello* – especially in the early parts of the play, but potentially all the way up to the moment where Romeo kills himself.[69] As with many of Shakespeare's plays, where tragedy and comedy are always mixed to a greater or lesser extent, the only circumstance that makes it possible to determine the predominant genre of the play with any certainty is whether the main characters die or survive. The possibility of reading *Romeo and Juliet* as a comedy *manqué* has received a great deal of critical attention. Tuck Rozett, for example, points out that the play bears a strong resemblance to Shakespeare's romantic comedies: like many comic heroes and heroines, Romeo and Juliet 'must overcome social and political obstacles to be united', they 'entangle themselves' in 'misunderstanding and confusion', and they are 'surrounded by variations on comic character types who contribute to the complications in the love plot'.[70] The Nurse and Friar Laurence in particular seem to be comic characters.[71] Apart from the prologue, the play begins in such a way as to lead the audience to expect a comedy, where, in Snyder's words, '[w]ith the usual intrigues and go-betweens, the lovers overcome

67 Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (eds), *The RSC Shakespeare Complete Works* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2007), pp. 416, 475, 1678, 2161; Weis, p. 2, n. 2.

68 In *Drop Dead, Juliet!,* Juliet takes exception to Shakespeare's treatment of women in his plays: 'Suicide, wife-beating, horrible relationships – what have you got against women, anyway? How come there's not more of us here?' Shakespeare tries to explain that the scarcity of women in his plot has to do with the 'Elizabethan acting company', but he is interrupted by Lady Montague: 'You can't tell me some pre-pubescent boy knows more about being a woman than I do' (8).

69 As Tuck Rozett points out, 'Shakespeare continues to use comic strategies in *Romeo and Juliet* until the very end of the play, even though, according to the laws of tragedy, a comic resolution becomes impossible once Tybalt and Mercutio are dead' (156).

70 Ibid., 153. Tuck Rozett also observes that the love tragedy, unlike for example the revenge tragedy and the romantic comedy, was a new genre without established conventions at the time when Shakespeare wrote *Romeo and Juliet*; 152.

71 See Snyder, '*Romeo and Juliet*: Comedy into Tragedy', 397; Tuck Rozett, 156.

obstacles in a move toward marriage'.[72] According to Snyder, *Romeo and Juliet* 'becomes, rather than is, tragic': 'the action and the characters begin in familiar comic patterns, and are then transformed – or discarded – to compose the pattern of tragedy'.[73] The point in the story where the play crosses from comedy to tragedy is often said to be Mercutio's death.[74] Snyder argues that 'the final definition of the tragic world of the play' is '[t]he Friar's failure to bring off [the comic] solution' and that 'the villain' in the story is '[t]ime': 'Time in comedy generally works for regeneration and reconciliation, but in tragedy it propels the protagonists to destruction'.[75] The 'annoying' ending and plot 'flaws', such as the Friar's plan, are also attributes more typically associated with Shakespeare's comedies. These are also the aspects of the drama that are most likely to make audiences think about, question and engage with the play, forming a possible starting point for appropriating it.

Both *Goodnight Desdemona* and *Fatal Loins* focus on gender and sexuality, both draw on *Romeo and Juliet*'s inherently comic traits, and both explore what might have happened if Romeo and Juliet had survived their honeymoon. These appropriations are comedies in both the classical and the modern sense of the word: they have happy endings, and they are funny. They transform *Romeo and Juliet* into a comedy in a number of different ways: they avert the tragic ending, they ridicule the idea of great love, and they use jokes, a lighter tone and affinities with Shakespeare's comedies. *Goodnight Desdemona* uses an additional comic device in its insertion of Constance as the fool of the play. The greatest comedic resource of both appropriations, however, is the contrast between the Shakespearean language and the modern and/or bathetic content.

72 Snyder, '*Romeo and Juliet*: Comedy into Tragedy', 393. One difference between *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* is that the latter begins in such a way that it could end with a wedding, and seems for a time to be moving towards that obligatory comedic ending. *Othello* begins with a wedding and therefore has no natural comedic continuation.

73 Ibid., 391.

74 Snyder argues that '[i]f we divide the play at Mercutio's death, the death that generates all those that follow, it becomes apparent that the play's movement up to this point is essentially comic' and that '[i]n Mercutio's sudden, violent end, Shakespeare makes the birth of a tragedy coincide exactly with the symbolic death of comedy. The element of freedom dies with him, and where many courses were open before, now there seems only one'; '*Romeo and Juliet*: Comedy into Tragedy', 392-93, 395. According to Lindell, '[m]ost people – be they scholars, spectators, or those involved in performance – would probably agree that the transition from comedy to tragedy happens in 3.1: the bewildering reversal comes with the almost accidental, almost incidental, stabbing of Mercutio' (166).

75 Snyder, '*Romeo and Juliet*: Comedy into Tragedy', 399.

Like *Goodnight Desdemona*, *Fatal Loins* is a parodic comedy written mostly in iambic pentameter. The comedy of *Fatal Loins* lies mainly in the Shakespearean references, where, in Pontac's words, '[t]he elegance of the verse is at odds with the silliness of its content'.[76] These references work on two different levels: Pontac uses both direct quotations and tropes or concepts from Shakespeare, thus appealing both to spectators/readers who are very familiar with Shakespeare's text and to those with only a cursory acquaintance with it. One example of a piece of text taken directly from Shakespeare and put in a different, 'silly' context is the following extract, where the Nurse talks about combing children's hair:

> I needs must groom their thickly knotted hair;
> They scream at first, then smile to look so fair.
> For combing is a kind of pleasant woe,
> And parting such sweet sorrow. I must go. (Scene 3, p. 80)

While this passage is likely to amuse the slightly more Shakespeare-versed spectator/reader, I have on three separate occasions read this play out loud with a group of students, and all three groups laughed much more at Juliet's line 'I barely fit within my balcony' (scene 3, p. 81). They may not have known the original context and full meaning of the phrase 'parting is such sweet sorrow', but they knew that Juliet is generally to be found on a balcony.

MacDonald's and Pontac's re-imaginings of *Romeo and Juliet* both hinge on the mistakes and misunderstandings leading to the lovers' untimely deaths. MacDonald reads Romeo's killing of Tybalt as the pivotal event which seals the young couple's fate. When Constance arrives in Verona – wearing only her long-johns, as her skirt was left behind in Cyprus – she is taken for a man and, adopting the name of Constantine, proceeds from saving Desdemona to saving Juliet. The fatal outcome of the swordfight between Tybalt and Mercutio is averted when Constance enters and, disclosing that Romeo and Juliet are married, suggests that it would be inappropriate for family members and their friends to fight one another. This version, of course, simplifies the problem, since the Montagues and Capulets could hardly be expected to forget about their ancient feud and accept their children's union, even on being presented with the fait accompli. But the solu-

76 Perry Pontac, personal correspondance, 17 March 2014.

tion serves its purpose in MacDonald's play, which is not concerned with the conflict aspect of Shakespeare's tragedy but with the generalised literary convention of romantic love, of which *Romeo and Juliet* is emblematic.

Pontac's *Fatal Loins* employs a different means of averting the tragedy. Here, Friar Laurence is providentially struck by the suspicion that Romeo might not receive the message sent to him in Mantua and decides to deliver it himself. Since Romeo is now aware that Juliet is not really dead, he does not kill himself, and everything goes according to the Friar's plan. Juliet's survival remains unknown to her parents, and she is able to move to Mantua with Romeo. However, as *Fatal Loins* finally ends with the deaths of Romeo and Juliet (twenty years postponed), the ending turns out to be 'tragic', albeit framed in a humorous manner.

The metatheatrical nature of *Drop Dead, Juliet!* makes a less realistic strategy for turning the tragedy into comedy possible, a strategy which is attempted in a more deliberate way in this play by means of a definite agent: kneeling beside Romeo's dead body and about to stab herself, Juliet suddenly stops the show, exclaiming,

> I'll tell you what's tragic – This is my favourite dress. And I've had to sew up the front four hundred times, after soaking it in cold water to get the stains out. Not to mention the searing pain in my abdomen every night. Do you know how excruciatingly horrible it is to stab yourself in the stomach? (6)

Shakespeare agrees to let Juliet try her wings as a playwright/director in a version with a happy ending. But as with the happy 'ending' at the beginning of *Fatal Loins*, Romeo and Juliet's lives are not saved indefinitely: the inevitable 'tragic' ending can only be postponed for so long. Even so, the metatheatricality of the play also means that even the deaths are temporary and reversible – as Juliet's 'dead' body is carried offstage at the end of the play, she low-fives Shakespeare in a silent celebration of their joint efforts to bring the story to a satisfactory conclusion. Both *Drop Dead, Juliet!* and *Fatal Loins*, then, maintain a tragic plot structure, where the main characters die at the end. The comedy of all three plays depending more on the contrast between Shakespearean references and bathetic content than on any transformation to a comic structure, *Goodnight Desdemona* is the only appropriation that actually saves the lives of Romeo and Juliet.

Pontac's Romeo's infatuation with the Friar and MacDonald's Romeo's with 'Constantine' each gives rise to a carnival of cross-dressing. In *Fatal*

Loins, Friar Laurence once again hatches a brilliant plan to keep Romeo and Juliet together:

> FRIAR
> I needs must feign a… vague flirtatiousness,
> Lest I alarm him and discard thereby
> The treasure of his trust. (*Pause*.) I shall transform
> His lust for me to love of Juliet. (Scene 4, p. 87)

The Friar writes an encouraging note to Romeo, asking him to dress up as a woman and come to his cell. He takes a 'sleeping draught', intending Romeo to take him for dead, mourn him and be comforted by Juliet. But Friar Laurence has underestimated the depth of Romeo's love, or perhaps the inalterability of a star-crossed lover's fate: on finding the Friar lifeless, Romeo instantaneously decides to kill himself. He swallows the apothecary's poison, which he still carries:

> ROMEO
> […]
> Ay me! It flows with fiery speed through all
> The channels, ports and flanges of my veins.
> Now I remember me: the seller said
> The poison hath but one adverse effect:
> It maketh one to sneeze. (*He sneezes*.) And so it doth.
> A violent and quick discharge of breath. (*Sneezes again*.)
> O emblem apt and fitting of great Death. (*Sneezes*.)
> Such pertinence my soul doth truly please:
> Slaying myself, to die upon a sneeze. (Scene 5, pp. 91-92)

Juliet, in the meantime, has seen a 'woman' sneaking out of Romeo's chamber and followed her to Verona. When she realises that it is Romeo and that he is dead, she tries to stab herself with a kitchen knife, fortuitously still in her hand as she left the house in the middle of cooking dinner; but being too obese to reach any vital organs, she has to resort to throwing herself off the balcony. The noise wakes the Friar, who realises that he has failed in his mission to keep Romeo and Juliet together, happy and alive, and who on seeing Romeo in female clothing falls in love with him and concludes the play with the words

> No love so sweet in th'east, south, north or west,
> In Rome or Venice, Genoa or Florence,
> As of my Romeo and his Friar Laurence.
> (Scene 5, p. 95) [emphases original]

In *Goodnight Desdemona*, both Romeo and Juliet fall in love with Constance as soon as they meet her. Since Romeo believes she is a man, he decides to change his name to 'Romiet' and 'wear a woman's gown until [he dies]' (III.4, 65). Juliet, conversely, assumes that the 'Greek boy' Constantine prefers men, and sets off in pursuit of Constance dressed in Romeo's doublet and hose:

JULIET [*Below*]	But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?
	It is the East, and Constantine the sun!
CONSTANCE	Uh oh.
JULIET	He speaks.
CONSTANCE	Romeo? Is that you?
JULIET	I know not how to tell thee who I am.
	My sex, dear boy, is hateful to myself,
	because it is an enemy to thee;
	therefore I wear tonight, this boyish hose.
CONSTANCE	Juliet? What are you doing down there?
	How on earth did you get into the orchard?
JULIET	With love's light wings did I o'erperch –
CONSTANCE	I see.
[---]	
JULIET	Deny thy preference and refuse thy sex;
	Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,
	and henceforth never will I be a girl. (III.5, pp. 67-68)

When Desdemona, sent by Constance to look for Juliet, meets Romeo, she assumes that he is a woman; but now Romeo changes his mind about his gender again, once more falling in love at first sight: 'I am no ma'am, but man, and worship thee' (III.8, p. 83). When Desdemona later sees Juliet dressed as a boy, she exclaims, 'Zounds! Doth no one in Verona sail straight?' (III.9, p. 85). While Pontac's Friar's reason for wanting Romeo to appear in drag remains a mystery, MacDonald's Romeo and Juliet clearly have the idea that it is possible to change one's gender simply by putting on different clothes and adopting a new name. They also do not seem to mind what their own gender or the gender of their love interest is. The apparently unfixed

nature of gender and sexuality in MacDonald's play can be connected to gender performativity, queer theory and compulsory heterosexuality.

The idea of gender performativity is presented in Judith Butler's seminal work *Gender Trouble* (1990), which marks the beginning of the third wave of feminism.[77] Butler claims that socially and culturally constructed gender precedes biological sex, and that, since gender is created, or rather *performed*, through ever-repeated actions, there is no 'true' gender identity outside these actions. Because Butler argues that drag exposes the 'imitative' nature of gender, she has often been misread as saying that gender can be changed through actions, for example by adopting a new style of dress. This is, however, not one of her claims; gender performance is not presented as an act of will, nor as an act that can be attributed to a subject, but as an ongoing aspect of human society that may be changed only over time. Nevertheless, the idea of gender performativity has sometimes been used in theatre studies to discuss the representation of gender on stage. As Terri Power argues, Butler's theory appropriates terminology from the theatre;[78] it might be said that theatre studies, in turn, appropriates the theory of gender performativity by taking back its terminology and using it in its original context.

Queer theory, a branch of gender and feminist theory that evolved in the 1990s, building on the theories of among others Judith Butler and Michel Foucault, claims that not only gender but also biological sex and sexual orientation are socially constructed and therefore potentially fluid rather than inherent in the individual. This may sound surprising, as the LGBTQ+ community has in recent years stressed that sexual orientation is innate and not a choice (partly as a response to homophobic suggestions that homosexuality can be deselected or 'cured'). But lesbianism has sometimes been approached by feminists as a political choice. Queer theory is essentially a critical deconstruction of heteronormativity – a model that assumes that men are masculine and attracted to women and that women are feminine and attracted to men, or (for individuals who depart from this model) that men who are attracted to men are feminine and women who are attracted to women are masculine, when in reality any combination among these features is possible, as well as many other variants.

Queer theory is also connected to the concept of 'compulsory heterosexuality' (also known as 'the heterosexual imperative'), a term which was

77 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

78 Terri Power, *Shakespeare and Gender in Practice* (London: Palgrave, 2016), p. 9.

coined in 1980 by Adrienne Rich, who argued that lesbian experience had been rendered 'invisible' by the idea that heterosexuality is the 'normal' or 'compulsory' model; that heterosexuality is not innately more natural for most women than homosexuality; that the assumption that it is gives men the opportunity to dominate women; and that heterosexuality is an institution that keeps this power structure in place. It is important to note, however, that Rich does not limit her terms 'lesbian existence' and 'lesbian continuum' to sexual attraction and relations but that she uses them to refer to emotional relationships and shared experience between women (and girls) in a much broader sense.[79]

According to Sharon Friedman, *Goodnight Desdemona*'s focus on the relationship between gender and genre (in this case male and tragedy versus female and comedy) connects it to second-wave feminism;[80] but there are also connections to third-wave feminism, and especially to later discussions of the concept of gender performativity presented in *Gender Trouble*, which was published in the same year as MacDonald's play. Lynne Bradley remarks that the cross-dressing in *Goodnight Desdemona* is a way of 'playfully engag[ing] with the Shakespearean tradition of cross-dressing and same-sex love, while at the same time engaging with contemporary critics such as Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva, who question binary signifiers like male and female'.[81] The cross-dressing in *Goodnight Desdemona*, then, is a comment on second-wave feminism as well as a look ahead towards the theoretical debates of third-wave feminism; but it is also an aspect of the transformation into comedy. The practice of employing boy actors, with the cross-dressing that it entailed, was of course part of Shakespearean drama from the beginning. But cross-dressing also plays an important role in the fictional worlds of Shakespeare's comedies, where the heroines who cross-dress generally take on traditionally masculine traits, as the male guise makes it acceptable to display characteristics that would not be regarded as appropriate for a woman. [82]

79 Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', *Signs*, 5:4 (1980), 631-60.

80 Sharon Friedman, 'The Feminist Playwright as Critic: Paula Vogel, Ann-Marie MacDonald, and Djanet Sears Interpret *Othello*', in *Feminist Theatrical Revisions of Classic Works: Critical Essays*, ed. Sharon Friedman (Jefferson, North Carolina, & London: McFarland, 2009), pp. 113-34 (p. 117).

81 Lynne Bradley, *Adapting* King Lear *for the Stage* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), p. 215.

82 *Drop Dead, Juliet!* also contains some regendering within the play as part of Juliet's plan to include '[m]ore girls'. Juliet decides that Friar Laurence will henceforth be Sister Laurence and the Prince a Princess, whereupon Friar Laurence '*whips off her monk robe to reveal a nun's habit*' and the Prince '*takes off her cape and buttons it around her waist as a skirt*', and Juliet announces that 'Anybody

The depiction of Romeo and Juliet as homosexual is quite common in certain types of appropriations of *Romeo and Juliet* and often constitutes an invention apparently introduced to translate the 'star-crossed lovers' into a same-sex couple in a modern context, thus presenting the audience with a kind of forbidden love they are more likely to be able to relate to, and possibly using the well-known classic tragedy specifically to address the issue of sexual stigma. Power discusses several 'lesbian' productions and appropriations of *Romeo and Juliet*, including Tallulah Theatre's 2012 all-female production at the Bierkeller Theatre in Bristol; a 2013 production by the company {Your Name Here} A Queer Theatre, adapted and directed by Mark Duncan and performed at the Tank in New York; and Leroy Street Theatre's *The Deliverance of Juliet and her Romeo*, directed by Harrison Thomas at Unit 102 Theatre in Toronto in 2014.[83] The idea of Romeo as gay is present in both MacDonald's and Pontac's plays, although there is no reason of the kind outlined above, since Romeo is a man and Juliet is a woman in both versions and the object of Romeo's desire is a third party.

The idea of Romeo as in some way effeminate finds support in both the text and the sources as well as in the performance history of *Romeo and Juliet*. When a weeping Romeo threatens to kill himself after being banished, Friar Laurence thinks he behaves like a woman, or even an animal, in a passage closely based on Brooke's text:

> Art thou a man? Thy form cries out thou art.
> Thy tears are womanish, thy wild acts denote
> The unreasonable fury of a beast.
> Unseemly woman in a seeming man,
> And ill-beseeming beast in seeming both! (III.3.108-12)

Here, being like a woman is described as '[u]nseemly'; but this is not the case in all the sources. Painter's version of the story speaks of Romeo's attractiveness to men, in words that were probably not at all suggestive of homoeroticism to an Elizabethan readership, but are likely to be so to present-day readers: 'young Romeo, who, besides his beauty and good grace wherewith he was enriched, had a certain natural allurement, by

who hasn't come on yet, you're a girl, OK?' (9). The part of Mercutio is taken over by 'a serving maid at the party', who does not know what to say except 'More ale, sirrah?' (16).

83 Power, pp. 128-33.

virtue whereof he drew unto him the hearts of each man'.[84] Even the special fondness between Romeo and the Friar that is exaggerated in *Fatal Loins* is mentioned by Painter: 'The young Romeo […] from his tender age bare a certain particular amity to Friar Lawrence'.[85]

In addition to this, Romeo was one of the first male Shakespearean roles to be played by women, notably by Charlotte Cushman, who played the part in the mid-nineteenth century to her sister Susan's Juliet. Her performance was apparently accepted on the same terms as a male actor's would, and it was lauded by the press. According to Lisa Merrill, a critic from the *Times*

> stated enthusiastically that 'it is enough to say that the Romeo of Miss Cushman is far superior to any Romeo that has been seen for years. … Miss Cushman's Romeo is a creative, living, breathing, animated, ardent human being.' A human being – not a caricature or a freak; this passionate woman publicly professing erotic love for another woman was regarded as superior to other *male* British actors as Romeo. The acclaim that was lavished upon Charlotte's Romeo by the London press was in no way qualified by her sex.[86]

Another contemporary critic suggested that perhaps it was more appropriate that a woman should play Romeo than that a man should do so, because 'females may together give us an image of the desire of the lovers of Verona, *without suggesting a thought of vice*'.[87] What is curious about this opinion from a present-day perspective is not merely that it would not be thought more immoral to show a love scene between two women, but that apparently it was not a factor that the lovers were played by siblings. On the contrary, Merrill argues that Cushman was able to get away with being a 'transgressor of gender norms' because she ostensibly took on the role of Romeo to give her sister, who was in 'straitened circumstances', an opportunity to work for her living while being chaperoned.[88] What audiences seem to have appreciated especially was the realism of Cushman's portrayal of a man. 'How', Merrill wonders, 'did Charlotte's contemporaries read an androgynous youth in what today appears to be an obviously female – even buxom – body?' More than one female spectator remarked that she would not have been able

84 Painter, p. 68.
85 Ibid., p. 61.
86 Lisa Merrill, *When Romeo Was a Woman: Charlotte Cushman and Her Circle of Female Spectators* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), p. 115.
87 Quoted in Merrill, p. 124 [emphasis original].
88 Merrill, p. 112.

to tell that Cushman was a woman had she not been aware of the fact prior to the performance.[89] Referring to Butler's theory of gender performativity, Merrill argues that those spectators who responded unfavourably perhaps felt threatened as Cushman's convincing performance suggested that 'being a man was merely an "act"'.[90] Merrill speculates that Cushman's Romeo 'serv[ed]' as 'the personification of Shakespeare's romantic lover for some spectators and as a transgressive erotic force for others'.[91] This aspect of the play's performance history may have contributed to the prevalence of ambivalent sexuality in later appropriations.

In *Goodnight Desdemona*, Romeo's infatuation with 'the lovely Greek boy, Constantine' (III.2, 54) has several functions. It is part of the cross-dressing in the third act, which serves a comic purpose, introduces the possibility of unstable gender identity and is a component in the transposition of *Romeo and Juliet* into a comedy. It is also an exaggeration of the Shakespearean Romeo's fickleness, demonstrated when he forgets about Rosaline as soon as he sets eyes on Juliet. Also, there is the further complication, or perhaps simplification, of Constance turning out not to be a man after all: Romeo is in fact a predominantly heterosexual man dressed up as a woman in order to seduce a predominantly heterosexual woman dressed up as a man.

This part of the plot could be interpreted as being about the problems of belonging to a sexual minority and being considered divergent, but this experience does not really seem to be an issue for MacDonald's Romeo. Rather, this plot line seems to adhere to the queer-theoretical idea that sexuality is not necessarily essential and stable, forming a comical way of questioning 'compulsory heterosexuality'. According to Ellen MacKay, both Romeo and Juliet are 'undaunted by the heterosexual imperative',[92] but there is an important difference in their respective reactions: Romeo simply does not mind what gender Constance is, or what gender he is himself. For Juliet, however, it is an extra thrill when Constance reveals that she is a woman:

89 Ibid., p. 116.
90 Ibid., p. 124.
91 Ibid., pp. 115-116.
92 Ellen MacKay, 'The Spectre of Straight Shakespeare: New Ways of Looking at Old Texts in *Goodnight Desdemona* and *Mad Boy Chronicle*', *Canadian Theatre Review* 111 (2002), 10-15 (p. 13).

JULIET O most forbidden love of all!
CONSTANCE Oh no.
JULIET Unsanctified desire, more tragic far
than any star-crossed love 'twixt girl and boy.
(III.7, p. 77)[93]

If Romeo is untroubled by the heterosexual imperative, Juliet is pleasantly surprised at this additional taboo, and she proceeds in her seduction, focusing on the advantages of being two women: 'Be thou the mirror pool of my desire: / reflect my love as thou dost ape my form' (III.7, 78). When Constance remarks that there is also a significant age difference between them, Juliet turns this too into a recommendation:

CONSTANCE Thou wouldst distort the pool, thy looking-glass,
with words of love like careless pebbles tossed;
the rippling waters tell a loving lie,
and show my face to thee as 't'were [*sic*] thine own.
Still waters would reflect an agèd crone.
JULIET More beauty in thy testament of years,
than in the face of smooth and depthless youth.
Nay, lovelier by far, now that I see
the sculpting hand of time upon thy brow;
O look on me with eyes that looked on life
before I e'er was born an infant blind.
O touch me with those hands that held thy quill
before I learned to read and write my name.
And thus with every look and touch, entwine
my poor young thread into thy richer weave.
(III.7, pp. 78-79)

This speech, to which Constance bathetically replies 'Okay', is the poetic climax of the play and is presented as more genuine than Romeo's wooing of Constance, which is carried out mainly in Shakespearean wording: 'O Constantine, O emperor of my heart! / It is my sex that is thine enemy. / Call me but love, and I'll be new endowed' (III.4, p. 61). In comparison with this piece of Shakespearean parody, there is, as Novy points out, 'a

93 Laurin R. Porter points out that the 'bond' between Juliet and Constance 'is deepened by the realization that they are both women, metaphorical sisters'; 'Shakespeare's "Sisters": Desdemona, Juliet, and Constance Ledbelly in *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*', *Modern Drama*, 38:3 (Autumn 1995), 362-77 (p. 370).

surprising seriousness and even eloquence in some of [Juliet's] lines'.[94] This is MacDonald's way of making the audience 'enter an experience that they thought they had no sympathy for' in the hope that they will 'find themselves identifying with people who they thought were perverse or alien or deviant'.[95] However, MacDonald does not see the play as a specifically '"lesbian" work' (unlike some of her other writing),[96] and Djordjevic points out that Constance's happy ending is not constituted by a 'love match' with a woman but by a sort of 'mystical marriage to herself'.[97] Juliet's reaction on finding out that 'Constantine' is a woman is also a comment on similar situations in Shakespeare's comedies, such as Olivia's finding out the same thing about 'Cesario' in *Twelfth Night*. In *Twelfth Night*, the implication seems to be that the gender of the love interest is of primary importance, but in *Goodnight Desdemona* gender and sexual orientation can both be changed if necessary.

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Goodnight Desdemona and *Fatal Loins* take their starting-points in the thought experiment that *Romeo and Juliet* is a romantic comedy thwarted by 'annoying' plot twists such as the Friar's miscarried plan and the pointless fight between Tybalt, Mercutio and Romeo. By anticipating and preventing these turns of events, the appropriations 'save' the play from its tragic ending. But a happy ending is not a fruitful beginning for a comedy. Other complications are consequently added, in both cases in the form of Romeo, not entirely out of character, falling in love with someone else. In *Drop Dead, Juliet!*, Juliet tries to prevent the events that will lead to her and Romeo's deaths, but she fails owing to a series of complications which arise when she starts to interfere with the plot. Here, rather than falling in love with someone else after falling for Juliet, Romeo never falls in love with Juliet in the first place, but remains faithful to Rosaline. His propensity for falling in love at first sight is thus removed rather than exaggerated. In both *Fatal Loins* and *Goodnight Desdemona*, Romeo's fickleness in love leads to homoeroticism and cross-dressing. In *Fatal Loins*, the change affects Romeo only, and the effect is entirely comic; in *Goodnight Desdemo-*

94 Novy, 'Saving Desdemona and/or Ourselves', p. 79.
95 MacDonald, quoted in Novy, 'Saving Desdemona and/or Ourselves', p. 79.
96 Quoted in Djordjevic, p. 98.
97 Djordjevic, p. 113.

na, both Juliet and Romeo are affected, in both cases with a comic effect but in Juliet's with additional serious undertones and glimpses of real pathos. While the cross-dressing strand of the story is mainly humorous, Juliet's love for Constance once she learns that Constance is a woman may be seen as questioning the heterosexual imperative, both for Juliet and for Constance. In line with Adrienne Rich's theory on compulsory heterosexuality, however, it is not suggested that Juliet and Constance become lesbians; but the text encourages them to consider being open to alternatives and to value the emotional bond of female companionship as highly as, or more highly than, sexual and/or romantic relationships with men.

Although they are all mainly comedies, the three appropriations may be seen as using an iconic romantic story to question the supremacy of romantic love in literature and in culture at large. Drawing on the inherent similarities to comedy in *Romeo and Juliet*, they ignore the darker aspects of Shakespeare's play, including forced marriage, generational conflict, and even the conflict between the families. Conceptually, *Goodnight Desdemona*, *Fatal Loins* and *Drop Dead, Juliet!* can be regarded as appropriations of the iconic status of *Romeo and Juliet* as a great romantic tragedy rather than appropriations of the text. However, on a textual level, these three appropriations contain an unusual amount of direct quoting from Shakespeare's play, which is, ironically, one of the main ways in which they transform the tragedy into comedy.

6.
Hamlet and The Question 'Did it happen?'

Each of the four Shakespearean tragedies previously discussed has given rise to a particular tendency among its recent appropriations. For each chapter, there has been a particular motif from Shakespeare's play on which its appropriations have been seen to focus, as well as a speculative question that all appropriations seem to use as their jump-off point. There appears to be considerably less conformity among *Hamlet* appropriations: there is no particular prevailing theme; no particular aspect of the original play is foregrounded, and no one type of appropriation (historical/feminist/metatheatrical or sequel/midquel – although I have not found any relevant prequels of this particular play) is more striking than any other. Granted, *Ophelia Thinks Harder* and *Gertrude – The Cry* both deal with 'missing' mothers and motherhood, but in very different ways. However, all the appropriations come up with different ways of questioning whether the plot of *Hamlet* necessarily unfolds the way it apparently does in Shakespeare's play. The question they ask may thus be phrased as 'Did it happen?', which can in turn be connected to a motif from Shakespeare's play, namely that which Hamlet himself claims to be the question: 'To be, or not to be'.

It should be pointed out that the perhaps most famous example of the kind of appropriation studied in this dissertation is an appropriation of *Hamlet*: Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* was first performed as early 1966, and therefore cannot be included in this study. However, it is in many ways a template for later plays about those among Shakespeare's characters who are not centre-stage in the original, such as Paula Vogel's *Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief*, the Women's Theatre Group and Elaine Feinstein's *Lear's Daughters*, David Greig's *Dun-*

sinane and Jean Betts's *Ophelia Thinks Harder*.[1] This chapter will focus on *Ophelia Thinks Harder* (1993) – a feminist comedy, first performed as part of a festival celebrating the centenary of New Zealand's women's suffrage – but it will also take a number of other *Hamlet* appropriations into consideration: John Cargill Thompson's *Hamlet II: Prince of Jutland* (1984), Perry Pontac's *Hamlet, Part II* (1992), Allison Williams's *Hamlette* (2001) and Howard Barker's *Gertrude – The Cry* (2002). In addition to looking at representations of certain aspects of Hamlet himself – his age and gender, both of which are relevant for recent productions and appropriations of the play – I will argue that the Ophelia and Gertrude characters in the appropriations are to a certain extent based on stereotyped and frequently reproduced conceptions of Shakespeare's characters rather than on Shakespeare's text. First, however, I will briefly consider the significance of Shakespeare's historical sources to modern appropriations of *Hamlet*.

'This is I, Hamlet, the Dane': *Hamlet*'s Historical Sources and Their Appropriations

Like the four Shakespearean tragedies previously discussed, *Hamlet* is an appropriating as well as an appropriated text. The best-known source for the story of *Hamlet* is the, to modern ears, rather bizarre story of Amleth in the Medieval Danish chronicles *Gesta Danorum* (c. 1185-1222), sometimes referred to as *Historiae Danicae*, by Saxo Grammaticus.[2] In this story, Feng ('Claudius') kills his brother Horwendil ('old Hamlet'), king of the Jutes, allegedly because Horwendil was cruel to his wife, Gerutha ('Gertrude'). Here, Shakespeare has made a significant change to the story in making Claudius conceal his crime, whereas it is public knowledge that Feng has killed his brother: it means both that Hamlet cannot be sure if

1 Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (New York: Grove Press, 1967). In a review of Gloria Muzio's production of Paula Vogel's *Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief*, at Circle Repertory in 1993, Ben Brantley writes that '"Desdemona" is based on the sort of conceit that a group of droll university students might come up with during a boozy night in a rathskeller after seeing Tom Stoppard's "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead"'; 'Review/Theater; Iago's Subterfuge Is Made the Truth', *The New York Times* 12 November 1993 <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/11/12/theater/review-theater-iago-s-subterfuge-is-made-the-truth.html> [accessed 5 February 2017].

2 Saxo Grammaticus, 'From HISTORIAE DANICAE', trans. Oliver Elton (1894), in Geoffrey Bullough (ed.), *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. VII: 'Major Tragedies: *Hamlet*; *Othello*; *King Lear*; *Macbeth*' (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), pp. 60-79.

Claudius has indeed killed the king and that Gertrude can be seen as less culpable, since nothing in Shakespeare's text indicates that she knows she has married her husband's murderer. Amleth ('Hamlet') pretends to be mad to protect himself from Feng, whom he suspects of foul play. His madness is tested by his being given the opportunity to rape a young woman with whom he has grown up, a temptation which no sane man could resist. Amleth persuades the girl to say (untruthfully) that he paid no attention to her, which gives him some reprieve, as it suggests he is indeed insane. Before he is sent away to England by his stepfather – as a result of killing an eavesdropping councillor ('Polonius'), which on the other hand is clearly the act of a sane man – Amleth confides in his mother and tells her to mourn him as dead after a year, but that he will come back. He then changes Feng's message to the king of England so that, instead of telling him to kill Amleth, it orders him to kill the attendants and let Amleth marry the king's daughter. When Amleth comes back to Jutland, he kills Feng. When he is later killed in an unrelated battle, one of his two wives, the Scottish queen Hermunthrude, marries the conqueror even though she has promised to die with Amleth: 'Thus all vows of women are loosed by change of fortune and melted by the shifting of time; the faith of their soul rests on a slippery foothold'.[3] This shows that the misogynist aspects of *Hamlet* and the idea that 'the lady doth protest too much'[4] are present already in this early version of the story.

It is likely that Shakespeare came into contact with Saxo's Amleth story through a novella in François Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques* (1564-82), based on the story in *Gesta Danorum*.[5] In fact, Geoffrey Bullough argues that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* may have no direct basis in *Gesta Danorum*: 'Undoubtedly the original play of *Hamlet* [*Ur-Hamlet*, discussed below] was based on the French *novella*, and I see no proof that either Shakespeare or his predecessor used Saxo Grammaticus at all'.[6] The anonymous English translation of Belleforest's story, *The Hystorie of Hamblet* (1608), may have been initiated on account of the popularity of Shakespeare's play.[7] *The*

3 Ibid., p. 79.

4 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), III.2.224. Subsequent references will be to this edition (unless otherwise stated) and given parenthetically in the text.

5 Geoffrey Bullough, 'Introduction' to *Hamlet*, in *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. VII, pp. 3-59 (p. 10).

6 Ibid., p. 15.

7 Ibid., p. 11; Anon., 'THE HYSTORY OF HAMBLET' (1608), in Bullough, vol. VII, pp. 81-124.

Hystorie of Hamblet is more moralising than Saxo's chronicle and explains some of the reprehensible behaviour of its characters by saying that Denmark was not Christian at the time and that the barbarous, cruel and disloyal conduct of its inhabitants is therefore not to be wondered at.

Some elements of *Hamlet*, however, are present neither in *Gesta Danorum* nor in *Histoires Tragiques*. It has often been pointed out that there are similarities between *Hamlet* and Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*; and it is widely believed that a now lost play known as *Ur-Hamlet* was written prior to the *Hamlet* of 1603-05,[8] possibly by Kyd or by Shakespeare himself, and that this was the first version of the Hamlet story to feature the ghost of the murdered king. According to Bullough, a probable source for the 'Murder of Gonzago' part of the plot is the anonymous 'A Warning for Faire Women' from 1599, as it is about a woman who has murdered her husband and confesses to it after seeing a play.[9] Another version of the Hamlet story worth mentioning is *Der Bestrafte Brudermord oder Prinz Hamlet aus Dänemark* ('Fratricide Punished'), an anonymous eighteenth-century German prose play based on Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (and/or possibly on *Ur-Hamlet*) which was popularised by the Hidden Room Theatre as a puppet show in the 2010s.[10]

Saxo's version of the story was the basis for the 1994 feature film *The Prince of Jutland* (released in America as *Royal Deceit*), which kept close to the story but adapted some aspects of it to suit modern sensibilities. Ten years before that, John Cargill Thompson's one-man play *Hamlet II: Prince of Jutland* was first produced at the Sheffield Crucible, directed by John Ashby. This play bears a strong resemblance to Cargill Thompson's other Shakespeare appropriation, *Macbeth Speaks*. This, too, is a monologue, in this case spoken by Hamlet, who claims that Shakespeare's account of his life is historically inaccurate. For instance, he stresses that Shakespeare made no distinction between Jutland and Denmark and that Hamlet was

8 Q1 was published in 1603 and Q2 in 1604-05. The play had of course been performed earlier than that, perhaps some time in the 1590s. See Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, 'Introduction', in *Hamlet*, pp. 43-59.

9 Anon., 'From A WARNING FOR FAIR WOMEN' (1599), in Geoffrey Bullough (ed.), *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. VII, pp. 179-81.

10 Bullough, pp. 20-24; Anon., 'FRATRICIDE PUNISHED (DER BESTRAFTE BRUDERMORD)', trans. H. H. Furness, adapted by Geoffrey Bullough, in Geoffrey Bullough (ed.), *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. VII, pp. 128-58; The Hidden Room Theatre <http://hiddenroomtheatre.com/past/der-bestrafte-brudermord-or-hamlet-prince-of-denmark> [accessed 31 October 2016].

never prince of Denmark but of Jutland, as pointed out by Barbara Everett: 'the "true" story of Amleth/Hamlet was acted out in Denmark's main peninsula, Jutland, not in Zealand (as [in Shakespeare's play]) and not in the castle of Kronborg which we have learned to know as Elsinore'.[11] Cargill Thompson's Hamlet also claims, among other things, that Shakespeare has misrepresented his family situation and that his relatives had different names in real life. Here, the 'it' in the question 'Did it happen?' refers to the entire plot of the play, and the answer to the question is 'No, none of it happened: Shakespeare made it up'.

'What a piece of work is a man': Hamlet's Gender

Since Charlotte Charke and Sarah Siddons played the part in the eighteenth century, many actresses have portrayed Hamlet.[12] Sarah Bernhardt, perhaps the most famous example, played Hamlet on stage in 1899, prior to giving the first-ever screen performance of Hamlet the following year. According to Bernhardt, any actor playing Hamlet 'must be divested of all virility', and therefore the part 'always gain[s]' by being played by an 'intellectual wom[a]n'.[13] In the German silent film from 1921, directed by Svend Gade and Heinz Schall, Asta Nielsen played Hamlet as a woman who had been brought up disguised as a boy to ensure that the Danish crown was kept in the family. More recently, Frances de la Tour played the prince in Half Moon Theatre's 1979 production, according to Michael Billington with 'a bravura swagger'; in 1992, The Sphinx Theatre Company cast Ruth Mitchell as Hamlet in the all-female 'Roaring Girl's Hamlet', directed by Sue Parrish at the Warehouse Theatre in Croydon; and in 2008, Billington included Angela Winkler, who appeared in Peter Zadek's German production 'Hamlet 2000',

11 Barbara Everett, *Young Hamlet: Essays on Shakespeare's Tragedies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 1. It should be noted that 'Elsinore' is not a Shakespearean invention, but the English name of Helsingør, the town where Kronborg is situated.

12 For a book-length study of female performances of Hamlet, see Tony Howard, *Women as Hamlet: Performance and Interpretation in Theatre, Film and Fiction* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

13 Sarah Bernhardt, *The Art of the Theatre* (1924), quoted in Howard, p. 98. According to Ellen Ecker Dolgin, Max Beerbolm was 'upset' by Bernhardt's performance, perhaps 'because of the unspoken – yet almost sacred – regard for the essentially masculine domain of the Bard and his key roles. Assuming equal access by actresses to these roles must have seemed too great a liberty for the women to take'; *Shaw and the Actresses* [sic] *Franchise League: Staging Equality* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2015), p. 61.

which toured to among other places the Edinburgh Festival in 2000, among his ten favourite Hamlets of the past fifty years.[14]

The interpretation in the 1921 film was inspired by Edward P. Vining's book *The Mystery of Hamlet* from 1881, which argues that Hamlet is a woman in disguise and that this accounts for what Vining, along with many before and after him, perceives as Hamlet's feminine quality.[15] Quoting the summary of Hamlet as 'the tragedy of a man who could not make up his mind' from Laurence Oliver's film, Marjorie Garber rhetorically asks, 'To which gender was this dilemma – in 1948, when the film was made – traditionally ascribed?'.[16] The implication is that Hamlet's vacillating nature has invited a perception of him as 'feminine'. Marilyn French argues along similar lines. To French, the feminine and masculine 'principles' are built around the human activities that have traditionally been constructed as the most extremely 'feminine' and 'masculine' ones, giving birth and killing. French argues that it is because of Hamlet's tendency to respond to the realisation that 'all human experience is bounded by its two most profound acts – killing and giving birth (with the implicit corollary that birth requires sexual intercourse)' by 'meditat[ing] upon and feel[ing] its implications' that Hamlet has been seen as 'sensitive, intellectual, and feminine', even though 'his actions are more violent, and rasher than those of any other character'.[17] Elaine Showalter also speculates that '[i]t is per-

14 Michael Billington, *The Guardian* 17 September, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 2014, p. 945; Michael Billington, 'The Role to Die for', *The Guardian* 31 July 2008 <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2008/jul/31/theatre.shakespeare> [accessed 16 January 2017].

15 Edward P. Vining, *The Mystery of Hamlet: An Attempt to Solve an Old Problem* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co, 1881).

16 Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 38.

17 Marilyn French, *Shakespeare's Division of Experience* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), pp. 157-58. It is interesting to note that reviewers seem to give more comments on the physical appearance of male actors in the role of Hamlet than in other parts, whereas the looks of female actors are of course routinely commented on whatever kind of part they play, which is a further connection to the perception of Hamlet as 'feminine'. For example, one critic asks, 'Has Simon Russell Beale ever had a waist? Or a neck?' (Alastair Macaulay, *Financial Times* 23 June 2001, in *Theatre Record* Jan-June 2001, pp. 751-52 [p. 752]); another claims that Ben Whishaw has 'the sort of beauty that borders on deformity' (Sarah Sands, *Daily Telegraph* 30 April 2004, in *Theatre Record* Jan-June 2004, pp. 553-54 [p. 553]); and a third calls Rory Kinnear 'balding' and 'chubby' (Neil Norman, *The Daily Express* 8 October 2010, in *Theatre Record* Jul-Dec 2010, p. 1130). Virtually every single review held in the National Theatre Archive of John Caird's production at the National Theatre and its international tour in 2000-01 (including British, American and Swedish newspapers) mentions Russell Beale's build and appearance in an unfavourable way. Russell Beale himself comments on the phenomenon in an interview with him and Adrian Lester, who were at the time both about to appear as Hamlet in New York. Russell Beale and Lester agree that the audience expects a 'pale', 'tall', 'slim', 'young' person (p. 6). They do not even mention that the audience expects

haps because Hamlet's emotional vulnerability can so readily be conceptualized as feminine that this is the only heroic male role in Shakespeare which has been regularly acted by women'.[18]

Maxine Peake's 2014 performance as Hamlet in Sarah Frankcom's production at the Royal Exchange in Manchester was, according to the critic Susannah Clapp, the 'first female Hamlet since Frances de la Tour 35 years ago'[19] – the first in a major British production, one might add; it was done elsewhere several times in the interim. However, this hiatus in female Hamlet performances in British mainstream theatre is more surprising than it might seem, as there was such a long and well-established tradition of female Hamlets. Clapp observes that 'Victorian actresses, amateur and professional, played the part regularly', and continues:

> Tony Howard's interesting programme note suggests that the dip in female Hamlets in the supposedly feminist 20th century is due to the rise in importance of directors, until recently usually male. That seems right. Put two women in charge of theatres – Sarah Frankcom at the Royal Exchange and Josie Rourke at the Donmar – and there is a sudden burst of parts for women over 40 by cross-gender casting.[20]

The most common way for women to play Hamlet seems to have been to play him as a man, as opposed to reimagining the part as female. Asta Nielsen's performance is an example of a solution that 'explains' the femininity of the actress but takes away any necessity to re-write the text (though in that particular case, of course, very little of the text remains, it being a silent film). In yet another review of Frankcom's *Hamlet*, Ian Shuttleworth speculates that it is

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a man – it must be inferred that this is taken for granted at that point in the conversation. However, Russell Beale goes on to say that the universality of the part means that it 'can be played by anybody. It doesn't matter what Adrian or I look like, or what sex we are' (p. 24); Matt Wolf, 'Two Hamlets Explore New Paths in an Old Terrain', *The New York Times* 8 April 2001, pp. 6-7, 24 (also available online at <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/04/08/theater/theater-two-hamlets-explore-new-paths-in-an-old-terrain.html> [accessed 21 January 2017]). National Theatre Archive. File: 'Press reviews and articles for the 2000 production of *Hamlet* in the Lyttelton and for its tour and subsequent transfer to the Olivier Theatre'.

18 Elaine Showalter, 'Representing Ophelia: Women, Madness, and the Responsibilities of Feminist Criticism', in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, ed. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman (New York & London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 77-94 (p. 79). Showalter goes on to quote James Joyce's *Ulysses*, where Leopold Bloom wonders if Ophelia might have killed herself because she found out that Hamlet was a woman.

19 Susannah Clapp, *Observer* 21 September 2014, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 2014, pp. 946-47 (p. 947).

20 Ibid.

> possible that [Peake's] performance is influenced by the long-standing theory that Hamlet is a woman in disguise, perhaps brought up as a prince but gropingly in touch with her own gender identity. I would prefer to disbelieve this: because it seems to me that Frankcom's approach is not merely to introduce character dimensions generally considered female but also to resist labelling them reductively as such.[21]

In fact, the backstory Peake had invented was that Hamlet was a trans man, born as a girl but identifying as a boy.[22] In this modern-dress production, that made perfect sense. However, most reviewers, and probably most audience members, were not aware of this reading. Only one review in the *Theatre Record* mentions the transgender aspect of Peake's performance: 'We should know by now that Shakespeare's ultimate man with qualms can just as easily be played by a woman. Gender-reversed Hamlets are nothing new – though an explicitly transgender one might be'.[23] Other reviewers speak of Peake's Hamlet as 'male',[24] 'androgynous',[25] 'a sexually ambivalent creature',[26] and a 'stripling prince, almost pre-sexual, without swagger and without girlishness'.[27] According to Billington, Peake 'doesn't go out of her way to underline Hamlet's maleness: character, you feel, matters more than gender'.[28]

What Shuttleworth refers to as 'the long-standing theory that Hamlet is a woman in disguise', invented by Vining and made famous by Nielsen's performance, forms the basis for Allison Williams's one-act comedy *Hamlette* (2001), an extremely abridged, meta-theatrical version of Shakespeare's play, where the central character is a young woman whose parents have decided to bring her up as a boy. Williams states at the beginning of the play that 'Hamlette absolutely may not be played by a man in drag'.[29]

21 Ian Shuttleworth, *The Financial Times* 20 September 2014, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 2014, p. 946.

22 Maxine Peake, video-recorded interview, 'Shakespeare in Ten Acts' (Act 4: 'Do you not know I am a woman?'), British Library, 2016; Matilda Battersby, 'Maxine Peake "Traumatised" by Watching Herself Play Hamlet Ahead of Cinema Release', *The Independent* 13 March 2015 <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/news/maxine-peake-traumatised-by-watching-herself-play-hamlet-ahead-of-cinema-release-10106882.html> [accessed 31 October].

23 Maxie Szalwinska, *The Sunday Times* 21 September 2014, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 2014, p. 947.

24 Dominic Cavendish, *The Daily Telegraph* 18 September 2014, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 2014, p. 946; Ian Shuttleworth, *Theatre Record*, p. 946.

25 Paul Valley, *The Independent* 18 September 2014, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 2014, p. 946.

26 Cavendish, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 2014, p. 946.

27 Clapp, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 2014, p. 946.

28 Michael Billington, *The Guardian* 17 September 2014, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 2014 (pp. 945-46), p. 945.

29 Allison Williams, *Hamlette* (Crystal Beach, ON: Theatrefolk, 2001), p. 3. Subsequent references

Hamlette herself insists on being referred to as female and called by the name of 'Hamlette', but all the other characters call her Hamlet and either believe or pretend that she is a man:

HOST This is the story of Hamlet! Prince of Denmark!
HAMLETTE (*indicating her female body*) Hamlette! Hamlette,
Prin-cess of Denmark!
HOST Whatever. (5)

Every time throughout the play that Hamlette points out that she is a woman and that her name is Hamlette, the rest of the cast respond with the word 'whatever'. In a light-hearted farce seemingly without any particular agenda, the political language of the explanation of Hamlette's disguise is startling:

QUEEN Hamlet, why do you look so sad?
HAMLETTE Mom, it's Ham-*lette*!
QUEEN Now, son –
HAMLETTE And I'm your daughter!
QUEEN Hamlet! How many times do we have to go over it?
HAMLETTE looks sullen.
QUEEN Now, what do little girls do?
HAMLETTE mumbles.
QUEEN I can't hear you!
HAMLETTE They get married.
QUEEN And?
HAMLETTE And they act as social figureheads
in backward Central European kingdoms.
QUEEN And?
HAMLETTE (*reciting*) And due to the overbearing patriarchal system
their husbands are endowed with any property they leave,
forcing women into a lifetime of financial dependency,
petty household concerns, and an early death from
excessive childbearing.
QUEEN And what do little boys do?
HAMLETTE Inherit lands, money and titles granted to them solely
because of an accident of genetics.
QUEEN And that's why sometimes Mother History needs a little
help. Now tighten your codpiece and stand up straight!
Now where were we? Oh yes – Daddy's dead, you have a
new stepfather, so let's all lighten up and play happy

will be to this edition and given parenthetically in the text.

> families until school starts, ok?
> Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted colour off
> And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark. (7-8)

Hamlette's ghostly father is the only one who voluntarily calls her by her real name: 'Hamlette! Mark me! Why art thou wearing so much eyeliner?' (11). Horatio knows that Hamlette is a girl, but he does not want to recognise the fact: 'if you're a girl we can't be friends because there will be sexual tension and things will chaaaaaaaange (*unintelligible weeping*) – and girls are scary!' (9). In this version, the symptom of Hamlet's supposed madness as perceived by Polonius is that '[h]e thinks he's a girl' (13).

Hamlet is of course not the only Shakespearean hero, or villain, to have been performed by female actors; but it is one of the Shakespearean parts that have been most frequently cross-gender cast and where cross-gender casting has been seen as least controversial. Originally, this was because Hamlet was perceived as possessing feminine qualities. But in more recent times it has come to be connected to the tradition of regarding Hamlet as *the* theatrical role, expressive of the universally human and thus transcending strict gender divisions. In *Women as Hamlet*, Tony Howard states that actresses undertaking the role must consider whether Hamlet is 'a "universal" figure whose dilemmas everyone shares, male or female' or 'a "feminine" character who invites a woman's voice'.[30] Years before Phyllida Lloyd's all-female Shakespeare project, Harriet Walter said that while she could in general see little reason for playing male Shakespearean roles besides simply showing that it can be done, she regarded Hamlet as a special case, as that particular character seems to encompass so much of humanity and its preoccupations that he is relevant to everyone.[31] Later, Walter has expressed her qualms about the gender inequality in Shakespeare's writing by asserting that 'To be or not to be, that is a question for us all'.[32] Clapp puts it rather more bluntly in her review of Frankcom's *Hamlet*: 'These gender switches may

30 Howard, p. 9.

31 'Harriet Walter on Lady Macbeth' (NT platform), chaired by Bonnie Greer, 17 June 2002. Audio recording, National Theatre Archive. Cf. Eileen Atkins, who said in 1991 that she would 'rather see a schoolboy [playing Hamlet] than a brilliant actress', and Fiona Shaw, who, when she played Richard II in 1995 had already '[f]or a long time […] resisted [the] temptation' to accept the role of Hamlet, since she did not 'think a woman could bring anything to this role of male consciousness'; Carole Woddis (ed.), *'Sheer Bloody Magic': Conversations with Actresses* (London: Virago Press, 1991), p. 69; Fiona Shaw, 'Foreword', in *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance*, ed. Lizbeth Goodman with Jane de Gay (London & New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. xxiii-xxv (p. xxiii).

32 Harriet Walter, *Brutus and Other Heroines: Playing Shakespeare's Roles for Women* (London: Nick Hern, 2016), p. 207.

unsettle for a moment but they do not distort the play. At least, not unless you think that "to be, or not to be" can only refer to people with penises.'[33]

The existential musings of Hamlet's soliloquies, then, are universal enough to be applicable to either, or any, gender. But some aspects of Hamlet are distinctly masculine, especially his misogynist attitude to his mother, and to women in general, which is apparent in his interaction with the female characters of the play. While women can of course be misogynists, this aspect of the character makes it problematic to refer to a version in which Hamlet is a woman as a feminist reading. Some of the things Hamlet says to Ophelia also have a definite feel of sexual harassment: especially 'Lady, shall I lie in your lap?' – 'Do you think I meant country matters?' – 'That's a fair thought to lie between maids' legs' – 'Nothing' (III.2.108-14) and 'It would cost you a groaning to take off mine edge' (243), but also 'God hath given you one face and you make yourselves another. You jig and amble and you lisp, you nickname God's creatures and make your wantonness ignorance' (III.1.142-45).[34] In Jean Betts's feminist re-vision *Ophelia Thinks Harder* (1993), Hamlet's misogyny is exaggerated:

> HAMLET
> […] Woman is all that is vile, corrupt and lowly; her body a tornado of blood, bile, urine, phlegm and mucous [*sic*] and the fluid of digested food: – her womb a cauldron of contagion, pus and poisons. [---] It is Satan makes men adore women! Instead of loving our creator we sinfully turn to them …[35]

33 Clapp, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 2014, p. 947.

34 Simon Russell Beale notes that when he and Cathryn Bradshaw, who played Ophelia to his Hamlet in John Caird's 2000-01 production at the National, in rehearsal improvised the scene in which Hamlet bursts in on Ophelia in her closet, the physical movement described by Ophelia 'looked as if Hamlet was miming (perhaps experiencing) masturbation and orgasm'. This was not Russell Beale's intention, but the discovery revealed 'a grim potency in the idea that Hamlet might abuse Ophelia in this clumsy way – especially if the relationship between them is, up until this point, not a sexual one, frustration and incomprehension on both sides being dominant emotions'; 'Hamlet', in *Players of Shakespeare 5*, ed. Robert Smallwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 145-77 (p. 163). According to Linda Bamber, whereas Shakespeare's other tragic heroes 'have to be brought by the action of the play to that low moment when their pain is translated into misogyny', Hamlet expresses misogynist attitudes from the beginning, but after he comes back from England 'the sex nausea simply vanishes', 'we hear no more about the frailty of women', and towards the end of the play 'his sexuality is purged of its aggression'; *Comic Women, Tragic Men: A Study of Gender and Genre in Shakespeare* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1982), pp. 71, 72, 90.

35 Jean Betts and Wm. Shakespeare, *Ophelia Thinks Harder* (Wellington: The Play Press, 2001 [1994]), scene 4, p. 31. Subsequent references will be to this edition and given parenthetically in the text.

The 'universally human' thoughts are instead given to Ophelia. In the Writer's Note, Betts explains why she decided to write an appropriation of *Hamlet*:

> The seeds of this play were sown when during an acting class, tutors expressed surprise that I had made Hamlet 'a believable woman' when delivering one of his famous soliloquies as an exercise. […] Why the difficulty accepting that women […] are capable of experiencing Hamlet's complexities?
> [---]
> The answer was not to cast a woman as Hamlet yet again, but to explore Ophelia […]. After all, she has at least as much reason as Hamlet to rage and despair. Her culture forces her into a boring and pointless existence […]. She has to adjust to the loss of both parents (eventually), and cope with cruelly dismissive behaviour from her boyfriend. […]
>
> I remember studying Hamlet at school, and like most other girls in my class, identifying with him and finding Ophelia alien; while at the same time being aware that even so, too often in my life I was judged not on how I measured up to Hamlet, but on how I compared to Ophelia. Few boys experience this trauma. It isn't fair.[36]

In Betts's play, then, Hamlet's soliloquies are delivered by Ophelia, a complex character trying to come to terms with life and womanhood. In both *Ophelia Thinks Harder* and *Hamlette*, as well as in productions of Hamlet where the main character is played by a female actor, the soliloquies are spoken by a woman, whether that woman represents Hamlet or Ophelia, emphasising that the essence of human nature can be embodied by a woman just as well as by a man.

'[Y]oung Hamlet': Hamlet's Age

Famously ambiguous, Hamlet's age has been the subject of many debates, which will serve as a useful context for discussing the appropriators' treatment of his relationship to Gertrude and to Ophelia. In Shakespeare's play, the gravedigger says that Hamlet was born thirty years ago, and Hamlet remembers Yorick, who according to the gravedigger died twenty-three years ago; but everything else in the text seems to suggest a younger man. Horatio refers to him as 'young Hamlet' (I.1.169), and although this is to

36 Jean Betts, 'Writer's Note', in *Ophelia Thinks Harder*, p. ii.

distinguish him from 'old Hamlet', whose ghost Horatio has just seen, thirty was by no means young in Shakespeare's day. For a prince to be unmarried at the age of thirty would be extremely unusual, as he would be expected to produce an heir for the throne. He is furthermore in the middle of his university studies, and English Renaissance boys would go to university in their early to mid-teens.

A further complication is that the gravedigger does not specify Hamlet's age in the first Quarto. In this version of the text, the Clowne ('the Gravedigger') says that Yoricke ('Yorick') has been in the ground a dozen years rather than twenty-three. Where Hamlet asks how long the Gravedigger has been 'grave-maker' in Q2, he asks in Q1 how long a man can lie in the ground 'before hee rots'; and after joking that Hamlet lost his wits upon the ground of Denmark, the Clowne does not add anything about how long he has been digging graves but Hamlet asks 'Where is he now?'[37] According to Abigail Rokison, the twelve years since Yorick died make Hamlet eighteen years old in Q1.[38] Rokison also points out that *Hamlet* is connected to youth not only through its main character but through its audience: as a story about a student who 'struggl[es] with his mother's second marriage, his own fledgling romance and his sense of identity', it is a play with 'obvious appeal for young people'. Rokison adds that in recent years, performances by actors with star quality for teenagers – such as David Tennant in Gregory Doran's 2008 RSC production and Jude Law in Michael Grandage's Donmar production at Wyndham's Theatre and its subsequent Broadway transfer, both in 2009 – have increased the popularity of the play for young people. [39]

Convinced that Hamlet is a teenager, Alice Griffin observes that he behaves like an 'angry adolescent' towards Gertrude, and that a thirty-year-old's reaction would be more mature.[40] Still, the possibility that Shakespeare conceived Hamlet as an uncommonly immature thirty-year-old cannot be ruled out. One idea is that Shakespeare consciously makes the audience think that Hamlet is about fifteen, only to reveal in Act 5 that he is in fact thirty, making him in effect a university drop-out approaching

37 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet: First Quarto 1603* (Menston, Yorkshire: The Scolar Press, 1969).

38 Abigail Rokison, '"Our Scene is Alter'd": Adaptations and Re-Workings of *Hamlet* for Young People', *Literature Compass* 7:9 (2010), 786-97 (p. 786). Rokison remarks that the reason for the discrepancy may be that the age was changed at some point to suit a particular actor's age better.

39 Ibid. Benedict Cumberbatch can now also be added to this category of Hamlet performers.

40 Alice Griffin, *Shakespeare's Women in Love* (Raleigh, North Carolina: Pentland Press, 2001), p. 94.

middle age (thirty was of course considered a much riper age in Shakespeare's time than it is now), unusually fixated on his mother for a person his age. This could rock the audience's perception of what they have witnessed and what kind of person they have potentially been identifying with, and thus force them to re-evaluate that perception.

In her essay '*Hamlet*: Growing', Barbara Everett compares the 'once much debated' question 'How old, exactly, is Hamlet?' to the even more famous question 'How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?'.[41] Just like this question, discussed in Chapter 3, the problem of Hamlet's age is, of course, one that has to be resolved by actors playing the role, and preferably agreed on by the entire production. Everett, however, discusses the problem not in relation to producing *Hamlet* but in relation to readers' making sense of the text. She considers it a 'mistake' to ignore the information the gravedigger gives about Hamlet's age.[42] But at the same time, as is suggested by the title of her essay collection, *Young Hamlet*, she considers youth to be at the core of the identity of Hamlet, as character and as play: '*Hamlet* is the story of a son who must – as the young always must – by living accept an inheritance largely unwanted from the generation of the fathers'. The 'tragedy of Young Hamlet', Everett proposes, is 'the inevitable growing and growing up of the young'.[43]

Marilyn French demonstrates another way of connecting Hamlet with youth. According to her, Hamlet sees both men and women as either 'gods' or 'beasts', 'superhuman' or 'subhuman'. [44] These absolutist values show that 'Hamlet's thinking is very *young* thinking'; but when 'the young man [is] suddenly thrust by events into a situation that is not easily understandable, and not at all manageable by absolute thinking', it becomes apparent that we all live in a world where 'the ideal' cannot exist all the time.[45] In this way, '*Hamlet* is about a young man growing into adulthood'. Hamlet remembers his father, idyllically, as the 'perfect synthesis of masculine and feminine principles', but is 'unlucky enough to stumble on sexuality in his mother and murder in his father'.[46]

41 Everett, *Young Hamlet*, p. 17.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., p. 8.
44 French, pp. 148-49
45 Ibid., p. 149. [emphasis original].
46 Ibid., p. 157.

Matthew Harkins takes yet another view of Hamlet's youth: 'Rather than portray an archetypal contest between the young and the old or Hamlet's developmental progression from youth to maturity, the play examines the production and application of these categories as political phenomena'.[47] In early modern England, Harkins argues, it was common practice for older men to infantilise men in their twenties, for example by referring to them as 'youths', as a way of discrediting them in legal or political contexts:

> By both shifting the boundaries of youth and then coding youth as ignorant, rash, frivolous, or rebellious, older men could justify keeping political power from younger men who might otherwise have been deemed mature adults. Such acts of political aggression could be masked by the assumption that nothing unusual was happening, that this social tension produced at a particular historical and cultural moment was only 'natural' – a timeless pattern only the young and foolish would question.[48]

Another aspect of this power play was that the opposite of 'young' was not seen as 'old' but as 'mature' or 'wise': 'The older group consolidate cultural power by defining themselves in positive terms: if they are old, then old, by definition, must be good'.[49] It is against this political backdrop that Harkins sees 'Claudius's political ascendancy and Hamlet's startling disinheritance'.[50] Having classified him as a youth, Claudius gives Hamlet two alternatives: 'to be unruly or to be subordinate'.[51] Either way, he will not be king. Harkins does not believe that Hamlet returns to Denmark a changed and more mature man; rather, the '"discovery" of his age' tells the audience that he has been mature from the beginning of the play. The age of thirty has, according to Harkins, been chosen because that was 'the farthest reach of what might conceivably be classified as youth in early modern England'.[52]

In any production, Hamlet's age inevitably manifests itself in a more concrete way than in either Everett's, French's or Harkins' analysis. Almost

47 Matthew Harkins, 'Making "Young Hamlet"', *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 49:2 (Spring 2009), 333-54 (p. 334).
48 Ibid., 336.
49 Ibid., 335.
50 Ibid., 336.
51 Ibid., 337.
52 Ibid., 344.

automatically, the decision is made already when the play is cast. Theatre has become a more visual and less verbal medium than it was in Shakespeare's day; therefore, 'surprising' the audience with the information of how old Hamlet really is when they have already been looking at the actor playing him for a couple of hours would be unlikely to have the effect it might have had on Shakespeare's audience. Hamlet is seldom played by an actor younger than thirty (though sometimes considerably older), for the simple reason that it is generally agreed that the part calls for a 'great' actor. Nor is it unusual for the casting of this particular lead to precede any overarching vision on the director's part.

One production, however, which had the age of the prince as its starting-point was Trevor Nunn's 2004 production at the Old Vic. Not only was Hamlet himself played by twenty-three-year-old Ben Whishaw, who had recently graduated from RADA, but the whole cast was more youthful than usual. Notably, Ophelia was played by the nineteen-year-old undergraduate Samantha Whittaker, who first appeared on stage in an untidily worn school uniform, listening to rock music in her room. Whishaw's Hamlet also appeared as a teenager in his dress and manner, and much was made of the youthfulness of Gertrude and Claudius, who were depicted as a celebrity couple in their prime, their marriage apparently based on mutual attraction.[53] According to Imogen Stubbs, who played Gertrude, the role of Hamlet had 'made sense to [Nunn] primarily as a young student, a modern student', and so in this modern-dress production Hamlet was portrayed as being the age of a present-day undergraduate.[54] Any textual indications that Hamlet is older than that were cut. Stubbs explains why 'the dynamic' between Hamlet and his parents 'had never made sense' to her before thinking of Hamlet as an adolescent:

53 As early as 1884, Wilson Barrett played Hamlet 'made up as a very young man, to justify a youthful Gertrude', since he believed that 'no woman [in her late 40s] could feel the kind of passion ascribed to Gertrude'; Marvin Rosenberg, *The Masks of* Hamlet (Newark: University of Delaware Press; London & Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1992), p. 74. It is striking how close this sentiment comes to the one expressed by Hamlet himself when he says to Gertrude, 'You cannot call it love, for at your age / The heyday in the blood is tame' (III.4.66-67).

54 Imogen Stubbs, 'Gertrude', in *Performing Shakespeare's Tragedies Today: The Actor's Perspective*, ed. Michael Dobson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 29-39 (p. 31).

> 'Why are you still so obsessed with your mother?' I have wanted to ask, especially when Gertrude, as so often, has been a dignified empress, talking to a grown-up actor who has suddenly started acting like a little child, as if the closet scene were based on *Psycho*. 'What is the threat? Why is this forty-year-old still obsessed with his sixty-year-old mother getting remarried?'[55]

Stubbs's Gertrude was a mother who did not want 'the son to grow up […], not being able to deal with all the teenage weirdness'[56] – when Polonius read out the love letter Hamlet had written to Ophelia, Gertrude mouthed 'aw' at the idea of her little boy imagining himself to be in love – and one review suggested that the production had 'made it a play about a boy who loses his mother'.[57]

In addition to offering an explanation of his relationship to Gertrude, constructing Hamlet as an adolescent sheds a different light on Hamlet and Ophelia's ambivalent attitudes towards each other, especially the interplay between them during III.2. Hamlet's lewd wordplay and ambiguous propositions and Ophelia's disconcerted response can easily be seen as sexual harassment between adolescents – in a present-day context perhaps even tweens rather than teens. This element in the play has been amplified in *Ophelia Thinks Harder*. Like Everett's analysis and Nunn's production, Betts's appropriation sees *Hamlet* as a story about growing up. But this feminist coming-of-age story is not about Hamlet's but about Ophelia's development into a young adult; she is a teenage girl negotiating her way into an acceptable form of womanhood in a misogynist world. In Barker's *Gertrude – The Cry*, on the other hand, there is no Ophelia, and Hamlet's being an adolescent is important for another reason: Barker sees Hamlet's lack of understanding of and disgust with his mother's sex life as childish.

'O Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain': Gertrude

As in Barker's appropriation, Shakespeare's Gertrude is often portrayed on stage as a sensual, dominant woman, sometimes even obsessed with sex. This is also a common attitude among critics. In *Crossing Gender in Shakespeare*, for example, James Stone thinks that Gertrude is 'a masculinized,

55 Ibid., p. 30.
56 Ibid., 32.
57 Sarah Sands, *Daily Telegraph* 30 April 2004, in *Theatre Record* Jan-June 2004, pp. 553-54 (p. 554).

castrating woman' and Hamlet 'a feminized, impotent man'.[58] Interpretations of Gertrude seem to be split into two camps: the more traditional reading, based on the male characters' perception of her as sexual and deceitful, and one that seems to be gaining ground, based on her own speeches and actions, which show her as not very intelligent, anxious to please, and dependent on men and male approval.

Rebecca Smith writes about this division in 'A Heart Cleft in Twain: The Dilemma of Shakespeare's Gertrude', first published in 1980. According to Smith, both critics and stage and film directors traditionally base their interpretation of Gertrude on what Hamlet and his father's ghost say about her rather than on what she says and does herself: her own 'words and actions […] create […] a soft, obedient, dependent, unimaginative woman […]. She loves both Claudius and Hamlet, and their conflict leaves her bewildered and unhappy'.[59] The 'misrepresentations' of Gertrude, Smith argues, 'seem to assume that only a deceitful, highly sexual woman could arouse such strong responses and violent reactions in men, not a nurturing and loving one, as is Shakespeare's Gertrude';[60] the play treats Gertrude as a 'sexual *object*', not a sexual subject.[61] Janet Adelman shares the view that 'the Gertrude we see is not quite the Gertrude [Hamlet and the Ghost] see' but 'a woman more muddled than actively wicked', whose 'famous sensuality is less apparent than her conflicted solicitude both for her new husband and for her son'.[62] Linda Bamber also observes that the only 'firsthand' experience readers get of Gertrude is as a supportive wife and mother rather than the lustful murderess of Hamlet's imagination:

58 James Stone, *Crossing Gender in Shakespeare: Feminist Psychoanalysis and the Difference Within* (New York & Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), p. 61. This reading of *Hamlet* can be connected to Vining's theory.

59 Rebecca Smith, 'A Heart Cleft in Twain: The Dilemma of Shakespeare's Gertrude', in *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz et al. (Urbana, Chicago & London: University of Illinois Press, 1980), pp. 194-210 (p. 194).

60 Ibid., p. 195.

61 Ibid., p. 207. French points out that the Ghost speaks more about and seems to be more outraged by Gertrude, who has remarried quickly and inappropriately, than about Claudius, who has murdered him, and that it is incongruous that he then proceeds to ask Hamlet to kill Claudius but spare Gertrude. When Hamlet has persuaded Gertrude to stop sleeping with Claudius, it seems as if he has 'accomplished his real task', though he has yet to kill the king; pp. 146-47; 155.

62 Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays,* Hamlet *to* The Tempest (New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, 1992), p. 15.

> Although Hamlet sees his mother as a disgustingly sensual creature, the relationship that we see between Gertrude and Claudius is domestic and ceremonial, never sexual at all. There is less evidence of sexuality here than there is between some of the kings and queens in the history plays.[63]

However, Bamber does not argue that Hamlet's image of his mother is necessarily misguided, but that the fact that this image of Gertrude is filtered through Hamlet rather than directly experienced discourages spectators/readers from caring about her deeply or feeling involved in Hamlet's feelings about her.[64] Like Smith, Marvin Rosenberg perceives a division in how Gertrude is interpreted: he argues that critics tend to base their analyses of Gertrude on one of two things: 'her silences', leading to a description of her as 'passive', 'docile' and 'dependent', or 'what others say of her', leading to descriptions including 'hard', 'cunning' and 'erotic'.[65]

Productions of *Hamlet* have traditionally tended to accept Hamlet's fantasy of Gertrude. Perhaps they cannot be too severely blamed, because to be fair there is rather little else to go on. The actual part is a small one (4% of the lines of the play), and while the men around her talk to and about her a great deal, what the character herself says and does (and refrains from saying and doing) leaves more questions than answers: Does she know about the murder? Was she an accomplice? Has she committed adultery? Does she believe Hamlet when he tells her that he is sane? Is she telling Laertes the truth about what happened to Ophelia, and why did she not try to save her? Why does she drink from the poisoned cup when Claudius tells her not to? Rosenberg notes that this means that the actor must play the role 'mainly in the language of gesture': 'She must manifest the theatre axiom that what the actor can show when not talking reveals the actor's quality. Gertrude, in her silences, will have much to show'.[66]

There are a number of ways in which productions try to give Gertrude more room within the bounds of the text. In II.2, where first Claudius and then Gertrude thanks Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, it is more the rule than the exception that Gertrude corrects Claudius, who does not know

63 Bamber, p. 75.
64 Ibid., pp. 75-76.
65 Rosenberg, *The Masks of* Hamlet, pp. 70-71.
66 Ibid., p. 70.

which of Hamlet's friends is which.[67] In this way, Gertrude is presented as someone with a bit of control and authority, not entirely dominated by her husband. At the same time, it creates a comic effect and makes sense of the two characters' repeating the names of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern after each other but in reversed order. In the 2009 television version of Doran's production, Penny Downie's Gertrude even has to remind Claudius in I.2 which university Hamlet attends, and at the beginning of II.2 she is obviously waiting for her first chance to speak all the way through Claudius's speech and therefore gives the impression of being an active part of the conversation, whilst at the same time drawing attention to the fact that she speaks much less than Claudius.

Unsurprisingly, actors playing Gertrude seldom receive much attention in reviews. However, there are exceptions. In the reviews of the London run of Grandage's production, there was an unusual amount of focus on Penelope Wilton's Gertrude. She was described by one critic as showing 'a fundamental decency and conservatism rather than the often-seen suppressed sexuality'.[68] The performance received its fullest appraisal from Susannah Clapp, who also comments on the problems of the role:

> Clarity and subtlety comes [*sic*] from an unexpected quarter. Gertrude is one of the most unrewarding parts: pivotal but underemployed. For most of the time, this Queen is just hanging around, looking on. But Penelope Wilton makes observation into an activity. Her face is swept by doubt, anxiety, perplexity, misguided relief. Most actresses would take a speech to convey what she puts into the single line: 'Oh Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain.'
>
> She becomes a kind of chorus, a still and quiet point in the roar of the action around her, both part of the play and slightly outside it. She draws your eye towards her while seeming to do nothing. She chronicles the drowning of Ophelia […] with mesmerising, terrifying attention. She is rigid with misery; her voice is low; each syllable is an attempt to control what has already happened.
>
> Grandage's staging highlights her passage from innocence to experience, and makes it one of the paths through the play.[69]

67 For example, this happened in John Caird's 2000-01 production and in Dominic Dromgoole's 2014-16 Globe-to-Globe production. In Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead,* it is a running joke that it is difficult to differentiate between Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and it is specified in a stage direction that Gertrude '*correct*[*s*]' Claudius (p. 37). Sometimes Stoppard's two characters hardly know themselves which is which.

68 John Nathan, *The Jewish Chronicle* 12 June 2009, in *Theatre Record* Jan-June 2009, p. 609.

69 Susannah Clapp, *The Observer* 7 June 2009, in *Theatre Record* Jan-June 2009, pp. 607-08 (p. 608).

The sheer space devoted to reviewing this performance is remarkable for such a relatively minor character – especially as Clapp then goes on to give no fewer than three examples of how the staging highlights Gertrude's journey, giving considerably less attention to Jude Law's Hamlet. But Clapp's review also shows that she as a reviewer as well as Grandage's production and Wilton's performance share many ideas about Gertrude with critics such as Smith and Rosenberg.

In Nunn's production of *Hamlet*, Stubbs was required to play Gertrude as 'someone who is still sensuous, who looks young enough to have another child, to be involved in a passionate relationship; someone who looks young enough for Hamlet almost to be in love with her himself in a confusing way'.[70] She accordingly played her as a so-called 'Yummy Mummy', who 'cherished a celebrity-magazine idea of glamour around her': 'an exquisitely maintained young mother almost in Princess Diana's social niche: a parent who plays as a friend and almost as a sister to her son but who, because the court provides such unlimited childcare, has only ever done the fun stuff with him, the treats'.[71] This Gertrude wanted to 'take on' Ophelia in a similar way, 'as a let's-go-shopping-together sort of protégée, delighted to think that she can talk with this teenager as though the age and status differences between them do not matter'.[72] As an answer to why Gertrude does not speak very much in the play, it was suggested that 'she is not a highly educated woman and perhaps not blessed with a very sophisticated intelligence, however much instinctive guile she may sometimes display in her management of people around her'.[73] In addition to this, she becomes less and less willing to 'articulate what is going on inside her head', as she starts to realise what kind of man she has married; the production visualised how Gertrude is increasingly 'diminished' by Claudius by her wearing lower and lower heels as the play went on.[74]

70 Stubbs, p. 31.

71 Ibid., pp. 32, 33. Several reviews noted Gertrude and Hamlet's resemblance to Princess Diana and Prince William.

72 Stubbs, p. 34.

73 Ibid., p. 37. French points out, however, that Gertrude is 'able to comment with force and intelligence on Polonius's tediousness and the Player Queen's protestations'; p. 149. Gertrude and Ophelia have the same amount of text, but Gertrude is present in twice as many scenes as Ophelia (and Ophelia is dead in one of hers); Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (eds), *The RSC Shakespeare Complete Works* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2007), p. 1922.

74 Stubbs, pp. 37-38.

According to Stubbs, Gertrude and Ophelia are two of the most difficult female Shakespearean roles: they are 'strange', 'under-written' and 'apparently inconsistent'.[75] Especially Gertrude's one famous speech, 'There is a willow grows aslant a brook' (IV.7.164-81), presents a problem: supposedly she comes out with this speech in an attempt to comfort Laertes, but why, Stubbs asks, would she first 'break the news of Ophelia's death' with the 'awful bluntness of "Your sister's drowned, Laertes"' and then go into 'all the pointless elaboration of "There is a willow grows aslant a brook …"', and why would it make him 'feel better about it' to know 'exactly how pretty she looked as she went under'? The speech itself gives rise to further questions: 'what exactly were you doing as you watched all this, why did you not rescue her, could you not have helped?'[76] Actors trying to make sense of this speech may imagine that the scene Gertrude has witnessed was very different from the one she describes: but even if Ophelia drowned herself in a more purposeful way and Gertrude's misleading description is intended to spare Laertes's feelings, that does not mean that she could not at least have tried to save Ophelia. An alternative solution is that Gertrude did not witness the scene at all but was told after the fact that Ophelia had drowned herself, and when she has told Laertes and he wants more details ('Drowned? O, where?') she invents a story to hide from him what has really happened. One Gertrude, however, who did try to rescue Ophelia, and failed, was Anastasia Hille in Lyndsey Turner's 2015 production at the Barbican: in an added silent scene, she watched Ophelia walking off stage, realised that she was going to try to kill herself, and ran after her; when she reappeared on stage in IV.7, her skirt was wet. The following year, Tanya Moodie's Gertrude also entered in a wet skirt in Simon Godwin's RSC production.

In *Ophelia Thinks Harder*, Laertes impatiently interrupts Gertrude when she starts to speak of the different names for the 'long purple[flowers]', urging her to continue her narrative, and when she has finished, rather than saying 'Alas, then she is drowned', he demands to know why Gertrude did not save Ophelia:

LAERTES	You mean; you just *stood* there and watched her drown?
QUEEN	(*Sobbing*) Laertes, alas, I cannot swim! (*She moves off*)

75 Ibid., p. 35.
76 Ibid., pp. 35-36.

> LAERTES (*Following*) You actually saw her fall in, listened to her singing, and *watched* her *sink*?
>
> (Scene 8, p. 70) [emphases original]

In this way, the appropriation lets a character give voice to the question many actors and spectators/readers want to ask Gertrude, with a bathetically comic effect as a result.

Somewhat surprisingly in view of the fact that Nunn's production already had an answer to the question of why Hamlet minds his mother's remarriage so much – that he is very young – Whishaw's Hamlet still followed the practice of kissing Gertrude on the lips in the closet scene. The Oedipal interpretation of Hamlet's feelings for his mother was made famous by Ernest Jones and has been excessively influential. Building on an idea by Sigmund Freud, Jones' *Hamlet and Œdipus* argues that the real reason behind Hamlet's hesitation to avenge his father's death is that as a child he resented his father's place in his mother's affections, wanting him 'out of the way' so that he could have her entirely to himself; he has then repressed this wish, but the unconscious memory makes 'the thought of incest and parricide combined too intolerable to be borne'.[77] A practice in the closet scene that is more pervasive than any actions suggesting an Oedipal interpretation, however, is Hamlet's violence against Gertrude. Hamlet abuses his mother verbally already in the text, but virtually every performance adds acts of physical violence. This is perhaps suggested by Gertrude's line 'Thou wilt not murder me?' (III.4.20), which shows that she at least feels physically threatened.[78]

At this point, as Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor point out, Q1, unlike Q2 and the Folio, has Gertrude say explicitly that she was not aware that Claudius had killed her husband, much less guilty of the crime herself: 'I sweare by heauen / I neuer knew of this most horride murder'.[79] This difference has significant repercussions on how Gertrude is interpreted throughout the play: Q1 presents a more unambiguously innocent Gertrude who has been taken in by her husband, as she realises in the closet

77 Ernest Jones, *Hamlet and Œdipus: A Classic Study in the Psychoanalysis of Literature* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1949), p. 78.

78 Samuel West argues against the Oedipal reading and observes that Hamlet's reference to Nero when going to talk to his mother constitutes textual evidence that he 'wants not to have sex with Gertrude but to kill her'; 'Hamlet', in *Performing Shakespeare's Tragedies Today: The Actor's Perspective*, ed. Michael Dobson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 41-54 (pp. 49-50).

79 Thompson and Taylor, in *Hamlet*, p. 337, n. 28.

scene. There is nothing in either of the other versions of the text to contradict this reading, but it is not made explicit. Thompson and Taylor also observe that Gertrude's 'relative calmness' during *The Murder of Gonzago*, in all versions of the text, and the fact that the Ghost does not speak of her as an accomplice have been seen as evidence that she is not privy to the murder.[80] In the Q2 and Folio versions, Gertrude apparently merely expresses surprise and incomprehension at Hamlet's reference to 'kill[ing] a king' (III.4.27) (though it could be played as a reaction of shock at having been found out), and neither Hamlet nor his mother returns to the subject again. Two of Gertrude's later speeches imply that she feels guilty about something. The first she speaks to Hamlet in the closet scene:

> O Hamlet, speak no more.
> Thou turn'st my eyes into my very soul
> And there I see such black and grieved spots
> As will leave there their tinct. (III.4.86-89)

The second is an aside that directly precedes Ophelia's mad scene:

> To my sick soul, as sin's true nature is,
> Each toy seems prologue to some great amiss,
> So full of artless jealousy is guilt
> It spills itself in fearing to be spilt. (IV.5.20)

It is not clear from the text of what sin Gertrude thinks she is guilty.[81] The two options that are most often considered are murder and adultery. French claims that it is 'strongly suggested that Gertrude had an affair with Claudius while her husband was alive', and in Nunn's production it was decided that 'Gertrude had been having an affair with King Hamlet's more fun, racy

80 Ibid. Helena Faucit Martin, for one, was convinced by these circumstances that Gertrude had nothing to do with the murder; in *On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011 [1885]), she asks herself if the Ghost could have spoken of Gertrude 'so tenderly as he does' if she had been involved in his death; p. 14.

81 T. S. Eliot, who calls *Hamlet* 'an artistic failure' with 'superfluous and inconsistent scenes which even hasty revision should have noticed', argues that while 'the essential emotion of the play is the feeling of a son towards a guilty mother', the mother's guilt is 'very difficult to localize' in the actual text of the play. Hamlet's 'disgust is occasioned by his mother', but 'his mother is not an adequate equivalent for it': but, Eliot argues, it is 'just *because* her character is so negative and insignificant that she arouses in Hamlet the feeling which she is incapable of representing'; 'Hamlet' (1919), in *Selected Essays*, 3rd ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), pp. 141-46 (pp. 143, 144, 145, 146) [emphasis original].

younger brother for some time before Claudius finally got to the point of committing murder'.[82] But Gertrude could very well have less extreme reasons than these to feel guilty. She speaks of her second marriage as 'hasty' in Q2 and as 'o'rehasty' in the Folio, and believes it to be one of the main reasons for her son's 'distemper' (II.2). The first time she mentions the 'black and grieved spots' in her soul, her son has just committed murder. It is possible to read her guilt as blaming herself for Hamlet's development.

According to Janet Suzman, Gertrude is a 'bad' or at least a 'thoughtless' mother, since she shows no understanding for her son's grieving for his father, especially in her line 'Why seems it so particular with thee?':

> Is she pretending to be disingenuous […] or is she a person whose radar is not very efficient? I think the latter; she seems to betray a slow uptake on most things. Clearly she is innocent of any hanky-panky, but still that is a pretty dim reply to a grieving son. (I mean the old king died a most uncommon death, screaming himself to death while having a siesta).[83]

Griffin thinks of Gertrude as 'a passive loving mother and wife who suffers guilt for her sins of the flesh', and suggests that she drinks from the poisoned cup to save Hamlet.[84] Suzman is of the same opinion:

> She just cannot drink *innocently* at this point, it would take from the queen the very last vestige of moral intelligence if she did. No, she must know what she's doing and she must want it by now, her life is so pointless. She must drink to warn Hamlet there's villainy abroad.[85]

Smith, on the other hand, does not think that the text suggests that Gertrude 'is suspicious of the pearl that Claudius drops in Hamlet's wine goblet': 'Gertrude does not drink the wine to protect Hamlet or to kill herself because of her shame; she drinks in her usual direct way to toast Hamlet's success in the fencing match'.[86] Stubbs calls the idea that Gertrude drinks to save Hamlet a 'sentimental reading', and she offers an al-

82 French, p. 147; Stubbs, p. 33.

83 Janet Suzman, *Not Hamlet: Meditations on the Frail Position of Women in Drama* (London: Oberon, 2012), pp. 162-63.

84 Griffin, p. 98.

85 Suzman, p. 184 [emphasis original].

86 Smith, p. 206. It might be added that it would not be a clever way of protecting Hamlet to die and leave him with Claudius, who was the one who tried to poison him. It might also be added that drinking the content of the cup would not be the only way of disposing of it.

ternative explanation: what her Gertrude really meant by 'I will, my lord, I beg you pardon me' was 'Don't humiliate me by telling the whole court you think I'm an alcoholic!'.[87] She had drunk from a bottle hidden in a drawer in earlier scenes, and when saying 'It spills itself in fearing to be spilt' (IV.5.20) she spoke the line with a slight slur and spilt some of her drink. When she had drunk from the poisoned cup she offered it to Hamlet, an action that is implied in the text by Hamlet's line 'I dare not drink yet, madam. By and by' (V.2.276), thus making the drinking impossible to see as an attempt to save him.

In *Gertrude – The Cry*, Howard Barker's portrayal of Gertrude has some things in common with some of the critical and creative interpretations of the character outlined above: she is young, she had an affair with Claudius before her husband died, and she is not a very responsible mother to her teenage son. But most of all, it resembles an extreme version of those traditional readings that see her as 'lusty, lustful' and 'lascivious', to quote Smith.[88] Barker's play definitely sees Gertrude as a sexual subject and Hamlet's worst nightmares about his mother as true; the main character in this appropriation is barely even Gertrude herself but her orgasmic 'cry' of the title. Claudius searches for the cry, which to him is 'more than the woman', who is merely 'the instrument', and he fears that he will not hear it again:

CLAUDIUS Darling I am your hound I am your dog
(*GERTRUDE smiles through her tears…*
his eyes travel over her.)
That skirt
GERTRUDE Yes
CLAUDIUS It's
GERTRUDE Yes
CLAUDIUS It's
(*He thrills to her*.)
GERTRUDE Whatever it is it is for you

CLAUDIUS Fuck
Fuck with me
GERTRUDE No
CLAUDIUS QUICK

87 Stubbs, p. 38. In Nicholas Hytner's 2010 production at the National Theatre, the alcoholism of Clare Higgins' Gertrude had been implied strongly enough to make the audience laugh at Claudius's telling her not to drink.

88 Smith, p. 206.

GERTRUDE No
(*She holds him with a look*.)
Suffer it
[Gertrude leaves; a servant, Cascan, enters.]
CLAUDIUS I haven't heard it
(*Pause. CASCAN stops*.)
CASCAN Heard it?
CLAUDIUS Have you heard it?
I haven't
Not for weeks
(*CASCAN looks bewildered*.)
CASCAN Heard what my lord?
CLAUDIUS THE CRY THE CRY OF COURSE
CASCAN The cry?
CLAUDIUS THE CRY OF GERTRUDE DO NOT BE OBTUSE
(*Pause*.)
CASCAN How should I have heard it my lord if you have not?[89]

When Barker directed the play himself, for The Wrestling School, one reviewer reports having been three minutes late for press night: 'I asked a colleague what I had missed. One fatality, one full-frontal, one sex from behind, he responded like a weary copper on the beat'.[90] The critic, Charles Spencer, continues:

> Shakespeare, [Barker] believes, treated Gertrude unfairly because the Christian tradition in which he wrote obliged him to make her feel a sense of shame. Barker has no such scruples. Gertrude is the heroine of the story as far as he is concerned, fearlessly following her own will and to hell with the consequences. Hamlet, in contrast, is a moralising prig.[91]

According to Barker himself, the play is about 'sexual love', which Hamlet is too young to understand.[92] Given the play's focus on sexuality, Gertrude and Claudius are, in the words of one reviewer of Chris Hislop's 2016 production at Theatre N16, 'confusingly passionless'.[93] As was pointed out

89 Howard Barker, 'Gertrude – The Cry' in *Plays Two* (London: Oberon, 2006), pp. 79-175 (scene 5, pp. 106-07) [emphases original].

90 Charles Spencer, *The Daily Telegraph* 26 October 2002, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 2002, p. 1419.

91 Ibid.

92 Howard Barker, personal interview, 2 April 2014.

93 David Ralf, '*Gertrude – The Cry* Review at Theatre N16, London – "Oddly Passionless"', *The Stage* 15 June 2016 <https://www.thestage.co.uk/reviews/2016/gertrude-the-cry-review-at-theatre-n16-london/> [accessed 21 January 2017].

in another review of Hislop's production, while Barker's Gertrude is emancipated and 'in control', she has no personality outside her sexuality.[94] According to Robert Shore, 'Barker's Gertrude is the very antithesis of her Shakespearean forebear: impervious to guilt and glorifying in her *crime passionel*, she strips and demands sex with Claudius even as her poisoned husband lies dying before her'.[95] Fiona Mountford observes that 'for a play which aims to reprioritise the female in an overwhelmingly phallocentric text, it is strange that only Gertrude gets her kit off', and says that Victoria Wicks (who played Gertrude in Barker's production) 'frequently stripped to the bone, commands sympathy, if not always how Barker envisaged'.[96]

In *Gertrude – The Cry*, Gertrude is an active agent in the murder of her husband and in the initiation of her relationship with Claudius. This fits in well with what Shakespeare's Hamlet implies that he believes has happened, but not necessarily with what Shakespeare's text suggests. It may perhaps be said that the 'Did it happen?' question that this play asks is 'Did Gertrude experience guilt?', and that the answer is 'Yes, in Shakespeare's play she does, but no, in this reimagined version she does not'. Whether or not Gertrude is an accomplice in her husband's murder or whether she is a particularly lustful person cannot be seen as questions in this context; they are unquestioned assumptions on which Barker's play is based.

In Betts's *Ophelia Thinks Harder*, too, Gertrude was aware of the murder of her husband from the beginning. When Hamlet calls his mother an 'ageing harlot' and Claudius a 'tub of sweating lard', she replies by telling him the circumstances of his father's death:

> My dear, sweet, only son – I think there are one or two things you need to know.
>
> First, your father. He was an ignorant bully, a cowardly cheat, a bloodthirsty killer, a thoroughly useless husband and a damaging and dangerous father – a fact which you sadly prove. He was *not* a noble warrior and saint – and why you should indulge in this post-mortem adoration when you couldn't stand him when he was alive, I simply can't imagine. Though I've heard [']tis common.

94 Sara Malik, 'Review: Gertrude – The Cry, Theatre N16', A Younger Theatre <http://www.ayoungertheatre.com/review-gertrude-the-cry-theatre-n16/> [accessed 21 January 2017].

95 Robert Shore, *Time Out* 30 October 2002, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 2002, p. 1421.

96 Fiona Mountford, *The Evening Standard* 25 October 2002, in *Theatre Record* July-Dec 2002, pp. 1421-22.

> Second; yes, Claudius killed your father, with the full approval of myself and 90% of his tyrannised subjects. His incessant war-mongering, and in particular, his nasty habit of murdering other people's fathers, has brought us to the brink of disaster.
>
> Third; Claudius is a man who could avert that disaster. He is wise, sensible, diplomatic, decisive – and by marrying him, he becomes King and can guide our state safely through these troubled times.
>
> [---]
>
> Fourth – I actually love this man dearly, and have done for years. It may come as a shock to you, little boy, but a lot of people over 30 fondle each other. Oh yes, Claudius and I take our clothes off, heave our misshapen, wrinkly carcasses into bed and HAVE SEX; on a fairly regular basis. We have the effrontery to desire each other and actually don't care that this upsets *you*. We make love in the bed, on the floor, in the bath, in the garden, on the beach, on the banqueting table – and we are inconsiderate enough not to give a *shit* what drivelling adolescents like you think. There. (Scene 7, pp. 55-56) [emphases original]

This appropriation, then, introduces the new condition that old Hamlet was an unsuitable ruler and that his son did not care much for him when he was alive, idolising him only after his death. There is nothing in *Hamlet* that contradicts this, no evidence that Hamlet had a close relationship with his father, and it is the kind of invention that spectators/readers of Betts's play may carry with them to Shakespeare's; if they did, it would have quite significant implications for their interpretations of *Hamlet*.[97]

Shakespeare's Hamlet plans to do exactly what Claudius has done: kill a family member and take over the crown himself. Hamlet does not plan to kill Claudius solely for personal gain, but to avenge his father; in *Ophelia Thinks Harder*, it is suggested that Claudius might also have had a not entirely selfish reason (to protect Gertrude from an unpleasant husband

97 French wonders what old Hamlet can have done to deserve the severe punishment he describes to his son, even taking the fact that he died without a chance to repent into account; p. 146. She also remarks that Claudius has some redeeming features and does not at first seem to fit Hamlet's and the Ghost's unfavourable descriptions: 'Claudius opens [I.2] with mixed grief for death and joy for marriage […]. He proceeds to state business with authority, intelligence, and benevolence of manner. He is not a king debilitated by lack of assurance, intelligence, or corrupted by egoism. He is concerned with the welfare of his country, seeking peaceful means to secure it. He is generous to Laertes and kind to Hamlet. He maintains his equanimity even after Hamlet's surly response to him[.] [---] Claudius is a good ruler; he loves his wife and is patient and kind with her difficult son'; p. 149.

and/or saving the country from ruin). In *Gesta Danorum*, it is made clear that Feng is lying when he claims to have wanted to protect his sister-in-law and that this makes his crime even worse – but if he had been telling the truth, the same reasoning would have applied to him. This thought experiment opens up the possibility of reading *Hamlet* as *Macbeth* seen from Malcolm's point of view, or *Macbeth* as *Hamlet* seen from Claudius and Gertrude's point of view. As it is, *Hamlet* is not seen from Gertrude's perspective, and we do not know very much about her.

Gertrude – The Cry and *Ophelia Thinks Harder* both give Gertrude the opportunity to tell her own version of the story, but they do so with the assumption that she is guilty of the murder of her husband. Rather than showing her as a more sympathetic and more ordinary person than traditional readings of her suggest, as more of a victim and less of a villain, misrepresented by Hamlet and his father's ghost, they try to justify the actions and personality traits of which Hamlet accuses her. Interpretations of Shakespeare's Gertrude in criticism and in the theatre may have taken a new direction during the last few decades, but that is apparently not reflected in stage appropriations of the play.

'To be, or not to be': The Question

Hamlet is (among many things) about being and not being – not only in the sense of life and death, but how things can seem to be one way and really be another, and perhaps also how mutually exclusive alternatives can seem to co-exist: Hamlet is both a child, an adolescent and a mature man; Gertrude is both guilty and innocent; Hamlet is both sane and mad; the ghost is both 'a spirit of health' and a 'goblin damned'.

The question of what the Ghost is is a particularly important one, at least to Hamlet. The apparition itself claims that he is the ghost of the dead king, and that he has come from Purgatory, which was a common conception of ghosts in Shakespeare's day. Regardless of Shakespeare's much-debated possible Catholic affiliation, Hamlet's status as a student at Wittenberg connects him to Protestantism, and as a Protestant it is fair to assume that he does not believe in the Catholic concept of Purgatory. He therefore has good reason to suspect the apparition of being something other than his dead father, possibly an evil spirit sent to him by the devil to trick him into murdering an innocent man. If he is to accept that the apparition is indeed the ghost of his father, he has to re-evaluate his entire worldview.

Hamlet's failure to 'make up his mind', then, is not only a question of his hesitant nature or of weighing the pros and cons of killing Claudius – it is also a question of being torn between trusting his own senses and gut feeling, or trusting his belief system. Even though he has seen the apparition himself and is quite ready to believe in supernatural phenomena, the implications of starting to believe in ghosts, as opposed to other kinds of spirits, are enormous.[98]

The to-be-or-not-to-be of the Ghost takes an idiosyncratic turn in the third of Perry Pontac's parodies, *Hamlet, Part II*. At the beginning of Pontac's sequel to *Hamlet*, all Shakespeare's characters are supposedly dead. Pontac's character Seltazar returns to Elsinore after spending some time abroad, and, greeting Fornia, enquires after Hamlet:

FORNIA	(*With difficulty.*) Hamlet, my lord… is dead.
	(*Pause*.)
SELTAZAR	(*Shocked*.) What? Hamlet dead?
	Alas! but how came he to die?
FORNIA	Young Hamlet died in duelling, gentle sir.
	He fought the young Laertes, also dead.
SELTAZAR	(*Appalled*.) Laertes dead?
FORNIA	A corpse who even now
	Is freshly festering in a nearby grave
	With all the zest of youth.
[…]	
SELTAZAR	The fair Ophelia?
FORNIA	*Foul* Ophelia, sir.
	For she lies decomposing, though her wits
	Rotted before her. [']Twas her father's death.
[…]	
SELTAZAR	How tragic for the Queen.
FORNIA	Gertrude, I fear, has passed beyond such pain,
	Plucked off by poison from the King's own hand.
SELTAZAR	Is't possible? King Claudius, he who reigns?
FORNIA	Who *reigned*, my friend, for he is quite reigned out.
	Young Hamlet too hath heaved him up to Heaven.
SELTAZAR	And Hamlet's father?

98 I owe this insight to Ben Naylor, who gave a plenary lecture on *Hamlet* I.1 from a performance perspective at the British Graduate Shakespeare Conference in 2015. See also Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). Thompson and Taylor suggest that 'Hamlet's immediate use of the familiar *thou* rather than the more formal *you*' on meeting the Ghost could perhaps '[indicate] a dismissive scepticism, whereas "you" would indicate his acceptance that the Ghost is indeed his father'; p. 206, n. 40.

FORNIA Deader than the rest:
He died before the killing had begun.
He's now a ghost, and often can be heard
Intoning on these very battlements.[99]

In this way, Pontac plays on the famously high body count at the end of *Hamlet*, and then goes on to draw attention to the fact that *Hamlet* is not the only one among Shakespeare's tragedies to end in a large number of deaths, as Fornia suggests that Macbeth, a very distant relative of Hamlet, might become the new king of Denmark:

SELTAZAR (*Shaken*.) Alas! You say, 'Macbeth'?
I have been late in Scotland, and I fear
Macbeth is dead.
FORNIA (*Her hopes blasted*.) Macbeth dead? Can it be?
SELTAZAR Past doubting. (*With interest*.) [']Twas a very curious
death:
Slain by a forest, so the people say,
From Birnam come to far-off Dunsiane.
FORNIA (*Scornfully*) Slain by a *florist*? A wretched death indeed.
[…]
SELTAZAR Not 'florist' – nay but 'forest'; though indeed
'Florist' doth seem the likelier of the two.
FORNIA (*Suddenly hopeful again*) And of his wife? He had a wife, I
trow:
Lady Macbeth.
SELTAZAR Ay, 'Jocelyn' by name.
She first went mad, then died, so no luck there.
(*Forestalling further inquiries*.) And Duncan too,
and Banquo. Ask no more. (22-23)

As it turns out, however, the King, allegedly '[d]eader than the rest', is not really dead at all: it was a trick to persuade Hamlet to take revenge on Claudius for having made an attempt on the King's life:

THE KING (*Sepulchrally*) I am the ghost of Hamlet's father, dead
These past few weeks, doomed to traverse these walls
Alarming passers-by with hideous sounds
And ghastly sightings. Or, to be precise,

99 Perry Pontac, 'Hamlet, Part II', in *Codpieces: A Triple Bill* (London: Oberon, 2012), pp. 13-37 (pp. 18-19) [emphasis original]. Subsequent references will be to this edition and given parenthetically in the text.

I am young Hamlet's father – but no ghost.
I speak in a bizarre sepulchral tone
And wear this curious armour phosphorescent
And creaking chain mail merely for effect.
(*Dropping his ghostly manner; sadly*.) I am not dead,
though full of years and woes.

FORNIA (*Meekly but pedantically.*) I do not wish to contradict a king,
Especially a late lamented one,
But rumour hath it and all men declare
That 'sleeping within your orchard…'

THE KING (*Interrupting, bored with the story*.) '…I received
A drop or two of poison in my ear,
Poured by my treacherous brother Claudius.'
So the whole ear of Denmark is abused:
Mine never was. For know that Claudius,
Reeling with drink as ever was his way,
In error poured the leprous distilment
Onto the wrong end of my sleeping form,
Anointing thus my ankles and my toes
Which chafe unto this day. (*FORNIA gasps in surprise*.)
I feigned my death.
And had another buried in my place. (30-31)

The Ghost in this version, then, is not a ghost but a living person. He returns on the scene, the only survivor of Shakespeare's play. Here, the answer to the question 'Did it happen?' is 'No, Hamlet's father did not die'. Instead, he was even present at his own funeral, wearing a 'disguise impenetrable', that of a woman dressed in black:

THE KING The ceremony o'er, I changed my garb,
Disguised myself as a perturbéd spirit
To stride these battlements in my grim attire,
Groaning and clanking in the midnight hour,
The better to incite my son's revenge
[']Gainst his incestuous uncle. Which, in time,
After some hesitation, he effected.
(*Sadly*.) A mixed success, for everyone was killed. (31)

The King is alive and has every intention of continuing to rule Denmark, but Seltazar has other plans, as the King finds out:

THE KING (*Angrily*.) O, Seltazar, thou vile, ambitious cur!
Insidious slave and rude rebellious hind!
Although it be against all courtesy,
Your whole soliloquy I overheard
And Jove be praised I did. You thought to swear
False fealty and then to steal my life. (34)

The ring which Seltazar and Fornia have just kissed as a pledge of allegiance to the King was poisoned. When Seltazar learns this, he stabs the King to death but then, too late, repents and confesses to Fornia that once he had married her and they jointly had taken power in Denmark he planned to kill her and marry a more beautiful woman instead. The end of Pontac's play returns to the Shakespearean tragic convention that 'everybody dies at the end', concluding with a dying speech from Fornia:

FORNIA Farewell, deceitful, trustless Seltazar.
All men are false, I see. Their watery vows
Lead but to grief and baffle our estate:
A timely lesson learnt, alas, too late.
Yet Death doth strangely suit the tragic scene:
To be is not to be, but to have been. (37)

As in *Fatal Loins: Romeo and Juliet Reconsidered*, Pontac temporarily subverts Shakespeare's ending, only to bring everything back to the status quo at the end of his own play.

The soliloquy 'To be, or not to be' itself is generally seen as the highlight of any performance of *Hamlet* – so much so, in fact, that it is a commonplace among actors and directors that audiences tend to stop listening and are jolted out of the world of the play, instead beginning to focus on judging how well the actor performs the soliloquy or how well they themselves can remember the words. The challenge for the director and the performer is to find a way to make the audience hear the soliloquy as if for the first time. It is not unusual to move it to another point in the play, or to add some unexpected stage business.[100] In Grandage's production, Jude Law's Hamlet spoke the soliloquy during a snow storm; and in Janet Suzman's 2006 production, which was part of the Complete Works season and played first at the Baxter Theatre Centre in Cape Town, followed by a small

100 Few productions opt for using the strikingly dissimilar and shorter version of the soliloquy from Q1.

number of performances at the Swan, the passage was, in the words of one critic, performed while 'undertaking a session of Chinese-style exercises'.[101]

In Nunn's production, the soliloquy was preceded by a scene where Hamlet finds Ophelia dancing to loud disco music and they have an inaudible argument (the encounter Ophelia would later tell Polonius had occurred 'as [she] was sewing in [her] closet' [II.1.74]). The next scene found Hamlet sitting on a bench, putting a bottle of pills, a water bottle and a penknife beside him before starting the soliloquy, accompanied by singing birds. One review pointed out that this Hamlet was 'not being existential' but 'terrified'.[102] At 'To die…', he prepared to swallow the pills, but when he got to 'sicklied o'er' he put them back into the bottle, closed the penknife, and screwed the top back onto the water bottle. In Frankcom's production, Hamlet spoke the soliloquy after the closet scene, covered in Polonia's blood. At the end of the soliloquy, he turned the gun he was holding on himself, but was interrupted by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and with a bathetic 'O, here they come' (IV.2.2) hastily lay down on the floor, resuming his mad act.[103] In Peter Brook's 2000 Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord production, 'To be, or not to be' was repositioned to IV.4, just before Hamlet sets off for England. Lyndsey Turner's production originally placed the soliloquy at the very beginning of the play. The idea was criticised, however, and it was moved so that it replaced the third 'except my life' (II.2.212).

In Derek Jacobi's 1988 production for the Renaissance Theatre Company, Kenneth Branagh's Hamlet spoke the soliloquy at the conventional moment but directly to Sophie Thompson's Ophelia, making her betrayal of him more poignant and planting the idea of suicide as a possibility in her mind. In Steven Pimlott's production, Kerry Condon's Ophelia was on stage when Samuel West's Hamlet entered. Taking no notice of her, he walked past her downstage, where he delivered the soliloquy, and then made it obvious that he had known she was there all along by 'whispering' 'Soft you now, / The fair Ophelia!' (III.1.87-88) to the audience without turning around. In John Caird's 2000-01 production at the National, Cathryn Bradshaw's Ophelia also stayed on stage during the soliloquy; Simon Russell Beale, who played Hamlet, notes that it is no coincidence

101 Quentin Letts, *The Daily Mail* 4 May 2006, in *Theatre Record* Jan-June 2006, p. 523.

102 Sands, in *Theatre Record* Jan-June 2004, p. 554.

103 This production used the version of the text created for Grandage's production. Cf. Steven Pimlott's 2001 RSC production, where Samuel West's Hamlet contemplated shooting himself during 'O that this too too sallied [/solid/sullied] flesh would melt' (129-59), but was saved by Horatio.

that the scene which follows 'To be, or not to be' 'involve[s] the only person in the play who (probably) commits suicide'.[104]

In *Ophelia Thinks Harder*, it is not Hamlet but Ophelia who speaks the soliloquy, after having drunk a 'herbal tonic' prepared by three suffragette witches and 'vomit[ed] noisily' (scene 4, p. 29). Furthermore, the middle of the soliloquy has been altered:

> For who would put up with the whips, the scorns, the pain,
> the pangs, the cramps, the sweats, the spurns, the burdens,
> the agonies of life, when you could easily end it all with a sharp fruit knife?
> […] (Scene 4, p. 29)

The mere fact that the words have been changed (and that the iambic pentameter is momentarily abandoned) may make an audience listen more attentively, but the focus is also moved from stressing that all the problems mentioned are experienced by men to talking about more typically female afflictions. The language is furthermore modernised and simplified, to leave the audience in no doubt of what Ophelia is talking about, and the mention of such an everyday household object as a fruit knife creates a comic effect.

As previously mentioned, Hamlet is not the only character in Shakespeare's play who is associated with suicide: even though Gertrude speaks of Ophelia's drowning as accidental, the possibility of her having intentionally drowned herself is always present – especially as drowning has traditionally been the preferred suicide method of women. According to Showalter, water and fluidity were associated with 'the feminine' in the Renaissance.[105] The gravediggers claim Ophelia's death to have been self-inflicted, and Hamlet says that the 'maimed rites' of her funeral imply that she 'did with desperate hand / Fordo [her] own life' (V.1.208-10). While it is one of the central unanswered questions about Ophelia, the actress playing her does not necessarily have to decide how Ophelia dies, as it does not inform anything she does on stage (apart from any suicidal tendencies as forming part of her mental illness). The person who has to know how it happened, or at least how much she herself knows about it, is of course Gertrude.

As Ophelia is usually described as a passive character, it is interesting that, while Hamlet only pretends to become mad and thinks about killing himself, these things actually happen to Ophelia: she genuinely goes mad and commits suicide. While these acts are of course destructive and at least

104 Russel Beale, 'Hamlet', p. 169.
105 Showalter, p. 81.

one of them involuntary, it sheds new light on the story to see them as evidence of Ophelia's agency in comparison with Hamlet. The difference between how much Hamlet's and Ophelia's respective madness and suicide have been commented on by critics can be connected to how much more seriously Polonius takes Hamlet's madness than Ophelia's in *Ophelia Thinks Harder* (scene 5, pp. 38-39). In this play, however, Ophelia's madness is only temporary; it is not Ophelia who finally loses her mind and drowns, but her maidservant, who has been frightened out of her wits by the ghosts of Polonius and Joan of Arc. As the maid is dressed in Ophelia's clothes, everyone assumes that the disfigured body is hers; Ophelia is therefore free to escape her old home unsought, to disguise herself as a boy and gain employment with the travelling players. Here, the answer to the question 'Did it happen?' is 'No, Ophelia did not die'.

'I do not know, my lord, what I should think': Ophelia

The state of being over-dependent on another person for instruction and being unable to form one's own opinions is sometimes referred to as the 'Ophelia syndrome', based on the following dialogue in *Hamlet*:

POLONIUS	[…]
	Do you believe his 'tenders', as you call them?
OPHELIA	I do not know, my lord, what I should think.
POLONIUS	Marry, I will teach you; think yourself a baby
	[…] (I.3.102-04)

Ophelia's apparent lack of psychological independence and her line 'I do not know […] what I should think' form the basis for Betts's appropriation *Ophelia Thinks Harder*. The play shows what might have happened if Ophelia had instead received the advice Polonius gives to Laertes: 'to thine own self be true' (I.3).[106] This Ophelia starts like Shakespeare's, not know-

106 Walter comments on the discrepancy of how Polonius speaks to his two children about their respective 'selves' within the same scene, telling Laertes to be true to himself and Ophelia that she does not understand herself: 'Young men should learn to fend for themselves in life's battles, gaining confidence through experience, whereas women must be kept in fear and ignorance of their very natures'; *Brutus and Other Heroines*, p. 7. The chapter on Ophelia in *Brutus and Other Heroines* is based on a section of the chapter 'The Psychological Key', in Harriet Walter, *Other People's Shoes: Thoughts on Acting* (London: Nick Hern, 2003 [1999]), pp. 144-52.

ing what to think, but thinks harder and decides to be true to herself.

Shakespeare's Ophelia has often been described as a character without much personality of her own. According to Bamber, it is a mistake to see Ophelia's and Gertrude's 'neutrality' as 'a character trait'; rather, they are functional characters who are there to 'advance the plot' and 'take on the coloration of the play's moods'.[107] This analysis is not helpful to actors, however. Helen Faucit felt strongly about Ophelia and wrote of her as possessing more character than she was usually credited with at the time: 'It hurts me to hear her spoken of, as she often is, as a weak creature, wanting in truthfulness, in purpose, in force of character, and only interesting when she loses the little wits she had'.[108] Ellen Terry, who generally saw Shakespeare's female characters as courageous and strong, thought that the 'whole tragedy' of Ophelia's life 'is that she is afraid; I think I am right in saying she is Shakespeare's only timid heroine'.[109] According to Rosenberg, performances of Ophelia can, like performances of Gertrude, be divided into two opposite extremes: in this case, the 'sweet Ophelia' – 'naïve and fresh', 'confused' and 'submissive' – and the less common 'power Ophelia' – 'individualistic and sophisticated', 'intelligent' and 'rebel[lious]'.[110]

Is Ophelia a weak or a strong character? And which of these readings is more conducive to a feminist performance? Attempts to depart from conventional interpretations by portraying her as strong may be seen as conflicting with the text, and her character's function in the story makes no sense if she does not become a victim. However, actresses have long tried to negotiate this problem and to accommodate a multidimensional Ophelia within the confines of the play. Frances Barber, who played Ophelia in Ron Daniel's 1984 RSC production, remembers a discussion on the subject with the director at an early stage of rehearsals:

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107 Bamber, p. 77.

108 Faucit Martin, p. 4.

109 Ellen Terry, *Four Lectures on Shakespeare*, ed. with an introduction by Christopher St. John (London: Martin Hopkinson, 1932), p. 165.

110 Rosenberg, *The Masks of* Hamlet, pp. 238-39. Rosenberg stresses that there should be balance and compatibility between Ophelia and Hamlet: an Ophelia that is either too insipid or too forceful may, according to Rosenberg, not be a believable love interest for Hamlet, and if she seems 'silly, cheap, stupid or tartish' Rosenberg considers her not 'worthy' of Hamlet's love and that this 'statement about his taste […] diminishes his quality'; pp. 237-38. More relevantly, Rosenberg observes that Hamlet would probably not have written that style of love letter, 'with its ironic touch', if the recipient had been unintelligent or humourless; p. 243.

'She's full of humour and wit and intelligence, she's strong, courageous, emotionally open. She shows her independence when she gives Hamlet his "remembrances" back, she stands up to her father, she…'

'Frankie, you can't play her as a feminist, it's not in the text.'

'Oh but it is, Ron, oh but it is.' (I had done my justification research rather thoroughly.)

'Why does she go mad, then?'

'Because she's the only person in the play who sees what's going on.'

'And?'

'And she's full of guilt for not having been able to prevent it.'

'And?'

'And she's full of remorse for her father's death.'

'And?'

'And she blames herself for Hamlet's prejudice against women.'

'And?'

'And she's guilt-ridden, Ron! She's utterly guilt-ridden, like every woman I know; and she's culpable to a point because she knew Claudius and Polonius were spying on Hamlet but she didn't warn him. And she knows he's physically attracted to her and she sort of encourages it.'[111]

It has to be pointed out that playing a character 'as a feminist' is not the same as giving a feminist performance. Ultimately, the director's overarching choices are likely to have more impact than the actress's individual choices on whether the role has a feminist function in the play as a whole. Roberta Baker, however, argues that Barber's performance *was* feminist, because, whereas the text of *Hamlet* apparently 'suggests that women do *not* make sense or follow logical courses of action', Barber 'pulled Stanislavskian clarity out of this apparent chaos': 'Her through-line from

111 Frances Barber, 'Ophelia', in *Players of Shakespeare* 2, ed. Russell Jackson and Robert Smallwood (Cambridge, New York & Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 137-49 (pp. 139-40). The conception of Ophelia as a Cassandra-like figure, who loses her mind because she can see just how corrupt the society in which she lives is, is by no means without precedent, and can be one particularly conducive to a feminist reading of the play; see Rosenberg, *The Masks of* Hamlet, p. 243.

rebellion to slow assimilation of male abuse to madness was eminently logical', and her conception of Ophelia as 'a victim, not of her own inherent frailty or pathology, but of masculine oppression' was likely to 'make sense to women in the audience, because it reflected a process familiar to contemporary feminine experience'.[112] One reviewer called Barber's Ophelia 'earthily intelligent', another 'a spirited and passionate girl whose mind is turned as much by frustration as by the death of her father', and a third thought that she 'shares Hamlet's vision of disaster and watches helplessly the disintegration of the court, her own family and the Prince before her sanity deserts her'.[113] Barber had seen Richard Eyre's production at the Royal Court four years earlier and thought that Harriet Walter's performance as Ophelia 'dispelled any traditional images of the weak, stupid girl which may have been lurking in the minds of the audience'.[114] Interestingly, however, Walter's approach to the part was in some respects very different from Barber's.

According to Walter, Eyre wanted to show Ophelia as 'an intelligent girl locked in her mind by the oppressive rules of the establishment'; but, unlike Barber, Walter thought that 'the seeds of Ophelia's madness had been sown long before the play started, by the workings of a cold, repressive environment on an already susceptible mind'.[115] As a way of gaining insight into Ophelia's mental illness, she studied the psychiatrist R. D. Laing's writings about schizophrenia, specifically case studies of 'young schizophrenic women, and the mechanisms by which their families inadvertently contributed to their disorder'.[116] Laing himself was convinced that Ophelia's madness should be read as schizophrenia:

112 Roberta Baker, *Early Modern Tragedy, Gender and Performance, 1984-2000* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 45 [emphasis original].

113 Victoria Radin, *The New Statesman* 14 September 1984, in *Theatre Record* Jul-Dec 1984, p. 777; Rosemary Say, *The Sunday Telegraph* 9 September 1984, in *Theatre Record* Jul-Dec 1984, pp. 776-77 (p. 776); Michael Ratcliffe, *The Observer* 9 September 1984, in *Theatre Record* Jul-Dec 1984, p. 778.

114 Barber, p. 137.

115 Walter, *Brutus and Other Heroines*, pp. 3, 5.

116 Ibid., p. 5. It should be noted that Laing's approach to schizophrenia is widely regarded as controversial.

> Clinically she is latterly undoubtedly a schizophrenic. In her madness, there is no one there. She is not a person. There is no integral selfhood expressed through her actions or utterances. Incomprehensible statements are said by nothing. She has already died. There is now only a vacuum where there was once a person.[117]

When reading Shakespeare's text informed by real-life accounts of schizophrenia, Walter 'started to hear the other characters' words from Ophelia's point of view, as traps and ambushes, and as means of controlling her mind'.[118] In Walter's reading, Ophelia does not have any strong sense of self to begin with: 'She has depended on Hamlet and her brother and father for what flimsy self-definition she has. The one has just denounced her as a whore, the second is abroad and the third is about to be murdered by the first'.[119] Both Barber and Walter, who have both later come to be known as 'feminist actresses' and who were both at the time in their first professional Shakespearean role, saw the oppressive, male-dominated environment of the play as central to Ophelia's plight, and both worked on the assumption that she was an intelligent person of whose personality and life psychologically naturalistic sense could be made; but whereas Barber's Ophelia started as a vivacious, independent young person, Walter's was already from the beginning psychologically and emotionally vulnerable.

In Simon Godwin's 2016 RSC production, it was decided that Ophelia, played by Natalie Simpson, should start as a happy and confident young woman who came from a loving family and had a good, healthy relationship with her father and brother, since that would make for a steeper descent into grief and madness. Godwin also planned to reassign some of Polonius's lines to Ophelia to make the part bigger, including the device of having Polonius make Ophelia read Hamlet's love letter out loud to Claudius and Gertrude. However, it was felt that Polonius's humiliating his daughter in such a cruel way would not be compatible with the strong father-daughter bond that the production wanted to show, and this par-

117 R. D. Laing, *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1960), p. 212, n. 1. According to Showalter, the tendency of twentieth-century criticism and performance to read Ophelia's madness as schizophrenia is partly 'because the schizophrenic woman has become the cultural icon on dualistic femininity in the mid-twentieth century as the erotomaniac was in the seventeenth and the hysteric in the nineteenth'; pp. 90-91.

118 Walter, *Brutus and Other Heroines*, p. 7.

119 Ibid., p. 9.

ticular plan was therefore abandoned.[120] In David Farr's 2013 RSC production, however, Polonius did make Ophelia read the letter out loud. Pippa Nixon's Ophelia was obviously oppressed by Robin Soans' strict and serious Polonius, whom she seemed afraid of and anxious to obey. In II.1, she rushed in to tell her father of Hamlet's 'mad' behaviour some twenty lines earlier than usual, while Polonius was giving instructions to Reynaldo, causing him to lose his train of thought. 'What was I about to say?' (II.1.49), which is often played in an endearingly naturalistic way, was spoken as a reproach to Ophelia, who had to sit down and wait until Reynaldo had left and not interrupt her father.

This kind of dominating, patriarchal Polonius has developed in the theatre as an alternative to the more common comic one – some productions have even implied an incestuous relationship between Polonius and Ophelia or, more often, between Laertes and Ophelia – and critics have seen her father's and brother's oppression of Ophelia as a contributing factor to her madness, viewed either as a mimetic representation of mental illness or as a symbol of revolt against patriarchy. Diane Elizabeth Dreher, for example, sees Polonius's and Laertes's warnings in I.3 as the trigger behind Ophelia's descent into madness. Dreher argues that girls are often brought up 'with an emphasis on empathy rather than autonomy' and therefore 'tend to subordinate their own needs to those of others' and prioritise 'external expectations' over 'personal feelings', which may, as in Ophelia's case, lead to a 'crisis of identity'.[121] According to Dreher, Ophelia at the beginning of the play is 'a healthy young woman with romantic feelings and a normal level of sexual awareness'.[122] But when her male family members, whom she trusts, 'warn her repeatedly to defend her honor, her virginity', and little by little convince her that Hamlet does not really love her and that 'men's sexual passions are fearful things, transforming them into beasts', her 'dream of love lies shattered at her feet'.[123]

Paradoxically in view of the dominating attitude of Polonius and Laertes in I.3 and Ophelia's reference to not knowing what to think, this is also the

120 Royal Shakespeare Company, 'Unwrapped: Hamlet', onstage demonstration with Natalie Simpson, Cyril Nri, Anna Girvan et al., 30 July 2016, Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon.

121 Diane Elizabeth Dreher, *Domination and Defiance: Fathers and Daughters in Shakespeare* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1986), p. 77.

122 Ibid.

123 Ibid., pp. 78-81.

scene that presents the most evidence for a spirited, independently thinking Ophelia. In performance, contemporary Ophelias often respond to both Laertes's and Polonius's warnings with an air of blasé impatience, sometimes even rolling her eyes, or a mixture of excitement at the idea that Hamlet might have a sexual interest in her and embarrassment at her brother and father's referring to it.[124] Dreher sees Ophelia's admonishing Laertes not to 'as some ungracious pastors do / Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven / Whiles, a puffed and reckless libertine, / Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads / And recks not his own rede' (46-50) as evidence that 'Ophelia realizes that not all male authority figures practice what they preach' but 'recognizes the ugly reality of hypocrisy'.[125] In performance, while retaining the sense of independent thinking that the speech conveys, Ophelias often deliver this retort in a playful, off-hand way. An example of this is Mariah Gale's Ophelia, who in Doran's film version produces a couple of packets of condoms from Laertes's suitcase when referring to the 'primrose path of dalliance', showing her relaxed attitude to the discussion, while Edward Bennett's Laertes, on the other hand, is visibly embarrassed. The subsequent conversation between Ophelia and Polonius is also often played in a more light-hearted way than readings such as Dreher's suggest. Sometimes, however, the text is interpreted rather freely to achieve this, as when Natalie Simpson's Ophelia punningly whipped out a T-shirt with the letters H and O and a heart on the front, a home-made present from Hamlet, as an example of the 'honourable *fashion*' in which Hamlet had importuned her. Nonetheless, the text supports many other interpretations than Ophelia's being totally dependent on her father. 'I do not know, my lord, what I should think' could be read as simply a diplomatic answer to a nosy and overprotective parent, or as genuinely not knowing what to make of the situation without any implication that she wishes her father to advise her.

Interestingly, it is the aspects of Ophelia's personality for which she has been censured by previous generations of critics and which have earlier been glossed over in performance that are now often emphasised by actors and may be felt to be the redeeming features of an otherwise all too 'perfect' and bland character. Seen from a strict moral perspective, Ophelia is certainly not perfect: she does not keep her promise to Laertes, but instant-

124 This describes, for example, Samantha Whittaker's Ophelia's reaction.
125 Dreher, p. 79.

ly tells Polonius what her brother has said to her, and she lies to Hamlet when she says that her father is at home – though both these offences could be caused by prioritising the more important duty of obeying her father. Walter connects Ophelia's apparent inability to keep secrets to schizophrenia: 'To keep a secret is a means of preserving the self. It is proof to the keeper that they own a private self that cannot be reached'.[126] Even when Ophelia tries to keep the secret that her father is eavesdropping on her and Hamlet, the attempt is unsuccessful in Walter's reading: 'When Hamlet suddenly springs on Ophelia, "*Where's your father*?", the girl who cannot keep a secret feels transparent and replies, "*At home, my lord*", a little too quickly'.[127] Faucit did not think Ophelia could be blamed for her lie: 'What can she do but stammer out in reply, "At home, my lord"? Shall she expose the old man, when thus called to answer for him, to the insults, the violence of Hamlet's mad anger, which she fears would have fallen upon him had she told the truth?'[128]

In performance, the nunnery scene, like the closet scene and the scene in *Romeo and Juliet* where Capulet tries to persuade his daughter to marry Paris, practically always contains physical violence. The text and stage directions of the nunnery scene ask for it even less than the other two scenes, and yet Hamlet's misogynist and abusive words seem to invite actions to match them.[129] Sometimes, he gets violent only after he has realised that Polonius is watching them, as part of his 'mad' act – this is sometimes thought to be a mitigating circumstance for Hamlet, but it does not make the situation easier to handle for Ophelia. Adrian Noble's 1992 RSC production (and the 1993 transfer to the Barbican) is an interesting exception to the prevalent performance practice of the nunnery scene. Kenneth Branagh's Hamlet, apparently genuinely upset after his soliloquy, literally threw himself into the arms of Joanne Pearce's Ophelia, who held and comforted him until she suddenly left him sitting on the floor to fetch his 'remembrances'. There was a sense that they had had an equal, loving relationship and that he saw her as the only one he could trust in a crazy world, and that now that he needed

126 Walter, *Brutus and Other Heroines*, p. 6.

127 Ibid., p. 9.

128 Faucit Martin, p. 18.

129 Russell Beale states that Ophelia is so 'vulnerable and hurt that it's quite difficult to be a bastard. In rehearsal, you would have to go and apologize to people afterward […]. You have to do some fairly brutal things, especially to the women. Actually, I don't understand Hamlet's misogyny'; Wolf, p. 7.

her the most she was, effectively, breaking up with him. When he realised that they were being spied on, rather than going into mad mode, he broke down weeping on the floor, heartbroken that she had betrayed him. Throughout the scene, this Hamlet was torn between love and anger, and Ophelia was torn between love and sticking to her father's plan. It was not a display for the spies, nor an abusive confrontation. There was some shouting, pushing and violent kissing, but it was not brutal or humiliating, and neither of the two participants seemed in control of the situation. Rather, they were both victims of the older generation's scheming.

Not present in any earlier versions of the Hamlet myth, Ophelia is entirely Shakespeare's own invention; nor is she present in Barker's or Cargill Thompson's appropriations. It is a small part even in Shakespeare's play: with 4% of the entire text and appearing alive in five scenes and dead in one, Ophelia is scarcely a larger role than Cordelia, and she plays a less central part in the action as a whole. In *Enter the Body*, Carol Chillington Rutter shows how three major film versions from the last century – Laurence Olivier's (1947), Grigori Kozintsev's (1964), and Franco Zeffirelli's (1990) – all employ a male perspective. All three films 'expand' the role visually, by adding the scene where Hamlet barges in on her sewing and the scene where she drowns, but 'diminish' the role's subjectivity by filming her in an objectifying way – 'Always, Ophelia's is a body to be watched' – by placing the focus on Hamlet instead of on Ophelia in her funeral scene, and by cutting her one soliloquy, 'O what a noble mind is here o'erthrown', completely: 'These directors cut her only unmediated articulation of subjectivity, thereby denying her access, performatively, to the speech act that constructs her as most like Hamlet even as the speech itself marks her utter alienation from him'.[130]

According to Imogen Stubbs, 'O what a noble mind…' is as 'psychologically impossible' as 'There is a willow grows aslant a brook' – it is 'about the last thing any young woman would actually want to say after what Hamlet has just said to her'.[131] Still, female characters do not get many soliloquies in Shakespeare's tragedies, and cutting any character's only soliloquy is a drastic measure. In Nunn's production, the nunnery scene was moved from its original position, instead coming after the interval and

130 Carol Chillington Rutter, *Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare's Stage* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 27, 29-30.

131 Stubbs, p. 35.

before Hamlet's advice to the players, with 'O what a noble mind…' deferred until after *The Murder of Gonzago*: Ophelia entered at the end of III.2, trying to give Hamlet a letter she had written for him. When he left, ignoring her, she read her soliloquy from the letter. At the end, she produced a pencil, crossed out 'have seen what I have seen' and added in its place 'see what I see'. Repositioning the soliloquy in this way so that it does not immediately follow the nunnery scene is one solution. But it is problematic that performers experience that neither Ophelia nor Gertrude has any speeches which seem to express what they *should* want to say. In *Ophelia Thinks Harder*, 'O what a noble mind is here o'erthrown' is not spoken by Ophelia, but partly by the maid (in reference to Ophelia rather than Hamlet) and partly by Polonius, at different points in the play.

One of the questions about Ophelia to which the audience cannot know the answer is whether Ophelia and Hamlet have, or have had, a sexual relationship. According to Marvin Rosenberg, this idea was entertained already by Voltaire.[132] Supporters of the theory base it on the sexual language of Ophelia's mad scene,[133] even though it would suggest that Ophelia lies when she tells Polonius that Hamlet has 'importuned' her '[i]n honourable fashion' (I.3); arguments can be made on both sides for which interpretation would make the stakes higher. Neil Taylor, in 'An Actress Prepares', has collected questionnaire answers from seven actresses who have played Ophelia on stage. The questions were about the backstories they had invented. Five of them thought that Hamlet and Ophelia have not had a sexual relationship. Some of them (on both sides) had been in disagreement about this question with either the director or the actor playing Hamlet.[134] Famously, in Kenneth Branagh's 1996 film adaptation of the play, Hamlet and Ophelia's backstory was made explicit by includ-

132 Rosenberg, *The Masks of* Hamlet, p. 247.

133 Rosenberg states that during the first 200 years after Shakespeare's death, Ophelia's 'offending language' was usually cut; ibid., p. 240. Helen Faucit attributed the coarse language of Ophelia's mad songs to her having grown up in the country; pp. 9-10. Mary Cowden Clarke imagined, in her prequel, that Ophelia had been brought up by a peasant family, where her older foster-sister had been seduced and abandoned and died, and that these memories resurfaced in her madness; *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* (London; Bickers and Son, 1887), pp. 195-225. According to Jonathan Gil Harris, far from being evidence of an experience similar to that described in her 'Saint Valentine's day' song, 'Ophelia's obsession with sex was probably interpreted by Elizabethans as proof of [sexual abstinence]', which was believed to cause hysteria in women; *Shakespeare and Literary Theory* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 119.

134 Neil Taylor, 'An Actress Prepares', in *The Afterlife of Ophelia*, ed. Kaara L. Peterson and Deanne Williams (Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 43-58 (pp. 54-56).

ing multiple flashbacks of the two of them in bed together. According to Rutter, Branagh claims that the flashbacks are there 'to "explain" the relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia', but Rutter argues that they objectify Ophelia rather than provide a useful backstory for the viewer:

> What is most disturbing about these flashbacks is not their content but their technique. In them the camera does not record the love-making from Ophelia's point of view or memory; rather, it voyeuristically watches her having sex, and so performs upon her the classic move of denying her subjectivity in the process of objectifying her. But since these memories-in-flashback begin with Ophelia, since they present themselves as her memories and seem to simulate a first-person viewpoint, they effectively recruit her, willy-nilly, to the project of her own objectification.[135]

If, on the other hand, Hamlet and Ophelia's relationship is read as non-sexual, while there is perhaps no way of making such a choice explicit to an audience, that backstory serves to highlight Hamlet's sexual harassment of Ophelia, described in the following way by David Mann:

> Hamlet's behaviour towards Ophelia in III.ii at the performance of the 'Mousetrap' alternates intimacy, insults, and sexual suggestiveness with an undertow of violence, hinting that he might take her, without affection, at any time he chose: 'It would cost you a groaning to take off mine edge.' It is said in a publically shaming manner, and following so soon on his violent rejection of her in the 'Nunnery' scene, keeps her ever uncertain and apprehensive as to how next – verbally or physically – he might assault her vulnerability.[136]

The impropriety of Hamlet's threatening behaviour in this scene is not affected by the nature of their previous relationship; but the implied shock for Ophelia is more momentous if it happens out of the blue.

In *Ophelia Thinks Harder*, Hamlet and Ophelia have definitely not slept together: many of Ophelia's thoughts revolve around virginity, and Hamlet has ideological qualms about even touching a woman: 'Remember the words of Odilo of Cluny – "to embrace a woman is to embrace a sack of

135 According to Rutter, 'Branagh's flashback "explanations" expose a serious illiteracy that serves to make Ophelia's narrative incomprehensible and her text, [*sic*] nonsense, for [Kate] Winslet's Ophelia must be either knave or fool – either sexually practised and a practised liar who makes a credulous dupe of her grieving brother […] or foolishly in thrall to a patriarchy whose hypocrisy she can't nose out even though it stinks to heaven'; *Enter the Body*, pp. 47, 48.

136 David Mann, *Shakespeare's Women: Performance and Conception* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 199.

manure"' (scene 5, p. 41). In Shakespeare's play, Hamlet shows some symptoms of a 'Madonna/whore complex': when it comes to women, as French argues, he has no conception of a 'mean' between 'chastity' and 'depravity'.[137] But in *Ophelia Thinks Harder*, it is taken to a new, literal, level:

HAMLET It flies in the face of nature that creatures so base should have such power over us.
HORATIO Yet Christ was born of woman…
HAMLET But what a woman! You can't compare real women with her! (Scene 2, p. 13)

At the beginning of Betts's appropriation, Ophelia is not herself sure of what kind of relationship she has with Hamlet, or how she feels about him:

OPHELIA
Oh WHY do I behave like this? I giggle, I blush; he touches me – I throb, I glow; but is this love? Do I love him? What *else* can it be?

Does he love me?

He says I tease him. *Do* I? If he *feels* teased, I must! Oh I can't bear it – how could I *do* that? I'm excited when he comes – but I get so confused I can't wait till he leaves – and then I end up like this!

Every time I *swear* I won't behave like that and every time I *do*! Why am I so *weak*? Why am I so stupid?

[…][H]ow do I find out what I'm supposed to want?
(Scene 1, p. 6) [emphases original]

Later on, she realises that her response to Hamlet's advances is not love but something else:

OPHELIA [---]
I shall be awesome, magnificent, I shall poison his dreams, haunt his days, eat away his heart! He will be dazzled! He will be devastated! He will *respect* me! He will!
Long pause. The Maid slowly raises her head.
Respect? Did I say respect?
MAID Yes madam yes; you said respect, not love!

137 French, p. 148.

OPHELIA	Odd!
MAID	No no; it's not his love you want!
OPHELIA	But then – what is this pain? This burning?
MAID	Anger, madam. Fury that you have been so – humiliated!
OPHELIA	Humiliated?
MAID	Abused, mistreated, bullied, ignored, sneered at, every day, every night, every hour – it's an endless suffering … (*Sobbing*)
OPHELIA	So this agony of longing is for nothing but – a sweet revenge? (Scene 5, p. 42) [emphasis original]

Ophelia finds out not only that she has in fact been angry with Hamlet all along, but that she was also wrong about Horatio's feelings: during most of the play, she assumes that Horatio is romantically interested in Hamlet, but eventually he admits that he has been in love with Ophelia all the time, and the two of them embark on a sexual relationship.

The most emblematic facet of Shakespeare's Ophelia is her madness; indeed, Rosenberg calls Ophelia's mad scene 'one of the most striking moments in Shakespeare'.[138] Still, according to reviewers, very few actresses do this particular scene well. According to Jeremy Lopez, critics seem to favour Ophelias who are perceived as achieving some kind of 'balance': truly horrifying but not too theatrical.[139] When Ellen Terry prepared for the part, she visited an asylum to seek inspiration. She, too, was wary of excessive theatricality:

> Like all Ophelias before (and after) me, I went to the madhouse to study wits astray. I was disheartened at first. There was no beauty, no nature, no pity in most of the lunatics. Strange as it may sound, they were too *theatrical* to teach me anything. Then, just as I was going away, I noticed a young girl gazing at the wall. I went between her and the wall to see her face. It was quite vacant, but the body expressed that she was waiting, waiting. Suddenly she threw up her hands and sped across the room like a swallow. I never forgot it. She was very thin, very pathetic, very young, and the movement was as poignant as it was beautiful.[140]

138 Rosenberg, *The Masks of* Hamlet, p. 236.

139 Jeremy Lopez, 'Reviewing Ophelia', in *The Afterlife of Ophelia*, pp. 29-41 (p. 32). Walter writes of Ophelia's mad scene (although it is largely applicable to acting in general), 'The important thing is to work out your own private coherence and to have a strong intention behind each thing you say. However broken up your story, let each fragment come from a clear image. If there are "unconscious" tics, let them come from a centred impulse. Inhabit your world, don't demonstrate it'; *Brutus and Other Heroines*, p. 10.

140 *Ellen Terry's Memoirs* (new edition of *The Story of My Life* [1908]), with a preface, notes and additional biographical chapters by Edith Craig and Christopher St. John (New York: Benjamin Blom,

According to Ellen Ecker Dolgin, Terry's portrayal of Ophelia was 'iconic' and all other late Victorian performances of the role were measured against hers.[141] Showalter argues that Terry 'led the way in acting Ophelia in feminist terms as a consistent psychological study in sexual intimidation' and 'inspired other actresses to rebel against the conventions of invisibility and negation associated with the part'.[142] In 1895, when Stella Campbell, drawing on her own experience of being treated for 'neurasthenia', played Ophelia 'as a truly depressed young woman' – rather than the 'docile' girl whose madness is merely a 'pretty' diversion in the play, which was the norm at the time – many spectators found this choice inappropriate and disturbing.[143] Ecker Dolgin argues that this reaction may be the same kind of 'patriarchal resistance' that audiences felt towards Nora in Ibsen's *The Doll's House*, which was performed in London around the same time, and that Ophelia can be seen as a tragic version of Nora who does not have the opportunity of choosing 'to pursue her own identity' instead of suicide.[144]

If Ophelia is imagined as an adolescent, her 'madness' in Shakespeare's text may easily be connected to the fact that some kinds of mental illness tend to surface with the onset of puberty. In *Ophelia Thinks Harder*, Ophelia is certainly unhappy about the physical aspects of growing up as a woman, as well as the societal demands and expectations it entails:

OPHELIA	I was happy when I was a little girl, you know.
MAID	You're a woman now. The rules have changed.
OPHELIA	I want to *stay* a little girl. I don't want to grow up – I will *not* grow up. How do I flatten out these?

(Scene 3, p. 23) [emphases original]

However, as she points out, the problem is not that she wants to be a child or a man instead of being a woman:

1969 [1932]), p. 122 [emphasis original]. According to Showalter, the 'theatricality' of the psychiatric patients was owing to the fact that 'the iconography of the romantic Ophelia had begun to infiltrate reality, to define a style for mad young women seeking to express and communicate their distress. And where the women themselves did not willingly throw themselves into Ophelia-like postures, asylum super-intendents, armed with the new technology of photography, imposed the costume, gesture, props, and expression of Ophelia upon them'; p. 86.

141 Ecker Dolgin, p. 59.

142 Showalter, p. 89.

143 Ecker Dolgin, pp. 57-60.

144 Ibid. pp. 60-61.

> OPHELIA
> [---] How come I turned into a woman!!? Can't I just stay a person? I didn't want to be a woman; *or* a man. I didn't ask to be either. It just happened. I just want to be a *person!*
>
> People carry on as if I made a choice; as if I must be pleased; as if I saw what a woman's life was like and said [']Yes, I'll have that I think', like choosing fish in a market; as if I made a deliberate choice I now have to be responsible for; if I don't make a good fist of it then I'm to blame. 'I made my bed; now I must lie in it'. But I *didn't* make the bed! I *won't* bloody lie in it!
>
> (*Feeling her body thoughtfully*.) I didn't ask for any of this – it just *grew*. I don't know what I'm supposed to do with it. All these knobs and blobs and hairy bits; bleeding bits, for heaven's sake! What is it all? How did I become this mobile tub of female sexual parts? How did *I* get in *here*?
>
> (Scene 3, pp. 21-22) [emphases original]

Though Betts's Ophelia clearly suffers a crisis of identity, her contemplation of suicide, like Hamlet's in Shakespeare's play, does not result in her death. Her 'madness' subsides when she realises that all she wants from Hamlet is respect, and her identity crisis is resolved when she finds an occupation she wishes to pursue.

Noble's 1992 production of *Hamlet*, designed by Bob Crowley, portrayed Ophelia's madness in an original way that extended beyond Pearce's performance: in the mad scene, the first scene after the second interval in this full-text production, Ophelia (wearing Polonius's bloody clothes) pulled a large sheet from the stage floor and revealed under it the piano that had earlier been in her room and drifts of flowers on the floor. In this way, Ophelia transformed the stage to represent her chaotic, colourful world, and it remained as she had left it to the end of the play, meaning that Ophelia had a visual impact on the stage long after she was dead. In Nicholas Hytner's 2010 production at the National Theatre, which was set in a surveillance state where even Ophelia's bible was bugged and Polonius had procured shots of Hamlet and Ophelia from a surveillance camera, it was strongly implied that Ruth Negga's Ophelia did not commit suicide but was killed by Claudius's security service. In this version, Gertrude had apparently been told what to say about Ophelia's death. Here, in contrast to Noble's production, where Ophelia's spirit lingered in the stage design, Ophelia was actively removed from the stage and silenced. The fact that

attention was drawn to the silencing makes it significant as a comment on the oppression of the character in the play.

But Ophelia has one more important scene after she is dead. Rutter argues that by not showing Ophelia clearly in the grave, Olivier's, Kozintsev's and Zeffirelli's film adaptations deny Ophelia her final significant appearance and 'foreclos[e] the insistent questions Shakespeare's playtext requires [the reader] to consider': 'What performance work does this body do? How do we look at it? What do we see?'.[145] According to Rutter, the scene in Shakespeare's text calls for a representation of non-sexualised, non-glamorised female death as a contrast to the representation of heroic male death:

> In [Laertes's] embrace, Ophelia rises from the grave. Reanimated (like the Ghost, like Yorick), she re-enters the field of play, her dead eyes gazing at the audience. And for this moment when she won't play dead, she embodies a subversion of each and every one of the patriarchal validations men in this play produce to glamorize death. But death isn't glamorous. It's hideous. Ophelia now – that's really what death looks like.[146]

Unlike Hamlet's death scene, there is '[n]o sweetness, no flights of angels, no rest', and Hamlet soon arrives on the scene and 'upstages her': 'The penetration of Ophelia's blank stare gets lost. Her manhandled body is dropped. After this, the funeral is dropped too. In Shakespeare's playtext, Ophelia never does get buried'.[147] The arguable disadvantage of staging Laertes's partial exhumation of his sister – as in the cases of Cordelia's and, especially, Desdemona's deaths – is of course said manhandling and the working conditions it entails for the actress. It is only in Q1 that the stage directions call for Hamlet to jump into the grave after Laertes, but while theatrical productions rarely use any of Q1's text, they frequently turn to its stage directions. In practice, Hamlet's and Laertes's quarrel over Ophelia is often presented on stage in a physically violent way, not least towards Ophelia, who has already usually suffered a good deal of violent and contemptuous treatment by Hamlet in the nunnery scene. As Rutter points out, on Shakespeare's stage the corpse would probably be played by the actress playing Ophelia rather than by a dummy, since that would be the easier and cheaper option.[148]

145 Rutter, *Enter the Body*, p. 28.

146 Ibid., p. 42.

147 Ibid.

148 Ibid., p. 28. For the same reason, intact dead bodies are usually played by actors on today's stage, while props are used for stray body parts or severely damaged corpses.

In Frankcom's production of *Hamlet*, however, the grave was represented by a square hole in a heap of clothes, and Ophelia's body by a dress placed in that hole. In Brook's production, too, Ophelia's dead body was represented by a dress. This solution creates more comfortable working conditions for the actress playing Ophelia (and for the actors playing Hamlet and Laertes, since a dress is not as heavy to lift as a human body), but it lacks the representation of a realistic dead female body argued for by Rutter. In Farr's 2013 production, the grave was very shallow, so that Ophelia was visible to at least some of the audience throughout the scene and Laertes did not even have to jump into the grave to embrace her. In Noble's 1992-93 production, Laertes held Ophelia up in the grave so that she was visible to the audience and then propped her up against the side of the grave, still visible, to go and fight with Hamlet. Hamlet then carefully put her back into the grave. This solution meant that Ophelia's body was shown on stage but not manhandled: she was both 'seen' and treated with respect.

If *Gertrude – The Cry* tries to reinvent Hamlet's 'missing', or at least under-prioritised, mother, *Ophelia Thinks Harder* invents a mother for Ophelia. Ophelia and Laertes's mother is not mentioned in Shakespeare's play, and is thus even more absent from the text than Lear's wife from *King Lear*. All the actresses who answered Taylor's questionnaire believed that the mother had died – some in childbirth, some as a result of suicide or sudden illness; most of them specified Ophelia's age as somewhere between birth and five when her mother's death occurred. Two of them thought that she had died in circumstances that made Ophelia blame herself for her mother's death, and one of them had decided together with the actors playing Polonius and Laertes that the mother had had schizophrenia, and that it ran in the family.[149]

In *Ophelia Thinks Harder*, Ophelia's mother has died fairly recently, and Ophelia is still in mourning; in parallel to Shakespeare's Hamlet, she insists on wearing black even though Polonius and Gertrude keep trying to make her wear something more colourful and becoming. But even though this mother is dead, her ghost appears and gives some advice to her daughter:

149 Taylor, pp. 50-51.

> MOTHER
> [---] It's a struggle to get to that wedding day but once it's over darling, everything changes. All you have to do is play house and dress up […] and play with your babies […] – there's no need for any more growing up! You can go back to being ten years old if you like and stay there for the rest of your life! […]
>
> And they like that, they like you being a little girl; just don't talk too much dear; just smile and be polite, he'll think you're the cleverest thing – act shy, a bit scared, blush when he touches you, they like that; make *him* happy and you're happy, it's a funny thing; forget self, men and children first; sacrifice, rewards will come…
>
> […]
>
> And darling – don't think too much, just smile, he'll think you're the sweetest thing … and darling – don't trust other women – women are treacherous, sly, scheming, deceitful … don't think, wait, smile, forget self … patience, don't think, don't talk … smile … forget self dear, forget self … (Scene 3, pp. 25-26)

Where Shakespeare's Hamlet's father's ghost asks his son to remember him, Betts's Ophelia's mother's ghost instead asks her daughter to forget herself.

As her mother is dead, Ophelia has no female role model, and throughout *Ophelia Thinks Harder* she tries to find someone to give her the advice she needs. Her maid concocts love potions and shows her various superstitious ways of finding out the name of her future husband. The Queen gives her plenty of advice, but most of it is unwelcome and confusing. Subjecting her to '*a fantastical cosmetic and corset fitting process*' (scene 3, p. 17), the Queen tells Ophelia that 'we're shaped this way to please them [men], after all – so what's a few ribbons, a bit of paint? For the satisfaction of being the inspirers of male glory …' (p. 19), that '[m]en can be themselves, but we have to *work* at being women' (p. 18), that men are 'all children' and should be 'manipulate[d]' – 'The darlings, they never grow up' (p. 19) – that 'one thing they all want […] [is] a pure, sweet, submissive little virgin' (p. 18), and that '[m]en and women are not equals' and can never be 'friends' (p. 19). But above all, she tells her, 'Don't *think* too much my dear. You'll get wrinkles' (p. 20). Ophelia also initially turns to the Virgin Mary for guidance (Mary's 'position' on the stage should, according to the stage directions, be 'established' at the beginning of the play, and Ophelia talks directly to her several times), but she later rejects her:

OPHELIA
DAMN prayer! Damn mothers, damn children, damn kings and queens and virgins – *damn* virgins! (*She addresses Mary*) Especially you, you sinless wonder! You sexless mutant! One look at you and I know I've failed; every day, every minute! We try so hard to be like you – how about *you* trying to be like *us* for a change! Give being a *real* woman a go! Try being a virgin and a mother down here, and see how good *you* are at it! *You* try period pain! (Scene 3, p. 22) [emphases original]

Ophelia finds two unexpected female role models in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who have disguised themselves as men to be able to attend university. They tell her that their research has shown that the prevailing definition of 'virginity' is a mistranslation:

GUILDENSTERN Virginity means – Independence. Being true to the self.

[…]

ROSENCRANTZ A true Virgin is a woman who choose her own direction; who is submissive to no one, who is in charge of her own life, who allows *no one* dominion over her inner being …

GUIILDENSTERN She trusts her feelings, and acts on them, and doesn't care what anyone says. She's strong, and honest, and brave. She's *free*. (Scene 5, p. 46)

It is Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, therefore, who finally give Ophelia the advice to be true to her own self. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern also give her the idea of assuming a male identity, which she will later make use of. She furthermore encounters the ghost of St. Joan, who tells her to trust herself, as even the Church can make mistakes, such as having 'handed [her] over to the Inquisition':

OPHELIA
'The Church can make mistakes.' And you [Mary] were certainly one of them. You! You nearly ruined my life, you know that? All this time, I've looked up to you – and – you don't know anything. You haven't *lived*.

Ask me! Go on, ask me; anything you like. What do you want to know? I bet you're dying to know (*She waves Horatio's handkerchief at Mary tauntingly*). How can you be wise, unless you've been *through* things? How can you have any idea what's good, or bad? Or even if there are such things? I bet you just believed

> what everybody told you! Just like me! Well, listen! People make mistakes. The *Church* is just people – the Church can make mistakes! You've GOT to think for yourself! (Scene 8, p. 62)

However, the play does not leave Ophelia with this unfavourable impression of the Virgin Mary, but picks up on Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's idea of a 'true virgin':

> OPHELIA
> [---] [*To Mary*] You've got a funny look on your face. I suppose – I don't suppose they've got you all wrong too? I wonder – what kind of a virgin are you??? (Scene 8, p. 62)

When Ophelia later asks Rosencrantz and Guildenstern who Mary really is, Guildenstern replies that '[s]he changes. She changes all the time. Or rather, she is *changed*, to suit the times' (scene 8, p. 66), and Rosencrantz suggests that Ophelia should 'ask *her*. *She* knows who she is' (p. 67). Ophelia answers, 'I have been asking – but she seems shy. I'm not surprised – I've been very rude to her …' (p. 67).

Ophelia Thinks Harder presents the Virgin Mary as the supreme model of womanhood, forced upon young women who have not learnt to think for themselves, and her virginity is presented as central to that role. However, the play does not ground the character of Ophelia in a context where the idea of Mary as the perfect woman feels appropriate. In today's sexualised society, the Virgin Mary could be seen as a representative of a minority group – in parallel with the holy family seen as refugees and working class – rather than the epitome of what every woman wants to be, or even what every woman feels other people to want her to be. In present-day Western teenage culture, not only so-called 'slut shaming' but also its opposite, 'virgin shaming', is a problem. Furthermore, the play supposedly places itself in a Christian context but presents a rather superficial understanding of Christianity and, specifically, of the Virgin Mary.[150]

150 It seems rather unnecessary to give so much room to religious aspects of gender roles, as it does not really add anything to the main point that the play makes, and it runs the risk of alienating any spectator/reader who has a conflicting conception of the Virgin Mary. Phrases such as 'You try being a virgin and a mother down here' show a clear lack of understanding of Mary's story. One wonders, furthermore, how carefully she can have read the Bible if she believes that one night with Horatio amounts to more 'living' than some of the things that the Virgin Mary is reported to have been through. It is never made quite clear that this slightly muddled routine blaming of religion is a failing

Ophelia is, in her own words, 'very rude' to Mary, and blames her for a great many things that cannot possibly be her fault. Ultimately, Ophelia changes her mind and the play hints at an incipient new understanding of the saint, but it is Ophelia's earlier, harsh words that are given precedence.

Not only does Ophelia struggle to find female role models, a predicament she shares with Shakespeare's Ophelia, but her father is a very unpleasant person in Betts's appropriation. In *Hamlet*, Polonius presents a difficulty in that his death should be believable as part of the reason for Ophelia's madness and suicide, but in life the character does not invite a performance that is consistent with this function. He is, as was noted above, often played as a comic figure, largely on the basis of his long-winded way of speaking. Other actors have shown Polonius as a domineering father who subdues Ophelia completely, an embodiment of the patriarchy in which she lives. In *Ophelia Thinks Harder*, the interpretation of him as a dominating patriarch is taken to an extreme, and it defies imagination that anyone would commit suicide because of this father's death. But then, of course, this Ophelia does not commit suicide.

In the questionnaire I gave to the students on the course 'Shakespeare's Women in Modern Drama', I asked whether they thought it likely, based on what happens to Ophelia in Shakespeare's play, that she would kill herself. Out of the students who had read *Ophelia Thinks Harder* first, a larger proportion thought it likely than out of the students who read *Hamlet* before the appropriation. The answers also showed that students were more likely to identify with Ophelia and less likely to identify with Hamlet if they had read *Ophelia Thinks Harder*, whether it was their first or second reading of *Hamlet*. Given the appropriation's focus on Ophelia and the extreme unpleasantness of Betts's Hamlet, this is hardly surprising, and yet the differences were very small.

As one of their written assignments, the students were given the option of writing their own short play appropriating one of the Shakespearean tragedies they had studied on the course. One student wrote a play in which an abusive, 'mad' Hamlet kills himself on the eve of his arranged wedding to Ophelia, who subsequently feigns madness to be able to run away with her chambermaid. As well as reversing the respective natures of Hamlet's and Ophelia's madness, the play was written as a response to

on Ophelia's part and not on the part of the play, whose analysis of other aspects of gender roles is infinitely more convincing.

Ophelia Thinks Harder, where the Maid is sacrificed to enable Ophelia to survive. The student wanted the two women instead to find love across class boundaries and to give them both a future, rather than prioritising one woman over the other. The student introduced a concept that was new to me, namely fridging (also known as 'women in refrigerators' or 'stuffed in the fridge'). The term was invented to describe and question a trope in superhero comic books, but is applicable to all kinds of fiction. It denotes a plot device where one character (typically female) is 'killed off' to drive forward the plot of another character (typically male). The student argued that *Hamlet* uses this device, as Ophelia's death is the catalyst for the duel between Hamlet and Laertes and thus the ending of the entire play, and that *Ophelia Thinks Harder* averts this 'fridging' of Ophelia in that she does not die. However, the student argued, the Maid in *Ophelia Thinks Harder* is fridged in Ophelia's place, as she is killed off simply so that Ophelia can have her happy ending: Ophelia is saved but her maid is sacrificed. In this case, the fridging is connected to class rather than gender: just as women in superhero comics are seen as less valuable and important than the (male) main characters and therefore sacrificeable, servants are in this story sacrificeable in comparison with the (upper-class) main character, Ophelia. However, the question of intersection between class and gender is explicitly raised in the Maid's mad scene, where she sings a song about having 'seven children at home', 'com[ing] home from work' and 'cook[ing] the tea' for a husband who 'bullies me'; in lieu of flowers, she hands out carrots, onions and beets, like a mother telling her children to eat up their vegetables. The Maid is also given some of the important speeches from *Hamlet* (for example some of Ophelia's soliloquy), a backstory, and, towards the end of the play, even a name, Rosalind (scene 8, pp. 63-65).

Interestingly, the student's own appropriation, 'The Prince is Dead, Long Live Ophelia', showed similarities to the plot of Melissa Murray's unpublished play 'Ophelia', directed by Sue Dunderdale and performed by the London-based lesbian feminist theatre group Hormone Imbalance in 1979. In this appropriation, Ophelia becomes a lesbian and escapes an arranged marriage with Hamlet by running away with her maid to join a female guerrilla commune.[151] In Bryony Lavery's play 'Ophelia', finally,

151 Unfinished Histories: Recording the History of Alternative Theatre <http://www.unfinished-histories.com> [accessed 6 February 2017]. See also Showalter, p. 91. Rosenberg notes that '[s]tagings have provided Ophelia with a waiting woman' but 'Shakespeare seems to want her lonely' and that 'one can only imagine a really caring gentlewoman who might have supported her, an Emilia perhaps';

Gertrude tries to drown Ophelia (and believes she has succeeded), because she believes her to be carrying Hamlet's child (whereas Ophelia is, in fact, pregnant by Laertes). Ophelia, however, holds her breath and survives, and proceeds to join the players and write a play about her life.[152] In all these feminist re-imaginings, including *Ophelia Thinks Harder*, Ophelia escapes drowning and forges a new life for herself either with another woman or in a collective community.

In *Ophelia Thinks Harder*, Ophelia begins as weak and grows increasingly strong as the play goes on, abandoning her victim role.[153] It could perhaps be said that Shakespeare's Ophelia begins as strong and ends up a victim. There is nothing to suggest extreme submissiveness in her early scenes; arguably, it is the spectator/reader who does not know what Ophelia thinks, not Ophelia herself. According to Showalter, '[t]here is no "true" Ophelia for whom feminist criticism must unambiguously speak, but perhaps only a Cubist Ophelia of multiple perspectives, more than the sum of all her parts'.[154] Nevertheless, at the present point in history, there seems to be a tendency in the theatre to resist seeing Ophelia's passivity and dependency as inherent character traits, instead locating the cause in external factors, be it mental illness, a lover's rejection, a dysfunctional family or an oppressive society.

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Pontac's appropriation, while taking place in the world of *Hamlet*, does not actually contain any of the same characters as Shakespeare's play (apart from the Ghost, of course), as they are all dead. *Hamlet, Part II* negates the most fundamental precondition of Hamlet – that Hamlet's father is dead – but ends by restoring the situation to the status quo.

In John Cargill Thompson's play, 'Did it happen?' can be seen as the other side of the question posed about *Macbeth*, 'What "really" happened?'.

The Masks of Hamlet, pp. 236, 243.

152 Extracts from Bryony Lavery's 'Ophelia', in Lizbeth Goodman (ed.) *Mythic Women/Real Women* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), pp. 323-42. See also Jane de Gay, 'Playing (with) Shakespeare: Bryony Lavery's *Ophelia* and Jane Prendergast's *I, Hamlet*', in *Languages of Theatre Shaped by Women*, ed. Jane de Gay and Lizbeth Goodman (Bristol: Intellect, 2003), pp. 49-63.

153 As Rokison remarks, *Ophelia Thinks Harder* encourage[s] the re-appraisal of traditional perceptions of Ophelia as an inherently weak character, highlighting the role of society in her mental disintegtration'; 'Our Scene is Alter'd', p. 795.

154 Showalter, p. 92.

In both cases, Cargill Thompson asserts that 'it' (Shakespeare's plot) did not happen and lets the main character tell the audience what 'really' happened. The difference – apart from the fact that *Macbeth Speaks* is, unlike *Hamlet II: Prince of Jutland*, to an extent driven by Scottish nationalism – is that what Cargill Thompson claims to be the 'real' version of *Hamlet* is Shakespeare's source, whereas the 'real' version of *Macbeth* is not a version with which Shakespeare can have been familiar and the changes to historical events that are criticised are changes made already in Shakespeare's sources.

According to the play-text of *Hamlet*, Hamlet is thirty years old; but in many ways he appears to be considerably younger. *Ophelia Thinks Harder* and *Gertrude – The Cry* both imagine Hamlet as an adolescent and connect his young age to his misogyny. In both plays, his dismay at his mother's remarriage and his general disgust with sex and women are explained by his young years, and in both cases the queen shows little patience with her immature and moralising son, prioritising her relationship with Claudius. In *Ophelia Thinks Harder*, Hamlet's abusive treatment of Ophelia is seen in the context of their youth, and it is easy to draw parallels to sexual harassment among present-day teenagers. Ophelia's crisis of identity, as perhaps in Shakespeare's play, hinges on her being so young that she has not yet developed any self-definition as a woman prior to Hamlet's definition of womanhood as disgusting and despised.

Paradoxically, it may also be Hamlet's child- or teenage-like qualities that are the reason behind the tradition of Hamlet being played by female actors. Hamlet can be seen as sensitive, emotional, moody, dithery and not a man of action, qualities that have been associated with both women and adolescents. In *Hamlette*, which builds on the theory that Hamlet is a woman who is for political reasons disguised as a boy by her parents, Hamlet is an adolescent girl, too young for self-definition in the eyes of her well-meaning mother but adamantly insisting on her right to define herself as a girl.

Hamlet is the largest, most iconic role in the Shakespearean canon, and from a practical feminist point of view it makes sense to give women equal opportunities to play it. As the tradition of female Hamlets is based on reductive gender stereotypes, however, a female Hamlet in a mixed cast can be seen as problematic. Hamlet's soliloquies are to a large extent about the human condition and therefore applicable to any human being, regardless of gender; but in his dialogues Hamlet frequently shows himself

to be a misogynist. To make sense of some of the scenes from an ideologically feminist point of view, Hamlet must represent a male attitude.[155] Maxine Peake played Hamlet as transgender, and therefore, from an inclusive standpoint, as a man. But if Hamlet is to represent hegemonic masculinity, it makes most sense if he is a cis-man, as opposed to less privileged gender identities, including female, non-binary and transgender. This does not mean that there is anything inherently problematic about a woman playing Hamlet, but it is problematic to automatically refer to any such production as feminist.

In any production concerned with showing the gender-based interplay between characters as presented in Shakespeare's text, the portrayals of Gertrude and Ophelia will be of great significance. Performance practice has fluctuated over the years with reference to these two characters, but in each case there is a stereotyped version of the character that is engrained in the public consciousness. In each case, too, there are two categories that performances and readings of the character may be said to fall under. These categories can, in both cases, be summarised as 'weak' and 'strong'. In Gertrude's case, the stereotype is that she is strong – dominant, lustful, sensual and wicked. In Ophelia's case, the stereotype is that she is weak – passive, dependent, obedient and timorous. Both characters evidently comprise elements of both strength and weakness, but it seems to have been a tendency during the past few decades to read and perform Gertrude as weaker and Ophelia as stronger than they have conventionally been thought to be, in an attempt to depart from the stereotype and get closer to Shakespeare's text. This is not a tendency, however, that can be seen in the appropriations of the play. *Gertrude – The Cry* presents an exaggerated stereotype of the dominant and lustful Gertrude, and *Ophelia Thinks Harder* presents an initially dependent and timorous Ophelia who must be saved from Shakespeare's text in order to start to think for herself. The evidence that Ophelia can think independently that is present in her early scenes in *Hamlet* has not been incorporated into *Ophelia Thinks Harder*,

155 Two alternative ways of creating opportunities for women to play Hamlet could be an all-female *Hamlet* – which would discourage the audience from reading gender into the role by forcing them to accept that in the world of the production a woman simply means a person, and therefore allow the actress to play Hamlet as a man – and a one-woman show consisting of only Hamlet's soliloquies, which would dispose of the problem of Hamlet's most misogynist scenes. The phrase most emblematic of Hamlet's misogyny, 'Frailty, thy name is Woman' (I.2.146) is located in a soliloquy, but it does not have to be played in a misogynistic way; if spoken by a woman, it might be taken to mean 'Frailty, thy name is Human'.

and whereas Shakespeare's Gertrude shows no evidence of excessive lust or of having taken part in murder, Barker's does.

With reference to the question 'Did it happen?', the aspects of the two female characters in *Hamlet* that are questioned by these two appropriations is Gertrude's guilt and Ophelia's suicide. In *Hamlet*, these two circumstances are ambiguous in that it is not made clear whether Gertrude is guilty of adultery and murder and whether Ophelia's drowning is accidental or self-inflicted. The appropriations have entirely different takes on the questions. Barker's Gertrude is unambiguously guilty, but, unlike Shakespeare's Gertrude, she feels no guilt. Betts's Ophelia does not drown at all, but is saved from that destiny when her servant drowns in her place.

7.
Feminist Re-Vision Strategies

The concept of re-vision, of viewing *again*, assumes a first, original way of viewing, an initial vision from which the re-vision differs. Shakespeare's plays have of course been viewed in a multitude of different ways through history; it is certainly not the case that the appropriations discussed in this study were preceded by one stable understanding of the plays. The 'first' vision that a re-vision implicitly engages with may refer to the vision invited by the text as perceived by the appropriator or the perceived 'conventional' vision. Ultimately, in order for the term to be useful, the function of a re-vision is to make spectators/readers see the original play in a new way.

The term re-vision is customarily used specifically about appropriations that re-view Shakespeare's stories and characters from a feminist perspective. Among the plays studied here, the ones that can be categorised as feminist re-visions are Paula Vogel's *Desdemona: A Play about a Handkerchief*, the Women's Theatre Group (WTG) and Elaine Feinstein's *Lear's Daughters*, Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* and Jean Betts's *Ophelia Thinks Harder*. Focusing on these four plays, this chapter explores what re-visionist strategies the appropriations employ and outline a preliminary model for distinguishing between two fundamentally different types of feminist re-vision.

Strategies for Putting Women Centre Stage

The chapter on *King Lear* discussed the four strategies identified by Lynne Bradley: 'giving voice to silenced female characters', 'writing around the original story', 'challenging representations of gender identity and female sexuality' and 'using metanarrative qualities to thematize the woman writ-

er'.[1] Bradley discusses these strategies in relation to *Goodnight Desdemona* and *Desdemona* as well as to *Lear's Daughters*, and especially the first three are also applicable to *Ophelia Thinks Harder*. These three strategies are expounded in the next few pages.

'[G]iving voice to silenced female characters' entails giving the female characters in the re-vision a greater proportion of the lines than the equivalent characters have in Shakespeare's play, as well as letting them tell and define their own stories rather than having other characters talk about them. '[W]riting around the original story' involves using the 'gaps' made by Shakespeare and filling them with possible additions to the story that allow the audience to see the story from the female characters' point of view. The gaps can be temporal, as in *Lear's Daughters*, which takes place before the action of *King Lear* and thus makes use of a temporal space left unclaimed by Shakespeare's play. A gap may also be spatial; in other words, the main action of the re-vision may occupy a different physical space from Shakespeare's main action. *Desdemona* takes place in a 'back room of the palace on Cyprus', *Ophelia Thinks Harder* takes place mainly in Ophelia's bedroom, and *Lear's Daughters* takes place in the nursery. These are all conventionally feminine or domestic spaces that are removed from the main part of Shakespeare's action (an obvious exception being the willow scene and the final scene in *Othello*). *Goodnight Desdemona* works in a different way, as it interrupts the storylines of *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* and creates new gaps to fill in, whereas the three other re-visions by 'writing around the story' more or less accommodate Shakespeare's storylines within their framework. Above all, the re-visions fill in the gaps left in the backstories and characterisations of the female characters by imagining possible answers to questions left open by Shakespeare. All this is done working on the assumption that Shakespeare's plays to a large extent show the stories from a male perspective, which in the re-visions is replaced with a female one. On a practical level, this means, among other things, that whereas in Shakespeare's plays men appear on stage without any women present more often than the other way around, many scenes in the re-visions take place entirely among women without any men on stage.

Ophelia Thinks Harder, *Lear's Daughters*, *Desdemona* and *Goodnight Desdemona* all challenge conventional representations of gender identity and female sexuality, but they do so in very different ways. *Ophelia Thinks Harder* explicitly questions what it sees as received opinions about norms

1 Lynne Bradley, *Adapting* King Lear *for the Stage* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), p. 186.

and ideals for women. In *Lear's Daughters*, the androgynous fool functions as a non-binary representation of gender identity. *Desdemona* shows an unconventionally promiscuous Desdemona; and while all three female characters are presented as heterosexual, the inclusion of the scene where Bianca teaches Desdemona to appear to enjoy being whipped functions as a visual way of challenging representations of female sexuality. *Goodnight Desdemona* challenges gender stereotypes by giving Othello's and Romeo's characteristics to Desdemona and Juliet, and the play questions 'compulsory heterosexuality' by letting Juliet fall in love with Constance and by letting Constance be momentarily seduced by Juliet.

Goodnight Desdemona uses an additional strategy: the insertion of a modern female character into Shakespeare's stories. In this play, the twentieth-century Canadian character Constance Ledbelly is the main character. She is a considerably rounder character than MacDonald's versions of Desdemona and Juliet, although she may in some ways be seen as a female version of the stereotypical absentminded and awkward male academic. The inclusion of Constance allows MacDonald to refer directly to problems that women today may have to face owing to gender inequality and patriarchal structures, including poor self-confidence and being exploited, both in the workplace and in personal relationships. The exploitation of Constance in the academic world both highlights the oppression of women in Shakespeare's plays and serves to invite the comparison between oppression of female characters in Shakespeare and discrimination against women in present-day real-life situations. As Constance gains greater self-confidence, takes control of her situation and starts her journey towards self-realisation, she develops into a 'strong, independent woman'. Laurin R. Porter argues that the Shakespearean characters whom Constance encounters help her realise her own worth:

> Because they come to Constance with no preconceptions or stereotypes, Desdemona and Othello are able to see her value. MacDonald, of course, manipulates the plot to make this possible, using especially the character of Desdemona to turn liabilities, as Constance's culture would perceive them, into assets. The fact that she is a scholar, unmarried, traveling alone, even that she is a vegetarian, which Desdemona declares "meet in vestal vows" (34) – all these qualities are set in a new context and admired.[2]

2 Laurin R. Porter, 'Shakespeare's "Sisters": Desdemona, Juliet and Constance Ledbelly in *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*', *Modern Drama*, 38:3 (1995), 362-77 (p. 366).

Though I would question the perception of being 'a scholar, unmarried', 'a vegetarian' and 'traveling alone' as 'liabilities', at least some of these qualities are certainly rare in classic literary heroines, and Constance therefore may provide contemporary women, and indeed men, who struggle to identify with the heroines and heroes of Shakespearean tragedies with a recognisable point of reference. But being a single woman who travels alone, in combination with her inadvertent cross-dressing, also links her to some of Shakespeare's comic heroines, and it is thus one of the components that make the play a comedy. Shakespeare's comedies might be said to show more gender equality than his tragedies, and Constance's endeavour to turn *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* into comedies may therefore in itself be seen as a feminist strategy on MacDonald's part. Mark Fortier points out that the Shakespearean scenes which Constance enters are both scenes which include only men and in which 'the fate of the characters, both male and female, is decided by men': the scene where Othello decides to kill Desdemona and the scene where Romeo fights Tybalt.[3] The intervention of a woman in these scenes changes the dynamics of the interplay between the male characters.

A strategy used by *Lear's Daughters* and *Ophelia Thinks Harder*, but not by either of the *Othello* re-visions, is to redistribute sympathy and blame so that the female characters appear as more sympathetic than they do in the originals and the blame for the tragic events is unequivocally fixed onto the tragic hero. Anna Lindhé argues that the 'shift in perspective' from Lear to the Goneril character in *A Thousand Acres* contributes to a 'shift of patterns from one that drives women into debt and guilt to one that releases them from debt and guilt' rather than a simple 'shift of sympathy from Lear to Goneril'.[4] *A Thousand Acres* is more nuanced than *Lear's Daughters* or *Ophelia Thinks Harder* in this way, but the argument that it is not first and foremost a question of sympathy still applies to these two plays: the reimagined Goneril, Regan and Ophelia do not necessarily appear as par-

3 Mark Fortier, 'Shakespeare with a Difference: Genderbending and Genrebending in *Goodnight Desdemona*', *Canadian Theatre Review* 59 (Summer 1989), 47-51 (p. 47).

4 Anna Lindhé, *Appropriations of Shakespeare's* King Lear *in Three North American Novels* (Lund: Lund Studies in English, 2012), p. 45. Cf. Sarah Appleton Aguiar, who, also writing about female-centred novels based on *King Lear*, says that '[f]eminist revisions seek to revalue the existence of the character – and her narrative – without re-presenting her as merely an "innocent victim", misunderstood within the paradigm she had previously inhabited'; '(Dis)Obedient Daughters: (Dis)Inheriting the Kingdom of Lear', in *He Said, She Says: An RSVP to the Male Text*, ed. Mika Howe and Sarah Appleton Aguiar (Madison & London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001), pp. 194-206 (p. 206).

ticularly likeable people (though they deal with issues that many audience members are likely to relate to and may therefore sympathise with), but they are subjected to very cruel treatment by the reimagined Lear and Hamlet, who are extremely unsympathetic. The redistribution, then, primarily consists in taking sympathy away from the male characters and taking blame away from the female ones: it dehumanises Lear and Hamlet, and alerts spectators/readers to the idea that Lear's and Hamlet's perspectives are not the only possible ones. In this way, the two re-visions may perhaps counteract the 'trauma' experienced by Jean Betts as a schoolgirl reading *Hamlet* and the 'guilt' that Jane Smiley describes in 'Shakespeare in Iceland', where she imagines Lear's two elder daughters on trial in front of a jury of readers.[5]

One aspect of blaming male characters is the recognition that men are responsible for their actions. The same argument can be found in contemporary debates on rape, where victim-blaming is often met by feminists with the argument that a lenient attitude to rapists actually shows disrespect for men, as it implies that they do not possess sufficient maturity or self-control to be held accountable. Shakespeare's tragic heroes are often spoken of as having been led astray and are sometimes therefore pardoned, even pitied, for their misdeeds: it is routinely said that Lear is 'driven mad' by his daughters and that Macbeth is 'driven to murder' by his wife. It is usually Iago who is blamed for Othello's murder of Desdemona,[6] but readings such as Margaret Loftus Ranald's claim that Othello's actions are understandable in the light of Desdemona's indiscretions. While this provides useful insight into the Renaissance ideals of womanhood, in a present-day context it may be thought comparable to blaming rape-victims on the basis of their behaviour or dress.[7] Feminist appropriations and productions, on the other hand, may maintain that if a man chooses to spend a night on a heath in a storm, that cannot be blamed on his daughters; if a man commits murder, that is his fault, even if his wife told him to do it; if a man murders his wife, it is his fault – not his wife's or even his lying friend's.

5 Jean Betts, 'Writer's Note', in *Ophelia Thinks Harder*, p. ii; Jane Smiley, 'Shakespeare in Iceland', in Marianne Novy (ed.), *Transforming Shakespeare: Contemporary Women's Re-Visions in Literature and Performance* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 159-79 (p. 171).

6 Could this be one reason for Iago's being one of the male Shakespearean characters that have sometimes been played by women in mixed casts?

7 Margaret Loftus Ranald, 'The Indiscretions of Desdemona', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 14:2 (Spring 1963), 127-39.

It can perhaps be argued that inventing backstories for female characters is in itself a feminist strategy, both for appropriators and for actors. Shakespearean actresses generally have to invent more backstory than their male counterparts, as the plays often do not contain nearly as much information about the female characters as about the male ones. While feminist critics sometimes argue that Shakespeare's characters are constructed as functions in the plays rather than rounded characters comparable to the heroes,[8] this is not a viable path for theatre practitioners. The strategy that is most readily available to performers is a rigorous approach to character analysis and a commitment to understanding the women in the plays on the same terms as the men, based on the text rather than on conventional reiterations, and complemented by imaginative backstories.

In addition to the above-mentioned specific strategies, feminist re-visions afford an opportunity for female writers, directors and actors to be a central part of a theatrical production about Shakespeare's characters, without having to wait for the conventions of mainstream theatre to change. This is the most literal way of putting women centre stage, and it makes feminist re-vision one solution among others to the gender imbalance in Shakespearean drama. It must be pointed out, however, that there can be few situations where there is a choice between producing a Shakespearean play and producing a feminist re-vision. *Lear's Daughters* has its origins in the feminist fringe theatre company WTG, *Ophelia Thinks Harder* was written for a feminist festival celebrating the centenary of women's suffrage in New Zealand, and *Goodnight Desdemona* was first produced by the Canadian feminist theatre company Nightwood Theatre. In a theatrical context, it is a fallacy to think of these plays as replacing or even offering an alternative to Shakespeare. Individual theatregoers may of course opt for a re-vision rather than a Shakespeare play on a particular night, and individual actors and directors who could have been working with a theatre company producing a Shakespeare play might instead work with a company that happens to be producing a re-vision. But from the point of view of the appropriators and the companies that first produced these plays the choice was never between a Shakespearean re-vision and

8 See Linda Bamber, *Comic Women, Tragic Men: A Study of Gender and Genre in Shakespeare* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982); Kathleen McLuskie, 'The Patriarchal Bard: Feminist Criticism and Shakespeare: *King Lear* and *Measure for Measure*', in Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (eds), *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 88-108.

Shakespeare's original, but between a Shakespearean re-vision and another newly written feminist play. Therefore, it would perhaps be fairer to compare a play like *Lear's Daughters* to contemporaneous plays written and performed in a similar context, such as Deborah Levy's *Pax* (1985) and Charlotte Keatley's *My Mother Said I Never Should* (1989), rather than to Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

The fact that certain late twentieth-century feminist plays draw on Shakespeare, however subversive or iconoclastic they may be thought to be, means that they are effectively bringing Shakespeare into feminism rather than bringing feminism into Shakespeare. Women in Shakespeare is a topical issue, and mainstream theatres are now actively working with the gender-imbalance problem through strategies like cross-gender casting and regendering.[9] As recently as 2019, the Shakespeare Institute Players performed a staged reading of *Goodnight Desdemona* in Stratford-upon Avon. It would be interesting, and perhaps conceivable after the 2016 *Making Mischief* season (which featured plays generically and stylistically akin to feminist drama from the 1980s and 1990s), to see a feminist re-vision staged at The Other Place, as this would bring the genre of theatrical feminist Shakespeare re-vision into the high seat of the Shakespearean Establishment.

The Father as a Symbol of Patriarchy

As one student on the 2015 version of the course 'Shakespeare's Women in Modern Drama' astutely pointed out, the feminism of *Goodnight Desdemona* primarily consists in showing that women can be strong, active and good role models, whereas *Lear's Daughters* and *Ophelia Thinks Harder* are more about demonstrating the negative aspects of patriarchy.

Etymologically, of course, *patriarchy* means 'rule of fathers', and both *Lear's Daughters* and *Ophelia Thinks Harder* criticise patriarchy as a system by depicting their female main characters' fathers in unfavourable ways. In *Lear's Daughters*, Lear is presented as a flawed ruler and father. Indeed, he is an inconsiderate lecher who ruins his wife's health with his incessant attempts to beget a son, neglects his daughters, and seduces a stranger in broad daylight with his children watching from a window on the day of their mother's funeral. It is also implied that he abuses his daughters, emotionally and possibly also sexually. Polonius in *Ophelia Thinks Harder* is

9 See Chapter 1.

similar to this Lear in many ways. He 'bellows' at Ophelia and distractedly 'fondles' the Maid while admonishing Ophelia (scene 2, pp. 10-11), an act which is reminiscent of Regan's memory of her father absentmindedly 'holding [her mother's] breast' (*Lear's Daughters*, scene 4, p. 220). When Ophelia daydreams about 'travel[ling] the world', Polonius laughs and, calling her a '[f]oolish girl', says, 'Except you would be raped, cooked and eaten at your first port of call' (scene 1, p. 6). When Polonius blames Ophelia for Hamlet's madness and the Maid says, 'My lord, I fear your daughter is also deeply disturbed', his reply is 'Is she indeed? Well snap out of it. Neurotic bloody women' (5, p. 39). When Ophelia has ordered the Maid to chastise her for having indulged in too much thinking, she interrupts the Maid, mid-whipping, exclaiming, 'Useless woman! My father! Get my Father! Only he knows how to beat me properly!' (scene 4, p. 33), which implies that Polonius has beaten her in the past.

Another similarity between *Lear's Daughters* and *Ophelia Thinks Harder* is that they both take issue with the patriarchal notion that women's chastity is a family commodity. Polonius tells Ophelia that 'Your chastity is the jewel of our house, bequeathed down from many illustrious ancestors' (scene 2, p. 11), and Laertes tries to warn Hamlet off by telling him that 'My sister's virginity is of great concern to me' (2, p. 15). In *Lear's Daughters*, Goneril, as the eldest daughter, has embraced her father's patriarchal values and tells her younger sister that 'Regan, Second Daughter of Lear' is '[v]aluable merchandise' but that 'Regan, Second Daughter of Lear, with bastard child' is worth nothing (scene 112, pp. 229-30).

These are all mimetic representations of men's oppression of women and of the consolidation of this oppression that is produced and reproduced by both men and women in patriarchal societies. But the extremity of the unfavourable depictions of fathers in the two plays should be seen more as a symbol of patriarchy than as an element in naturalistic depictions of two individual fathers. Lear is the only man in *Lear's Daughters*, and hence there are no depictions of other men of a more favourable nature. Two male characters in *Ophelia Thinks Harder*, Laertes and Hamlet, join Polonius as instances of men with stereotypically masculine negative personality traits and behaviours. Old Hamlet was also a man of this kind, according to Gertrude. But *Ophelia Thinks Harder* balances its deprecating attitude towards men by also including a very sympathetic male character, Horatio, who is the moral centre of the story and who, it is implied, may have a place in Ophelia's

happy ending. Claudius, at least according to Gertrude, is actually quite nice as well. In *Goodnight Desdemona*, men are also portrayed unfavourably, but as examples of bad experiences of men that may be shared by many women rather than as symbols of patriarchal ideology. In *Desdemona*, there are no men on stage, but it is implied that men exploit women in the patriarchal institutions of prostitution and marriage.

In addition to using paternal characters symbolically, feminist re-visions of Shakespeare, almost by definition, use Shakespeare himself as a symbol of patriarchy in order to criticise the patriarchal society of their own time. Shakespeare's status as a white, male cultural icon and part of the literary canon makes him an apt representative of the Establishment, regardless of the extent to which his plays express patriarchal values. Furthermore, the plays' connection to Shakespeare amplifies the impact of their message. Conversely, it can also be claimed that feminist re-visions use patriarchy to be able to appropriate Shakespeare. Igor Djordjevic suggests that 'a fundamentally revolutionary feminist and lesbian play "needs" the patriarchal, oppressive world of set gender roles for its inspiration'.[10] For anyone who wishes to write a play, both the Shakespeare spin-off and the revolutionary feminist play are formats that lend themselves to appropriation. However, although Djordjevic is strictly speaking right in that feminist writing profits from patriarchy and strict gender roles and would have been unnecessary without them, it must be assumed that most feminist plays are written by people who adhere to a feminist world-view and therefore wish for the patriarchal system to be abolished.

The Shakespearean Tragic Family

When seen as domestic drama in a twentieth-century context, Shakespeare's tragedies have the family at their core, specifically the unsuccessful nuclear family. The subject matter of feminist re-visions is closely connected to the concerns of second-wave feminism. First-wave feminism had focused largely on procuring legal rights for women; radical feminism now turned its attention towards domestic and sexual politics.[11] The oppression

10 Igor Djordjevic, '*Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*: From Shakespearean Tragedy to Postmodern Satyr Play', *Comparative Drama*, 37:1 (2003), 89-115 (p. 111).

11 It should be noted that radical feminism is not radical in the sense of extreme. 'Radical' is derived from *radix*, the Latin for 'root', and this particular strand of feminism (which was dominant during the second wave of feminism) is so termed because it argues that the patriarchal gender system is the

of women in the private sphere was a central concern during the second wave of feminism, and it is also a central concern in feminist Shakespeare re-visions from around 1990. One way in which feminist re-visions use Shakespeare is to emphasise the female characters' roles in familial relationships. Some family-related motifs that are especially prominent in Shakespearean appropriations are relations between fathers and daughters, marriage, and fertility and motherhood.

Relationships between fathers and daughters are more prevalent in Shakespeare's plays than depictions of marriage or motherhood. These relationships take a number of different forms. In *Domination and Defiance: Fathers and Daughters in Shakespeare*, Diane Elizabeth Dreher divides Shakespeare's father-daughter relationships into 'Dominated Daughters' (which includes Ophelia and Desdemona), 'Defiant Daughters' (which includes Desdemona, Goneril, Regan and Cordelia), 'Androgynous Daughters' (including only heroines from the comedies) and 'Redemptive Love and Wisdom' (including only heroines from the romances). In *Shakespeare's Daughters*, Sharon Hamilton instead divides Shakespeare's father-daughter relationships into 'The Father as Inept or Able Mentor' (which includes Lord Capulet), 'Daughters Who Rebel' (which includes Desdemona), 'Daughters Who Acquiesce' (which includes Ophelia), 'Daughters Who Act in Their Fathers' Stead' (including only heroines from the comedies) and 'Daughters Who Forgive and Heal' (which includes Cordelia).[12] The presence or absence of forgiveness and reconciliation seems to be central to Shakespeare's father-daughter relationships, as well as the presence or absence of obedience. In *Rewriting Shakespeare, Rewriting Ourselves*, Peter Erickson maintains that the ability to forgive of such female characters as Cordelia and Perdita 'is so central to the articulation of what one can find moving […] that it can become fixed in our minds as an inviolable element of father-daughter relations'.[13]

The Shakespearean plays on which the specifically feminist appropriations discussed in this study are based are *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Romeo and*

root cause of oppression and that men's oppression of women is the most fundamental kind of oppression in the world. See, for example, Michelene Wandor, *Carry On, Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics* (London & New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986 [1981]), pp. 132-34.

12 Diane Elizabeth Dreher, *Domination and Defiance: Fathers and Daughters in Shakespeare* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1986); Sharon Hamilton, *Shakespeare's Daughters* (Jefferson, North Carolina, & London: McFarland & Company, 2003).

13 Peter Erickson, *Rewriting Shakespeare, Rewriting Ourselves* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & Oxford: University of California Press, 1991), p. 163.

Juliet and *Hamlet*. Juxtaposing these four plays with regard to father-daughter relationships reveals certain similarities. The female main characters are all (dis)obedient daughters: Cordelia, Desdemona, Juliet and Ophelia. In all four cases, there is a conflict, an opposition, or even rivalry, between the father and the suitor or husband. Both Cordelia and Desdemona explicitly talk about their duties to their father versus their duties to their husband. The text of *King Lear* does not make it clear which, if either, of her two suitors Cordelia favours, so her sentiments on the duty to love any future husband, which she talks of in her first extended speech in the play, must be understood as a matter of principle:[14]

> Good my lord,
> You have begot me, bred me, loved me. I
> Return those duties back as are right fit,
> Obey you, love you and most honour you.
> Why have my sisters husbands, if they say
> They love you all? Haply when I shall wed,
> That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
> Half my love with him, half my care and duty.
> Sure I shall never marry like my sisters
> To love my father all. (*King Lear*, I.1.95-104)

This speech is remarkably similar to Desdemona's first speech in *Othello*, with the difference that Desdemona is already married and therefore speaking of a particular person:

> My noble father,
> I do perceive here a divided duty.
> To you I am bound for life and education:
> My life and education both do learn me
> How to respect you; you are the lord of duty,
> I am hitherto your daughter. But here's my husband:
> And so much duty as my mother showed
> To you, preferring you before her father,
> So much I challenge that I may profess
> Due to the Moor my lord. (*Othello*, I.3.180-189)

14 In this respect, Shakespeare's play differs from Tate's version, where Cordelia clearly has Edgar in mind during this speech.

In both these cases, the father 'loses' his daughter to her husband and feels betrayed by her, while in *Hamlet* Ophelia obeys her father, giving priority to her loyalty as a daughter and thus arguably causing Hamlet to feel betrayed by her.[15] Juliet only avoids this conflict by going behind her father's back. In all four cases, the dichotomy father/suitor foregrounds the theme of growing up and the conflict of owing loyalty to one's parents versus loyalty to oneself and one's future life. The fathers' treatment of their daughters is clearly not condoned by the texts. In *Macbeth*, no father-daughter relationship is shown on stage; but the placing and implications of Lady Macbeth's mention of her father ('Had he not resembled / My father as he slept, I had done't' [II.2.12-13]) gives it some weight and makes it a possible source of insight into her character.

In the appropriations, father-daughter relationships feature in *Lear's Daughters*, *Ophelia Thinks Harder* and David Calcutt's *Lady Macbeth*, but not in *Goodnight Desdemona* or *Desdemona*, even though Brabantio's controlling behaviour towards Desdemona in *Othello* would seem an apt subject for feminist re-vision. In both *Lear's Daughters* and *Ophelia Thinks Harder*, the relationship portrayed is dysfunctional and even abusive, and Lear and Polonius are clearly not a force for good in their daughters' lives. In *Lady Macbeth*, on the other hand, Lady Macbeth's father is described in a favourable way and is associated with her integrity and individuality as well as her heritage.

The only one of the five Shakespeare plays studied here where motherhood/fertility can be seen as a central theme is *Macbeth*, though it can also be said to be a minor topic in *King Lear*. There are mothers in *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*, but they are noticeably absent from *King Lear* and *Othello*. The absence of a mother is actually also manifest in *Hamlet*, as although Hamlet has a mother, Ophelia does not. The fact that Cordelia, Ophelia and Desdemona are motherless make them all the more exposed to ill-treatment by men. Irene G. Dash notes that Juliet is '[u]nusual among Shakespeare's women characters' in that she 'has both her mother and her Nurse as women role models'; however, they 'ultimately […] fail

15 Hamlet and Ophelia are of course neither married nor engaged, but the implication is that they could have been if Polonius had not discouraged Ophelia from communicating with Hamlet. Polonius seems to think that Hamlet, as a prince, is too far above Ophelia to seriously consider marrying her and must therefore be merely toying with her or planning to seduce and abandon her; but at Ophelia's funeral Gertrude says that she 'hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife' (V.1.233), which implies that Hamlet would have had support from his family had he wanted to marry Ophelia.

her'.[16] In *Romeo and Juliet*, as in *Hamlet*, the focus is on the children in the parent-child relationships, whereas the main characters in *Macbeth* are of the parents' generation. As *The Woman's Part* argues, Shakespeare's Gertrude and Lady Macbeth are not the iconic formidable temptresses they are often seen as, but nurturing and family-orientated women, who only want what is best for their husbands and any children they may have.[17] The two characters are in this view less 'strong and independent' and more stereotypically feminine than conventional interpretations suggest, but the interpretation of them as strong and independent implies that they are complicit in the plays' tragedy to a higher degree than the texts indicate and thus creates a bias against them and burdens them with guilt that belongs to their male partners.

In the appropriations, both the experiences of having (or not having) a mother and of being (or not being) a mother are represented. The scarcity of mothers in Shakespeare's plays is turned around by the addition of mothers in *Lear's Daughters*, *Ophelia Thinks Harder*, Jules Tasca's *Prince Lear*, Perry Pontac's *Prince Lear*, and Howard Barker's *Seven Lears*. *Lear's Daughters* and *Ophelia Thinks Harder* both deal with the potential prospect of motherhood. *Lear's Daughters* takes its cue from Shakespeare's Lear's speech cursing Goneril's fertility and potential offspring, and has its reimagined Goneril persuade the reluctant Regan to have an abortion, an event that is depicted in the play as a traumatic experience that is instrumental in turning the optimistic and vivacious girl Regan from the early scenes of *Lear's Daughters* into the cynical and ruthless woman in *King Lear*.[18] In *Ophelia Thinks Harder*, the Queen's description of childbirth and motherhood, together with the Maid's interjections as she chimes in, movingly stand out from the rest of these two rather flat characters' speeches:

16 Irene G. Dash, *Wooing, Wedding, and Power: Women in Shakespeare's Plays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), p. 69.

17 Rebecca Smith, 'A Heart Cleft in Twain: The Dilemma of Shakespeare's Gertrude', in *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz et al. (Urbana, Chicago & London: University of Illinois Press, 1980), pp. 194-210; Joan Larsen Klein, 'Lady Macbeth "Infirm of purpose", in *The Woman's Part*, pp. 240-55.

18 It may be regarded as somewhat surprising that such an unfavourable portrayal of abortion should be included in such a decidedly feminist play, since the feminist movement has been (and is) vocal in campaigning for the legalisation of abortion. However, this must be understood as a result of the writing process. Since the play is based partly on the personal experiences of cast members, stories touching subjects such as abortion reflect individual experiences rather than express generalised political views. It must also be pointed out that the abortion-rights movement is not about advocating abortion but about advocating the woman's right to choose, which logically includes the right to choose *not* to have an abortion.

QUEEN	[…] Hours and hours of intense pain, for our sins. And then – your body splits in two – and out comes – another person. It's absolutely absurd. Absurd and horrifying. Knowing that your body – *your* body, that you thought you *knew* – can just split open and splurt out a whole new person; just like that. Ludicrous. And it throws you; it's thoroughly bewildering. You are completely tossed out of yourself, you can never be absolutely certain of anything ever again… That's why men don't like knowing about it; it rattles their little certainties. They like to think we take it in our stride, find it all 'natural', you know. When in fact the process is as extraordinary and frightening for us as it would be for them – if it happened to them. You, girl. You've had children. Don't you agree?
MAID	O yes, yes your majesty. Your body is shattered, then your sleep is shattered.
QUEEN	All the tidy little structures you've built up around you – for your emotional survival, your protection – collapse like a pack of cards … everything you believed is thrown into question …
MAID	You thought you knew what love meant …
QUEEN	Ah, and then you look in the ugly little face of this child you've made and you know the word 'love' wasn't coined till the first mother looked at the first baby.
MAID	We do stupid things for men sometimes but it's only for our children we'll do …
MAID & QUEEN	… absolutely anything.
QUEEN	Absolutely anything. But don't let men know this. They get jealous. They like to think *they* invented love. (Scene 3, p. 20)

Both these plays, then, express an essentially favourable attitude to motherhood. *Lady Macbeth*, without any clear feminist function beyond its focus on a female character, picks up on the theme of parenthood in *Macbeth*, spectacularly reimagining Lady Macbeth's lost child and merging him with Lady Macduff's son. A difference here from David Greig's *Dunsinane*, where Lady Macbeth also has a son, is that the child in Calcutt's play has been estranged from his mother from infancy, which means that she is a

mother only in the sense of having given birth (and briefly nursed the baby) but not in the sense of having the experience of bringing up a child.

Macbeth, *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet* all deal with marriage in one way or another, though the portrayal of married life is not a foregrounded aspect of Shakespeare's drama. According to Stephen Greenblatt, there are only 'two significant exceptions to Shakespeare's unwillingness or inability to imagine a married couple in a relationship of sustained intimacy': Claudius and Gertrude and the Macbeths.[19] Iago and Emilia are another married couple whose relationship is explored in some depth, and Goneril's marriage to Albany is also depicted. It is interesting to note that at least one person in each of these marriages is a villain; and Greenblatt reads both the relationship between Claudius and Gertrude and that between Macbeth and his wife as deeply disturbing. The 'main' marriage in each of the four plays mentioned above (the Macbeths, Othello and Desdemona, Romeo and Juliet, and Claudius and Gertrude) is seemingly a happy one, but not a force for good in the lives of the characters: the Macbeths' *folie à deux* turns them into murderers, Othello kills Desdemona, Romeo and Juliet both kill themselves as a result of their relationship, and Gertrude's marriage to Claudius proves to be fatal for most of the Danish court.

Arranged marriage can be said to be a minor theme in both *King Lear* and *Lear's Daughters*; but while the marriage between Goneril and Albany is briefly explored in *King Lear*, *Lear's Daughters* does not dwell on the relationship between husband and wife beyond outlining Lear's past abusive treatment of the queen. The two appropriations that are most concerned with marriage are *Desdemona* and Pontac's *Fatal Loins: Romeo and Juliet Re-Considered*. These plays both present marriage in an unfavourable light. *Fatal Loins* presents the quintessentially romantic marriage as doomed to fail, and *Desdemona* compares marriage to prostitution. But in the same way as the unfavourable depictions of fathers do not mean that all fathers are bad people, this should not be interpreted as the plays being inherently against marriage; rather, they use both father-daughter relationships and marriage as metaphors for men's oppression of women. An important difference between these two plays, however, is that one criticises marriage in a mainly tragic way and the other in an entirely comic way.

19 Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (New York & London: 2004), p. 137.

Making Audiences Laugh or Cry

Pontac's three Shakespeare parodies, though they all show 'quite a bit of very bad behaviour towards women by men', are comedies first and foremost.[20] But even among the four core feminist re-visions, there is a clear division between comedy and tragedy. *Goodnight Desdemona* and *Ophelia Thinks Harder* are more likely to make spectators/readers feel happy and hopeful, whereas *Lear's Daughters* and *Desdemona* are darker plays with unhappy endings, which, though they include comic elements, are more likely to inspire feelings of sadness and hopelessness.

Whether either of these types of impact on an audience serves a feminist function or not largely depends on whether the audience's emotional response springs out of sympathy for a female character, whether this is something that has been changed from Shakespeare's play, and whether parallels can be drawn between the fictional problems that these female characters encounter and women's situation in the real world. The four feminist re-visions all redistribute sympathy in one way or another: *Lear's Daughters* invites more sympathy for Goneril and Regan and less for Lear than *King Lear* does, *Ophelia Thinks Harder* invites less sympathy for Hamlet and Polonius than *Hamlet* does, and *Desdemona* and *Goodnight Desdemona* both actually invite less sympathy for Desdemona than *Othello* does. In the first two cases, the connection between the redistribution of sympathy and the feminism of the plays is clear, but Desdemona's change is less obviously relevant for the feminist enterprise. Vogel's Desdemona is overbearing, manipulative, disregardful of Othello's and Emilia's feelings, and generally unpleasant. This brings the question of infidelity and honour-based violence to a head, as spectators/readers, however disgusted they may be with Desdemona's behaviour and personality, are invited to consider whether they really think she deserves to be killed. MacDonald's Desdemona's similarities to Shakespeare's Othello may reveal to spectators/readers that Othello is a more deeply flawed character than they had thought, as some of his characteristics may be stereotypically seen as more excusable in a man.

It is impossible to generalise about how audiences perceive any play; but in order to obtain an indication of how some readers have experienced *Lear's Daughters*, *Goodnight Desdemona* and *Ophelia Thinks Harder*, it may

20 Perry Pontac, personal correspondence, 17 March 2014.

be useful to look at some of my students' reactions to reading and studying them. While most students appeared to find the phenomenon of appropriation interesting and engaging, some struggled with the concept. Some of these students took the new ideas suggested in the appropriations as truth revealed about the original plays, and some of the 2013 students (who had read Shakespeare's plays first) were unwilling even to consider the implications of the appropriations if they did not correspond to their own original readings of Shakespeare's plays; sometimes these attitudes overlapped. The response of some of the students to the plays, both Shakespeare's and the appropriations, was very emotional, and some students found it hard to contemplate the texts and the questions in an objective way. In parallel, it does not seem to be unusual for audiences to respond to adaptations or appropriations with indignation or anger, especially if the adaptation is felt to lack in 'fidelity' to the original. Appropriations with a specific agenda, for example a feminist one, may use these strong emotional reactions to increase the impact of the message they wish to convey. On the other hand, such strategies may also make some spectators less susceptible to the message.

Many of the 2013 students disliked *Lear's Daughters*, apparently because they found it depressing that it offers such an unflattering interpretation of Lear and that the ending is unhappy. The views on *Goodnight Desdemona* were divided. Some liked the play, because they thought it was funny, while others disliked it because it did not depict Desdemona as a rounded or pleasant character. *Ophelia Thinks Harder* was appreciated by many of the students because they found it possible to identify with Ophelia and to relate to the questions she struggles with, and because the ending is optimistic. The opinions of the 2015 students tended to be slightly more positive towards *Lear's Daughters* and *Goodnight Desdemona* and slightly less positive towards *Ophelia Thinks Harder*. It was also pointed out in the 2015 group that *Othello* may in itself be seen as a feminist play, as the female characters are presented as so much better people than the male ones: in the world of *Othello*, men generate destruction and women try to stop it but fail.

It seems that the general view among the students was not only that a good play should present likeable characters and a happy ending, but also that a good *feminist* play should present 'strong' female role models and an ending where women are emancipated and equality is attained – the plays should work as utopian models of how a better society is envisioned. This is

of course one strategy that can be used in political theatre, but showing and exaggerating the flaws of the present society is a more common one.

Pessimistic and Optimistic Feminism: Towards a Theory of Feminist Re-Vision

These students' diverging attitudes towards the three different re-visions they studied reveal an essential difference between two fundamentally dissimilar kinds of feminist Shakespeare re-vision. *Ophelia Thinks Harder* and *Goodnight Desdemona* change the destinies of Ophelia, Desdemona and Juliet, while *Lear's Daughters* invents a backstory for the daughters of *King Lear*. *Ophelia Thinks Harder* and *Goodnight Desdemona* avert the tragic endings and 'save' the heroines, creating a utopian version of the stories where the women are no longer victims. *Lear's Daughters* 'explains' the female characters' background and shows how unhappy an ending they get when patriarchy wins.[21]

The tragedy of *Lear's Daughters* does not even end with the last scene of the play, though that is bleak enough; the implied ultimate unhappy ending is the fate of the daughters in *King Lear*. *Desdemona* belongs to the same category as *Lear's Daughters*; and this play, too, ends with the implied awareness of what is to follow after the final scene. Both these plays outline the dynamics and events that lead up to the tragic end. To increase the awareness of social problems connected to patriarchy, they show a dystopian version of society, where the female characters are still victims of patriarchal structures at the end of the play and are unable to escape oppression.

Feminist re-visions either 'explain' the female characters' background and show that the unhappy outcome has its roots in patriarchal values, or they change the ending and 'save' the female characters from their Shakespearean fate, giving them a happy ending according to feminist values. Thus, the happy ending makes a feminist point in *Ophelia Thinks Harder* and *Goodnight Desdemona*, and the unhappy ending makes a feminist point in *Desdemona* and *Lear's Daughters*. These two separate ways of reinventing a Shakespearean tragedy from a feminist viewpoint may be

21 An alternative division of feminist re-visions was suggested by one of my 2013 students, who perceptively argued that *Lear's Daughters* belongs to the second wave of feminism and *Goodnight Desdemona* to the third wave, even though the two plays were written at roughly the same time (*Lear's Daughters* premiering in 1987 and *Goodnight Desdemona* in 1988).

called 'pessimistic feminism' and 'optimistic feminism'. It is important to explain that the pessimistic approach does not amount to thinking things will never get better, but rather to imagining the worst-case scenario.

A similar division between optimistic and pessimistic feminist readings can be found among productions of Shakespeare's plays. When trying to perform a feminist interpretation of the ending of *The Taming of the Shrew*, for example, some actresses try to accommodate a happy ending by interpreting Kate's final speech either as ironic, as her deceiving Petruchio, or as the two of them being in collusion, while others play Kate as having been defeated, which in a feminist reading constitutes an unhappy ending. Sinéad Cusack, for instance, played it as a 'declaration of independence': she thought Petruchio had allowed Kate to have 'her own vision' – it just '*happens* that her vision coincides with his'. Paola Dionisotti, on the other hand, played it as 'a statement of utter disillusionment': what she was saying to Petruchio was, 'Is this what you want? It this what you're asking me to do?' As she knelt to kiss his foot at the end of the speech, he 'gasped' and 'recoiled' at the realisation of what he had done to her, but it was '*too late*'.[22]

Essentially, the difference between the optimistic and the pessimistic approach may be what Sarah Werner refers to as trusting Shakespeare or not trusting Shakespeare.[23] Feminist critics, directors, actors and appropriators may think of Shakespeare as being essentially on their side but in need of rediscovering after generations of misinterpretation, or they may be what Judith Fetterley calls 'a resisting reader', suspicious of the attitude and ideology of the author and his time.[24] Paradoxically, the approach that can be said to be connected to trusting Shakespeare is the pessimistic one, as that approach puts faith in the idea that Shakespeare's tragedies in themselves show tragedy to have its roots in patriarchal structures, and that these structures can be exposed without changing the endings of Shakespeare's stories.

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22 Carol Rutter, *Clamorous Voices: Shakespeare's Women Today* (London: The Women's Press, 1988), pp. 21-23 [emphases original]. See also Penny Gay, 'Changing Shakespeare: New Possibilities for the Modern Actress', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Actress*, ed. Maggie B. Gale and John Stokes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 314-26 (pp. 324-25); Terri Power, *Shakespeare and Gender in Practice* (London: Palgrave, 2016), pp. 12-13.

23 Sarah Werner, *Shakespeare and Feminist Performance: Ideology on Stage* (London & New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 41. See Chapter 1.

24 Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington, IA: Indiana University Press, 1978), pp. xxii-xxiii.

Feminist re-visions of Shakespeare's tragedies use a number of specific strategies for putting women centre stage: giving a voice to female characters who do not tell their own story in Shakespeare's version; filling in temporal or spatial gaps in Shakespeare's story in ways that show the story from a female perspective; representing female identity and sexuality in unconventional ways; redistributing sympathy and blame among the characters so that the male characters receive the blame for their own actions; using unfavourably portrayed father characters and marriages as symbols of patriarchy; showing female characters as role models; saving female characters from their tragic fates; and, finally, explaining the female characters tragic fates in terms of gender oppression. These last two strategies can be connected to what I call 'optimistic' and 'pessimistic' feminism.

A common denominator among many of the strategies presented here is to blame men, both for the tragic outcomes of Shakespeare's tragedies and for the shortcomings of contemporary society. It should be pointed out that feminism as a movement and an ideology sees both men and women as victims of patriarchy, even though on the surface men profit from it. The feminist plays studied here contain extreme representations of men as oppressors of women so as to reveal and analyse the oppression inherent in the patriarchal order. They belong ideologically to the radical feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s and are very much 'of their time', even though many kinds of oppression fought against by this movement and criticised in these plays, such as domestic and sexual violence, are as current as ever. Understanding the strategies employed by the re-visions may prevent the subsequent generation from dismissing them precipitately as unsophisticated or overly polemical.

Conclusion

Several different factors contributed to the emergence of feminist theatrical Shakespeare re-visions in the late twentieth century. The parts that had originally been written for boy actors had now long been played by professional actresses, who could not see why they should not be as central to the projects they worked on as their male counterparts. Shakespeare's development into a cultural icon meant that feminist appropriations could use him to criticise the Establishment and use his status to give their message greater impact. The development of the role of the modern director had already led to ideologically driven productions of Shakespeare's plays in both fringe and mainstream theatre. Appropriations take this one step further and are a natural continuation of politicised engagement with Shakespeare. In addition, appropriations written collaboratively by prospective casts offer an alternative to actors' exclusion from giving feminist interpretations of Shakespeare's plays.

Shakespeare re-visions are also an opportunity to discuss concerns of second-wave feminism, such as patriarchy, sexuality and domestic aspects of misogyny. These phenomena are already in evidence in Shakespeare's plays; but they are brought to the fore in the re-visions, where other aspects of Shakespearean drama are omitted, such as national politics and warfare, the focus on which can sometimes obscure the inherent engagement with gender issues in Shakespeare's plays. Feminist re-visions employ a balance of drawing on the perceived inherent feminism in Shakespeare's plays and challenging the patriarchal values reproduced in them, or, expressed differently, a balance of working with and against Shakespeare. The same tension can be found in feminist criticism and performance of Shakespeare.

In Shakespeare's own appropriations of *Leir* and the Macbeth story in Holinshed, and in his treatment of Emilia, Ophelia and Juliet, there is a movement, similar to the movement of present-day feminist re-visions, towards focusing more on and partly exculpating women. By extension,

Shakespeare's own versions of these stories can be seen to ask whether women are in life routinely blamed for things that are not necessarily their fault – an approach which can, in a present-day context, be connected to the topical issue of victim-blaming. Shakespeare's plays also tend to focus more on children than his sources do – and not only in the child motif and inclusion of two boy characters (Fleance and young Macduff) in *Macbeth*. If Juliet, Ophelia, Cordelia and Desdemona are thought of as being about thirteen to seventeen years old, they are children by today's legal definition. Juliet, the youngest, is for no obvious reason three years younger than the corresponding character in Shakespeare's source; and in the other three cases the daughter's relationship with her father, and therefore her daughterhood, is foregrounded. As discussed in the chapter on *King Lear*, patriarchy places men above both women and children, leaving girls at the bottom of the hierarchy. This focus on young girls and their relationships with their fathers may therefore be read as gender-orientated engagement with the source stories.

As has been obvious throughout this study, different Shakespearean tragedies give rise to different tendencies in appropriations. *Lear* appropriations tend to take the missing mother into account. Some of them lump Goneril and Regan together, which is often described as the conventional way of portraying them in productions of *King Lear*, while others take care to individualise the two characters, an approach which has in recent years become common in performances of Shakespeare's play. In performance and criticism of *King Lear*, incest and dementia have come to be two standard (not mutually exclusive) explanations of Lear's personality and his relationship to his daughters. *Lear's Daughters* (like Jane Smiley's novel *A Thousand Acres*) picks up the motif of incest, but none of the appropriations contains any reference to dementia. Perhaps most strikingly of all, the questioning of Cordelia as Lear's biological daughter occurs in both *Lear's Daughters* and *Seven Lears*. As I have argued, the trope of Cordelia as a changeling may be connected to similarities between Cordelia and Cinderella and the latter's status as stepdaughter. It may also be a way to relieve anxiety caused by implications of a sexual relationship between Lear and Cordelia.

Since Adrian Noble's 1986 RSC production of *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth's missing child has gained a prominent position in productions, appropriations and criticism of the play. While the historical son from her first marriage is conventionally thought to be out of bounds as an explanation

in the theatre, all three appropriations studied here choose this explanation of her famous speech beginning 'I have given suck'. The appropriations have the further common traits of reintroducing the historical background into the story and taking Lady Macbeth's part by suggesting that her actions can be excused in view of the trauma to which she has been subjected, by stipulating her legal right to the throne and/or by writing off the acts she performs in Shakespeare's play as malicious slander.

While I would argue that domestic violence against women is a central theme in the play-text of *Othello*, neither productions of the play nor the appropriations studied here foreground this aspect as much as might be expected. *Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief* treats domestic violence as one manifestation of the oppression of marriage, but *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* instead focuses on an aspect of Shakespeare's play that many spectators/readers appear to experience: the impulse to intervene to avert the inevitable tragedy.

It is also interesting in this context that productions of *Othello* still tend to read the play as being primarily about race, whereas neither *Desdemona* nor *Goodnight Desdemona* is concerned with race or racism. What is surprising is not that race is seen as being an important element in *Othello*, but that the importance of the very topical area of domestic violence as a central aspect of the play is often at least partly overlooked. One reason for this could be that the issue of race obscures the issue of gender. If Othello's status as a racialised character is seen as important for the play by a production or appropriation with an anti-racist outlook, it is in the interest of this production to present the character of Othello as sympathetically as possible, which is likely to mean that less attention is directed towards his violence and the gender issues in the play. In a similar way, an appropriation or a production that wishes to promote Emilia as a feminist character would be likely to downplay her racist discourse and focus less on the issue of race in the play as a whole. This is an example of how present-day productions and appropriations are more categorical than Shakespeare's texts. This tendency is partly connected to the development of the role of the director during the twentieth century.

The appropriations of *Romeo and Juliet* create an imagined future, but the vision is cynical and challenges the ideas of love at first sight and living 'happily ever after'. However, the idea of romantic tragedy that they question and replace with comedy is not derived from Shakespeare's play but

from its afterlife. The tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* is not just that Romeo and Juliet die, and certainly not that their romantic story is interrupted. The marriage between these two adolescents is in itself part of the tragedy – it is the modern idea of romantic love that makes us think that marrying for love is always the desirable outcome in fiction. The tragedy, including both the marriage and the deaths, is caused by the adults in Juliet's life: the Friar's risky plan, the Nurse's irresponsible guardianship and the Capulets' bad parenting, including pressuring or even forcing their daughter to be married too young and to someone she does not want to be married to.

The assortment of subjects treated in appropriations of *Hamlet* is more eclectic than the subjects of the other appropriations. This may be because the play in itself is so multifaceted. It is often said to be about the extremely broad subject of what it means to be human; but it could also, in a less complimentary vein, be seen as touching on various different topics with little or no intrinsic connection. Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that appropriations of this play do not follow any discernible trend. However, *Ophelia Thinks Harder* and *Gertrude – The Cry* have the mutual trait of being appropriations of stereotypical, conventional readings of Ophelia and Gertrude rather than of the characters in Shakespeare's text. *Ophelia Thinks Harder* assumes that Shakespeare's Ophelia is passive and does not think for herself, and explores what might have happened if Ophelia had been afforded as much subjectivity as Hamlet and allowed to be 'true' to her 'self'. *Gertrude – The Cry* assumes that Shakespeare's Gertrude has conspired with Claudius to murder his brother out of lust, and explores what might have happened if she had not felt guilty about it.

The extent to which tendencies regarding ideational content in the appropriations connect to notable contemporaneous productions of Shakespeare's plays and/or to their sources varies. Suggestions of incest between Lear and one or more of his daughters appear in both productions and appropriations of *King Lear*, and they have also formed a prominent idea in criticism on *King Lear* during the same time period. The three appropriations of *Macbeth* are all connected to the play's sources in terms of the importance of Scottish history and to contemporary productions and criticism in terms of the importance of Lady Macbeth's child. Here, the introduction of historical 'facts' is clearly connected to Scottish nationalism and/or an interest in Scottish culture and heritage, not least in John Cargill Thompson's play. In his appropriation of *Hamlet*, on the other hand, there

is no such motive; it is written in direct parallel to the *Macbeth* appropriation, but lacks the political dimension. *Othello* is interesting in terms of how sympathy and blame in relation to the various characters have been redistributed, first in Shakespeare's play in relation to its sources and then again in the appropriations. But the two appropriations studied here show little affinity to how the staging of the play has developed in the theatre. The appropriations of *Romeo and Juliet*, with their elements of cross-dressing and homoeroticism, are more connected to Shakespeare's comedies than to his sources for this particular tragedy. Some appropriations of *Romeo and Juliet* that fall outside the category studied here interpret the play as being about homosexuality; however, they usually reinvent the star-crossed lovers as a same-sex couple kept apart by the families' and society's prejudice, not – like here – as a man and a woman kept apart by their desire for a third party of their own sex. By contrast, the interpretation of Hamlet as a woman in one of the *Hamlet* appropriations has a parallel in the longstanding tradition of productions of Shakespeare's play with the same idea.

The aspects of Shakespeare's plays that tend to be highlighted in present-day appropriations are issues that are regarded as burning questions in our own time. Appropriations of *King Lear* and *Macbeth* are concerned with children and parenthood, and appropriations of *King Lear* and *Othello* deal with domestic violence and abuse, while both appropriations of *Romeo and Juliet* are about sexual identity and orientation, monogamy and romantic love. It can of course be argued that these are universal and eternal topics, but they are also peculiarly characteristic of the present day. Perhaps children and couplehood (including LGBTQ+ questions) are especially prominent concerns in an age where it is increasingly important to be norm-critical at the same time as the nuclear family and the relationship between two people based on a combination of romantic and sexual attraction are very strong norms. Gender and family politics is a fast-changing area in the wake of the relative normalisation of feminism during the last few decades. On a darker note, child abuse and domestic violence are ever-present problems that have been receiving a great deal of attention in recent times.

Appropriators, directors, actors, scholars, readers and audiences are all likely to see and attach importance to things in Shakespeare's plays that they feel to be of vital significance in the present moment. In different time periods, people have noticed and focused on completely different aspects of

the plays. This can be exemplified by the fact that the idea of mourning a dead child has in about forty years' time gone from not being generally seen as relevant for *Macbeth* at all to being widely viewed as absolutely central to the play. This does not, however, necessarily mean that present-day readers superimpose their own concerns on Shakespeare's plays without any foundation in the texts. On the contrary, it is usually perfectly possible to find evidence in Shakespeare's texts to defend readings that may at a cursory glance appear to be anachronistic. As Shakespearean actors and directors repeatedly point out, Shakespeare's texts are so rich and versatile that the possibilities for different interpretations are seemingly endless; and, above all, the texts are strong and flexible enough to bear the stretch of any 'liberties' taken with them. Most far-fetched stagings of Shakespeare today are accommodated within productions of his own plays. There is limited awareness of the last few decades' stage appropriations in mainstream theatre; and it may also be felt that the advantages of producing Shakespeare's original plays – in terms of the quality and versatility of the text as well as the possibilities for funding and attracting large audiences (and, in consequence, conveying any 'message' the director may wish to get across to more people) – outweigh the advantage of having the freedom to create an entirely new text. It would be possible to draw the conclusion that appropriations of the kind investigated here, especially feminist ones, have largely served their purpose and been replaced by an attitude that is increasingly accepting of varying and unconventional ways of staging Shakespeare's texts.[1]

The appropriative impulse often stems from unanswered questions and what is sometimes perceived as 'unsatisfying' solutions in Shakespeare's plays. These are often connected to gender issues and resonate with appropriators owing to the connections to contemporary concerns. The appropriations, in turn, often introduce a new condition that could have an impact on spectators'/readers' understanding of Shakespeare's plays. This may lead to a back-and-forth movement of interpretation between Shakespeare's play and its appropriation, where both can be seen as appropriations of each other in the mind of the spectator/reader. Not all of the inventions have this kind of potential, though, either because they are impossible to reconcile with Shakespeare's story or because they do not appear to add anything to the interpretation of Shakespeare's play. Inventions that

1 *Dunsinane* is the most recent of the appropriations and the only one with its roots in mainstream theatre.

seem to be inconsistent with Shakespeare's versions include Lady Macbeth surviving (in Greig's *Dunsinane*), Old Hamlet surviving (in Pontac's *Hamlet, Part II*), Desdemona surviving (in MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona*), Romeo and Juliet surviving (in MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona* and Pontac's *Fatal Loins*) and Macbeth's and Hamlet's lives having been completely different from how they are portrayed in Shakespeare's plays (in Cargill Thompson's two plays). Inventions that are irrelevant to the over-all interpretations of Shakespeare's plays include Kent being a woman (in Pontac's *Prince Lear*). The conditions that really seem to have the power to affect the understanding of Shakespeare's plays are Cordelia not being Lear's daughter (in Barker's *Seven Lears* and the WTG's *Lear's Daughters*), Lady Macbeth's baby having been lost and subsequently adopted by the Macduffs (in Calcutt's *Lady Macbeth*), and the idea that Romeo and Juliet would not have stayed in love forever if they had lived (in MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona* and Pontac's *Fatal Loins*).[2] In the latter case, while the two stories involving Romeo and Juliet surviving are of course not consistent with Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, there is nothing in Shakespeare's play that says that they would never have fallen out of love *if* they had survived, and so the individual invention of that hypothesis is not inconsistent with Shakespeare's play.

The invention of Ophelia surviving is strictly speaking possible within the story of *Hamlet*, as *Ophelia Thinks Harder* explains away the apparent impossibility by having her maid found dead in Ophelia's clothes and with her face disfigured beyond recognition as a result of asphyxiation. This makes it possible, if difficult, to accommodate Ophelia's survival within the story of *Hamlet*, unlike the survival of Desdemona and Juliet, who both die on stage and are identified by several other people. The idea that Desdemona is a prostitute (in Vogel's *Desdemona*) is clearly not consistent with Shakespeare's character, but it has an impact on the interpretation of *Othello.* The suggestion in *Ophelia Thinks Harder* that Ophelia survives can thus be seen as consistent with the story of *Hamlet*, but is not very relevant for interpreting it, as none of the other characters (except possibly Horatio) knows about it; and the invention in *Desdemona* can be seen as inconsistent with the story of *Othello* but relevant to an interpretation of that play.

2 Several of my 2015 students spontaneously commented that they would never be able to see *Romeo and Juliet* in the same way again after having read *Goodnight Desdemona* and *Fatal Loins*.

The new inventions in Shakespearean appropriations with maximal impact on a spectator's/reader's perception of Shakespeare's plays, then, are the ones that are possible to accommodate within the framework of Shakespeare's stories (that is, the ones that do not obviously contradict Shakespeare's story-lines); the ones that make a difference to the interpretation of Shakespeare's plays if accepted by spectators/readers; and, finally, the ones where this difference adds a layer of dramatic irony to Shakespeare's tragedies: Romeo and Juliet die for their love, but it would not have lasted. Cordelia is Lear's favourite daughter and the only one who truly loves him; furthermore, he disowns her because she does not fulfil her duty as a daughter – but she is not in fact his daughter. The childless Macbeth unwittingly has his own wife's child killed. These inventions all add poignancy not only to the appropriations but also to Shakespeare's plays when they are revisited. In addition, they are likely to create an uncomfortable, unsettled and unsatisfied feeling for an audience. Such a feeling is consonant with emotional responses to Shakespeare's own endings – responses that are in themselves an important source of the appropriative impulse and therefore a reason why Shakespeare's plays are so often reimagined.

Appendix 1: Presentation of the Appropriations

(in alphabetical order)

Desdemona: A Play about a Handkerchief (Paula Vogel, US 1979; 1994)

Dramatis personae

Desdemona, 'Upper-class. Very'
Emilia, 'Broad Irish brogue'
Bianca, 'Stage-cockney'

Paula Vogel started writing *Desdemona* in 1977; at some point, Vogel directed a staged reading of it at Cornell University, and the play was partially produced at the Actors Theatre's New Play Festival in 1979. Various sources conflict regarding the play's early performance history, but its first full professional production took place in 1993, directed by Gloria Muzio, at Circle Repertory in New York.[1] It was first published in 1994, and in 2000 it was included in Fischlin and Fortier's *Adaptations of Shakespeare: A Critical Anthology of Plays from the Seventeenth Century to the Present*. Vogel has referred to the play as a 'tribute' to Wolfgang Bauer's play *Shakespeare the Sadist* (*Film und Frau*, 1970), and though it owes none of its feminist agenda to Bauer's play, and does not quite measure up to it in terms of violence and obscenity, it follows the same format in its use of

1 See, for example, Joanna Mansbridge, 'Paula Vogel', in *The Methuen Drama Guide to Contemporary American Playwrights*, ed. Martin Middeke, Peter Paul Schnierer, Christopher Innes and Matthew C. Roudané (London & New York: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2014), pp. 372-90 (p. 374).

short scenes similar to 'cinematic "takes"'.[2] *Desdemona* takes place in 'a back room of the palace on Cyprus' among the three female characters, during the same time that Othello's jealousy develops on stage – in the front room, as it were – in Shakespeare's play. In this version, her husband's suspicions are totally justified, as Desdemona has been filling in for Bianca at the local brothel. In an attempt to redeem herself, she searches for the lost handkerchief. The play ends with the realisation that Desdemona will soon be killed. This is one of the best-known theatrical Shakespeare appropriations from the late twentieth century. Recent productions include Allison Crews' 2016 production with the Burbage Theatre Company in Providence, Rhode Island.

Drop Dead, Juliet! (Allison Williams, Canada 2006)

Dramatis personae

Juliet
Nurse
Lord Capulet
Lady Capulet
Gregory
Sampson
Tybalt
Romeo
Abram
Mercutio
Lady Montague
Shakespeare
Prince/Princess
Friar/Sister Laurence
Friar John
Ophelia
Desdemona

2 Paula Vogel, 'Note to Director', in *Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1994), p. 4; Christopher Bigsby, *Contemporary American Playwrights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 298.

Drop Dead, Juliet! is a metatheatrical comedy, popular among high-school theatre students, in which Juliet refuses to go along with Shakespeare's tragic ending and kill herself, instead rewinding the story to the beginning and starting over with several of the male characters regendered and with Juliet herself as playwright/director. During this high-speed version of Shakespeare's story, Juliet keeps trying to orchestrate the plot to include more romance and less death but does not even manage to make Romeo fall in love with her instead of Rosaline. Allison Williams has written several plays of this type, including *Hamlette* (2001) and *Mmmbeth* (2003).

Dunsinane
(David Greig, UK 2010)

Dramatis personae

Siward, an English general
Osborn, his son
Macduff, his Scottish lieutenant
Egham, his English lieutenant
The Sergeant
The English army
Gruach, the Queen
Gruach's women
A Scottish soldier
A Scottish boy
Malcolm, the King of Scotland
McAlpin, Moray, Kintyre and Luss (Clan Chiefs of Scotland)
The Boy Soldier
The Hen Girl
Boy prisoners

Dunsinane is a sequel to *Macbeth*, written for the RSC by the Scottish playwright David Greig. It first opened in London in 2010 and was performed again the following year at the National Theatre of Scotland. The main character of the play is Siward, Earl of Northumberland and General of the English army, who assists Malcolm in defeating Macbeth at the end of Shakespeare's play. Siward tries to create peace in Scotland after the tyrant has been killed. But it turns out that not everyone thinks that he

was a tyrant or that Malcolm has any right to the throne. It also turns out that the tyrant's wife has survived and that she has a son, who, according to her, is the rightful King of Scotland. The play revolves around Siward's attempts to negotiate with Gruach (and to find and kill her son), the inability of the occupational force to understand the alien, war-torn land they are trying to save, the young English soldiers' struggle to cope far away from home, and Gruach's relentless struggle to take back the power over her country. This is the most recent of the appropriations studied here.

Fatal Loins: Romeo and Juliet Reconsidered (Perry Pontac, UK 2001)

Dramatis personae

Romeo
Friar Laurence
Juliet
Nurse
Rosaline
County Paris
Chorus

Fatal Loins, a radio play by the American-born writer Perry Pontac, was originally broadcast on BBC Radio Four in 2001. In 2011, it was printed in *Codpieces*, a collection of three blank-verse Shakespeare parodies by Pontac. *Fatal Loins* tells the story of what might have happened if Friar Laurence had succeeded in conveying his message to Romeo and the star-crossed lovers had therefore survived. Twenty years after their escape to Mantua, it turns out that Romeo has grown tired of Juliet and is secretly in love with Friar Laurence. The Friar concocts a plan to make Romeo love Juliet again: he writes a love letter to Romeo arranging for them to meet, but before Romeo arrives the Friar takes a sleeping draught so that Romeo believes him to be dead. The plan does not go as expected, however, since Romeo kills himself on discovering the lifeless Friar – as does Juliet on finding Romeo's dead body. Pontac's three comedies have only recently been made available to the public, prior to which they had, according to

Alan Bennett, 'been a well-kept secret on BBC radio for far too long'.[3] The published scripts are adapted for the stage and have been performed on a small scale, but so far it seems to be with readers that the plays have proved most popular.

Gertrude – The Cry (Howard Barker, UK 2002)

Dramatis personae

Gertrude, a Queen
Claudius, a Prince
Cascan, Servant to Gertrude
Hamlet, an Heir
Isola, Mother of Claudius
Ragusa, a Young Woman
Albert, Duke of Mecklenburg

A graphic exploration of the sexual relationship between Gertrude and Claudius (and Hamlet's disgust at this relationship), this re-writing of *Hamlet* had its world première in 2002 at Kronborg castle and was subsequently performed at Riverside Studios in London, where it was revived in 2016 at Theatre N16. The play is written in Howard Barker's usual style, with fragmented or unfinished sentences, according to his theatrical poetics, 'The Theatre of Catastrophe', which is based among other things on the idea that there is no message behind the play and that neither the audience nor the author should understand the play entirely. *Gertrude* starts with a scene where Claudius kills her husband, while she looks on, naked and 'seem[ing] to vomit in her ecstasy'. They then proceed to 'couple above the dying man' (1, p. 84). The 'cry' of the title refers primarily to Gertrude's orgasmic cry, but also to the cries of pain of her dying husband and of Gertrude as she gives birth to Claudius's daughter as well as to the cry of the new-born infant. Barker is internationally a famous, if controversial, playwright; but his plays do not have a wide audience in Britain. According to himself, his work is appreciated by audiences but not by critics.[4]

3 Alan Bennett, 'Foreword,' in Perry Pontac, *Codpieces* (London: Oberon, 2011), pp. 9-11 (p. 9).
4 Howard Barker, personal interview, 2 April 2014.

Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet) (Ann-Marie MacDonald, Canada 1988; 1990)

Dramatis personae

Constance Ledbelly, assistant professor at Queen's University
Professor Claude Night, professor at Queen's University
Ramona, student at Queen's University
'Julie, eh Jill', student at Queen's University
Desdemona
Othello
Iago
A soldier of Cyprus
Juliet
Romeo
Tybalt
Mercutio
Juliet's nurse
Servant
Chorus
Ghost

Ann-Marie MacDonald's comedy *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* was first produced in 1988 by Nightwood Theatre, a company in Toronto that specialises in contemporary drama written by women. Two years later, the production went on a national tour with a revised version of the text and with Kate Lynch replacing Tanja Jacobs as Constance Ledbelly. Banuta Rubess, who directed the first production, writes in the introduction to the published script that the idea for the play 'began with a joke' when MacDonald 'crammed a pillow on [Rubess's] face and with great hilarity pronounced: "Goodnight, Desdemona!"'[5] One of the best-known theatrical Shakespeare appropriations from the late twentieth century, *Goodnight Desdemona* is still frequently performed by both professionals and amateurs – not least by university drama students – especially in Canada but also in the US and the UK. In 1994, for example, Magdalen Elwes's production was the first theatrical production to be performed at

5 Banuta Rubess, 'Introduction', in Ann-Marie MacDonald, *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 1998 [1990]), pp. xi-xiii (p. xi).

the then-new Turtle Key Arts Centre in London. In 2001, Ann-Marie MacDonald, who trained as an actor, played the part of Constance herself in Alisa Palmer's Canadian Stage production.

This three-act play takes place partly in the playworlds of the two Shakespearean tragedies, *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*, and partly in an academic setting in late-twentieth-century Canada, where Constance Ledbelly, assistant professor at Queen's University, is working on her long-overdue doctoral thesis in which she is trying to prove that Shakespeare based *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* on comedies that have subsequently been forgotten. The tragedy in these two plays, Constance argues, is by no means inevitable or inextricable from the plot, but relies on insignificant details; the presence of a wise fool in the text would have averted the tragic events and it is supposedly by removing this fool from the source texts that Shakespeare turned the stories into tragedies. It is Constance's theory that the fools in the sources did not only have the function of commentator but played a more active part as the 'comic hero' of the plays.

Constance has been used as a ghost-writer by Professor Claude Night to promote his career, and has apparently been led to believe that there will be a lecturing post and marriage in it for her, which turns out not to be the case; Professor Night takes the Oxford post himself, '[e]ven if it does fall somewhat short of a challenge' (I.1, p. 19), and gets engaged to a younger student who has won the Rhodes scholarship. Meanwhile, he taunts Constance for her slow academic progress, her age, her handwriting and the choice of subject for her thesis. Just as Constance is about to give up on her project, she is magically sent on a quest to find her own identity and the 'Author', and is transported into Shakespeare's plays through her waste-paper basket.

Constance's presence in the plots averts the deaths of Desdemona and Juliet and turns the plays into comedies. In Cyprus, she takes the handkerchief from Iago, hands it to Othello and reveals Iago's scheme, but discovers that Desdemona is an extremely violent person and, moreover, easily tricked by Iago into suspecting Othello of infidelity. In Verona, she tells Tybalt and Mercutio that Romeo and Juliet have married and prevents the fight, only to find that both Romeo and Juliet fall in love with Constance herself at first sight and proceed to fight over her like children over a toy. In the final scenes of the play, Constance finds out that she is herself both the Fool and the Author. The prologue to the play asks the listener

to 'divide the mind's opposing archetypes' and to 'unite' them 'into a mirror that reflects one soul' and says that 'in the merging of unconscious selves, / there lies the mystic "marriage of true minds"' (p. 6). At the end of Act III, it becomes clear that the answer to the riddle Constance is presented with as she is sent on the quest for the Author is that Desdemona and Juliet are two archetypes found in Constance's subconscious.

Hamlet, Part II (Perry Pontac, UK 1992)

Dramatis personae

Fornia
Seltazar
A Fool
The King

Hamlet, Part II, a radio play by the American-born writer Perry Pontac, was originally broadcast on BBC Radio Three in 1992 as a companion piece to a full-text radio production of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, co-produced by the BBC and Kenneth Branagh's Renaissance Theatre Company. Part of the dialogue of *Hamlet, Part II* was included in Christopher Luscombe and Malcolm McKee's *The Shakespeare Revue*, both on stage and in the published version, under the title 'And How is Hamlet?' In 2011, the whole play was printed in *Codpieces*, a collection of three blank-verse Shakespeare parodies by Pontac. As indicated by the title, *Hamlet, Part II* is a sequel to *Hamlet*, which of course means that all Shakespeare's characters are dead. The Danish Ambassador Seltazar returns from abroad and, meeting Fornia, enquires after Hamlet, Laertes, Ophelia, Polonius, Gertrude, Claudius, Osric, Fortinbras and Horatio, only to find them all dead, as well as the rest of '[t]he "Dramatis Personae", as it were'. Seltazar proceeds to ask who reigns in Denmark now; but when Fornia replies that she has hopes for Macbeth, it is Seltazar's turn to inform her that both Macbeth and his wife, 'Jocelyn', are likewise dead. Seltazar and Fornia then form the idea of getting married and taking power over Denmark themselves, but at that moment the old King Hamlet enters and informs them that he only pretended to die and be a ghost so that young Hamlet would kill Claudius. The King then discovers Seltazar's new plan to commit treason, and there-

fore poisons both Seltazar and Fornia, but Seltazar manages to kill the King before he dies himself. The play ends with a dying speech from Fornia and a stage full of corpses. *Hamlet, Part II* has only recently been made available in its entirety to the public, prior to which Pontac's Shakespeare parodies had, according to Alan Bennett, 'been a well-kept secret on BBC radio for far too long'.[6] The published scripts are adapted for the stage and have been performed on a small scale, but so far it seems to be with readers that the plays have proved most popular.

Hamlet II: Prince of Jutland (John Cargill Thompson, UK 1984)

Dramatis personae

Hamlet, Prince of Jutland (the only character on stage)
Feng, King of Jutland (corresponds to Claudius)
Horvendile, his brother (corresponds to Old Hamlet)
Geruta, Queen of Jutland (corresponds to Gertrude)
Corambis of Elling, a Councillor (corresponds to Polonius)
Hilda, his daughter (corresponds to Ophelia)
Her six brothers (correspond to Laertes)
Olaf and Haakon, two bluff jarls (correspond to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern)
Rorek Slyngebond, King of Denmark, father to Geruta and Wigleck
Wigleck, Prince of Denmark, Hamlet's uncle
Alsi, King of Lindsay (Lincoln), blood brother of Feng and Wigleck
Orwenna, his ward, Queen of East Anglia, Hamlet's wife
Hermuthruda, 'an almost virgin queen of the Picts, Hamlet's girlfriend'
'Ruth and Mabel have no place in the story'
'Jarls, Courtmen, Huscarles, the Palace cook, a shot putter and of course Yorick; an out-of-work actor resting as a wine waiter'

John Cargill Thompson's play is a long monologue spoken by Hamlet, challenging the version of events in Shakespeare's play. Specialising in one-person plays, Cargill Thompson was declared Britain's most productive playwright in 1997 (with 52 plays produced in comparison to the

6 Alan Bennett, 'Foreword', in Perry Pontac, *Codpieces* (London: Oberon, 2011), pp. 9-11 (p. 9).

better known Alan Ayckbourn's 51).[7] *Hamlet II* was first performed at the Sheffield Crucible in 1984, directed by John Ashby.

Hamlette (Allison Williams, Canada 2001)

Dramatis personae

Actor 1 (male or female): Host, Queen/King, Francisco, Referee
Actor 2 (male or female): Horatio, 2nd Player
Actor 3 (male): Ghost, Polonius
Actor 4 (male or female): Bernardo, Laertes, Ophelia, Player
Actor 5 (female – 'absolutely may not be played by a man in drag'): Hamlette

Hamlette is a metatheatrical comedy in which Hamlet is a girl who has been brought up as a boy for socio-economic reasons. During this high-speed version of Shakespeare's story, Hamlette constantly tries to persuade the rest of the cast to refer to her as the Princess rather than the Prince of Denmark. Allison Williams has written several plays of this type, including *Mmmbeth* (2003) and *Drop Dead, Juliet!* (2006).

Lady Macbeth (David Calcutt, UK 2005)

Dramatis personae

The Wyrd Sisters: the Girl, the Goodwife and the Crone
Gruach, later Lady Macbeth: a Pictish princess, later Queen of Scotland
Beoedhe (and Beoedhe's Ghost): Gruach's father, a Pictish king
Gruach's baby son (may be played by a doll)
Magg and Grimm, 'a couple "living on [their] wits", frequently on the wrong side of the law'
Thorfinn, later Macbeth: a Scottish nobleman, later King of Scotland
Finnleach, Thorfinn's father
Malcolm, King of Scotland

7 David Lister, 'Sixty a Day Inspire More Plays Than Shakespeare', *The Independent* 8 February 1997 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/sixty-a-day-inspire-more-plays-than-shakespeare-1277400.html> [accessed 7 November 2016].

Duncan: Malcolm's nephew
MacRory Gillacomgain, Malcolm's appointed heir
Lady Macduff
Soldier 1-8, soldier in MacRory's army
A Captain
Northman 1-3, soldiers in Duncan's army
A Nurse: Gruach's son's wet nurse
A Messenger
A Servant

Lady Macbeth was commissioned by Oxford University Press and written specifically to be studied in schools alongside Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. David Calcutt first had the idea of writing the story of *Macbeth* from many different characters' perspectives, but he had also long been interested in the character of Lady Macbeth, and when he started to research her background he became so intrigued that he decided to focus on only her story.[8] Calcutt always writes with performance in mind, and, although in reality many schools probably study the written text rather than perform it, the play is written to be at once 'performer friendly' and 'a challenge' for any students who do want to stage the play. It is an unusual piece of drama in that it is written for the performers to experience rather than for the audience. So far, the play has been produced by schools and amateur dramatic companies, but not by any professional company, and it is not well known in the theatre.

The story follows Gruach from an event when, as a young girl, she prays to the spirits (here personified as the Wyrd Sisters) to show her her 'true love', through her marriages to Gillacomgain and Macbeth, to her implied suicide, in this version caused by grief at having inadvertently caused the death of her child through her desire to avenge her father. The play begins as a prequel to *Macbeth* and ends at the point in the story where Lady Macbeth dies. The play is written partly in prose, partly in iambic pentameter and partly in other verse forms. It contains many direct quotations from *Macbeth*, which was a requirement from OUP; but the quotations have been taken out of their original context and broken up so that they have gained a new significance.

8 David Calcutt, 'What the Playwright Says', in *Lady Macbeth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 5-6.

Lear's Daughters (The Women's Theatre Group and Elaine Feinstein, UK 1987)

Dramatis personae

Cordelia
Regan
Goneril
The Fool
The Nurse/Nanny

Collaboratively written and performed by the feminist fringe company The Women's Theatre Group after an idea by Elaine Feinstein, *Lear's Daughters* tells the story of three sisters who grow up in their nursery with their nanny. Their mother dies early on and their father is largely absent. The sisters reminisce about events that took place when they were small children and when both their parents were present. Their memories do not always agree, and sometimes they have to rely on Nanny's version of the story; but it is suggested that Nanny tells them what they want to hear rather than what she knows to be true. The story is told in a quasi-chronological series of scenes, where the androgynous Fool functions as storyteller and metadramatic stage manager, as well as occasionally playing the parts of the King and Queen. The stories grow more and more sinister, and the picture of Lear that is revealed is one of a neglectful and abusive father and husband.

This is one of the best-known theatrical Shakespeare appropriations from the late twentieth century. The WTG performed the play in 1987 and again the following year, with different actors playing the three daughters. The original cast was Adjoa Andoh (Regan), Janys Chambers (Nanny; Chambers also edited the final version of the play), Polly Irvin (Cordelia), Hazel Maycock (Fool) and Sandra Yaw (Goneril). The production was directed by Gwenda Hughes. In 1991, *Lear's Daughters* was published in the first volume of *Herstory: Plays by Women for Women*.[9] An audio-version of the play, featuring actors from the original WTG production, was recorded in 1996-97 and released on CD as part of an Open University

9 *Herstory: Plays by Women for Women*, vol. 1, ed. Gabriele Griffin and Elaine Aston (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991).

course on Shakespeare in 2000.[10] The same year, it was included in Fischlin and Fortier's *Adaptations of Shakespeare: A Critical Anthology of Plays from the Seventeenth Century to the Present*. One of the Women's Theatre Group's most enduring successes, it has been revived several times, notably by Yellow Earth Theatre in 2003, in a production directed by David Tse. In 2016, two production photographs from the second run of the original production and a brief note on Sphinx Theatre Company were included in the British Library's anniversary exhibition 'Shakespeare in Ten Acts'.[11]

Macbeth Speaks (John Cargill Thompson, UK 1984; 1997)

Dramatis personae

Macbeth
Three witches

The Scottish playwright John Cargill Thompson specialised in writing one-person plays. He wrote the first version of *Macbeth Speaks*, 'Macbeth: The Alternative Version', in 1984, but it was not performed until 1991, when it appeared as *Macbeth Speaks* at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. In 1995, the text was revised for publication, and in 1997 yet another version was published, under the title of *Macbeth Speaks 1997*. The play is a monologue spoken by the 'historical' Macbeth, who tells his life's story, challenging the version of events in Shakespeare's play.

10 *Shakespeare: Text and Performance*, 19: Janys Chambers and Hazel Maycock interviewed about *Lear's Daughters*, produced by Jenny Bardwell, with academic advisors Katherine Armstrong and Lizbeth Goodman (Milton Keynes: The Open University, 2000) [on CD]; Lizbeth Goodman, '*Lear's Daughters* on Stage and in Multimedia and Fiona Shaw's *King Lear* Workshops as Case Studies in Breaking the Frame', in *Languages of Theatre Shaped by Women*, ed. Jane de Gay and Lizbeth Goodman (Bristol: Intellect, 2003), pp. 37-47 (p. 38).

11 Interestingly, the material on *Lear's Daughters* was in the room '4th Act: "Do you not know I am a woman?"', together with items such as the dress Vivien Leigh wore as Lady Macbeth and a monitor showing clips from interviews with Harriet Walter and Maxine Peake on playing male Shakespearean characters, while a poster for the film adaptation of *A Thousand Acres* and a playbill for a performance of Gordon Bottomley's *King Lear's Wife* were in the adaptation room. The photographs were from the Victoria and Albert Theatre and Performance archive. Their provenance was not specified further than 'Photographs of *Lear's Daughters* (1987)', but a comparison with photographs in the archive and the cast lists for the two runs indicates that the photographs were taken in 1988 rather than 1987.

Ophelia Thinks Harder (Jean Betts, New Zealand 1993)

Dramatis personae

Ophelia
Maid (doubles as Player Lover)
Hamlet
Horatio (doubles as Player Mother)
Queen (doubles as Woman 2)
Rosencrantz (doubles as Woman 1, Player 2 and St Joan)
Guildenstern (doubles as Player 3 and Ophelia's Mother)
Polonius/Laertes (doubles as Player 1, Player Father and Woman 3)
Player 4 (a boy about 12 years old)
(King and Virgin Mary – optional)

Ophelia Thinks Harder was first performed in 1993 at Circa Theatre in Wellington, directed by Jean Betts. The play formed part of a festival of new drama by female writers to celebrate the centenary of women's suffrage in New Zealand. Full of misogynistic quotations from various saints and historians, it is a version of the story of *Hamlet* seen from Ophelia's perspective. Ophelia struggles with the gender role she is expected to fit into, and, partly through Hamlet's soliloquies and partly through new texts more specifically about the plight of young girls, she thinks long and hard about life and womanhood and decides that she will find her own way of living her life. Ophelia has assumed that Horatio is in love with Hamlet, but he is in fact in love with her, and they start a relationship. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern turn out to be women in disguise, and they educate Ophelia about women's history. Ophelia's maid is literally frightened out of her wits by the ghost of St Joan, puts on Ophelia's clothes and drowns. When everybody assumes that Ophelia is dead, she disguises herself as a man and runs away with the travelling players to become an actor. *Ophelia Thinks Harder* has been revived several times, but it is not widely known outside of New Zealand.

Prince Lear
(Jules Tasca, US 2007)

Dramatis personae

Goneril
Regan
Cordelia

The play takes place '[e]ons before the common era' (p. 32). Lear's wife gives birth to a son while Lear is away at war, but she dies in childbirth. Goneril is upset because the birth of her brother means that she will not succeed to the throne. The baby dies, and Regan suspects that Goneril has killed him. Cordelia persuades them to present a united front when their father returns. As far as I have been able to find out, this play is not at all well known in the theatre.

Prince Lear, A Prequel
(Perry Pontac, UK 1994)

Dramatis personae

Prince Lear (soon to be King Lear)
Earl of Kent
Princess Eudoxia (Lear's wife)
Goneril

Prince Lear, A Prequel, a radio play by the American-born writer Perry Pontac, was originally broadcast on BBC Radio Three in 1994. In 2011, it was printed in *Codpieces*, a collection of three blank-verse Shakespeare parodies by Pontac. On the eve of Lear's succession, he falsely accuses his wife of infidelity and finds out that Kent is a woman and that she is in love with him. Eudoxia kills herself, and Lear gets engaged to Kent. Goneril tricks her father into leaving his recently acquired power and wealth to his daughters in such a way that his favourite, Cordelia, will not benefit. Pontac's three comedies have only recently been made available to the public, prior to which they had, according to Alan Bennett, 'been a well-kept se-

cret on BBC radio for far too long'.[12] The published scripts are adapted for the stage and have been performed on a small scale, but so far it seems to be with readers that the plays have proved most popular.

Seven Lears: The Pursuit of the Good (Howard Barker, UK 1989)

Dramatis personae

Lear, a child, later a king
Lud, his brother
Arthur, his brother
Bishop, a teacher
Prudentia, a widow
Clarissa, her daughter, later a queen
Horbling, a minister, later a fool
Kent, a soldier
Oswald, a soldier
Boy
The Surgeon
Assistant
Goneril, a princess
Regan, a princess
The Inventor
Gloucester, a vagrant, later an earl
Herdsman
Cordelia, a princess
The Emperor of Endlessly Expanding Territory
First Man and Second Man, servants of the State
Drummer
The Gaoled, a chorus

Seven Lears was first produced in 1989 by Howard Barker's own theatre company, the Wrestling School. Like *Gertrude – The Cry*, *Seven Lears* is written in Barker's usual style, with fragmented or unfinished sentences, according to his theatrical poetics, 'The Theatre of Catastrophe', which

12 Alan Bennett, 'Foreword', in Perry Pontac, *Codpieces* (London: Oberon, 2011), pp. 9-11 (p. 9).

builds on the idea that there is no message behind the play and that neither the audience nor the author should understand the play entirely. The play is divided into seven sections, loosely based on the seven ages of man, called 'First Lear', 'Second Lear', and so on. When playing with his two elder brothers, the young Lear comes across a group of rotten-smelling prisoners, whose suffering troubles him deeply. His brothers both die jumping off a cliff, and Lear's father appoints a tutor whose job it is to make him fit for leadership by teaching him to have no empathy. Lear is a very intelligent and sensitive child, but he loses these qualities. He has a relationship with an older woman, Prudentia, but marries her daughter, Clarissa, who is an entirely honest and 'good' person. Goneril and Regan (literally) will their parents to conceive them. Clarissa then has her third daughter, Cordelia, by Kent. Lear tries to drown Cordelia in a barrel of gin, but she survives and grows up to love Lear as her father and, like the rest of the family, to hate Clarissa, who she thinks is too perfect and measured. Barker is internationally a famous, if controversial, playwright; but his plays do not have a wide audience in Britain. This play, however, must be counted among the best-known theatrical Shakespeare appropriations from the late twentieth century. According to himself, Barker's work is appreciated by audiences but not by critics.[13]

13 Howard Barker, personal interview, 2 April 2014.

Appendix 2: Categorisation of Stage Appropriations of Shakespearean Tragedies

1. Shakespeare's characters in Shakespeare's story with alterations

eg. Nahum Tate's *The History of King Lear* and William Davenant's *Macbeth*

2. Shakespeare's characters in a new story

Prequels

- The Women's Theatre Group and Elaine Feinstein, *Lear's Daughters* (1987) * F
- Howard Barker, *Seven Lears: The Pursuit of the Good* (1989) *
- Perry Pontac, *Prince Lear* (1994) *
- Jules Tasca, *Prince Lear* (2007) *
- David Calcutt, *Lady Macbeth* (2005) * H

Sequels

- Perry Pontac, *Hamlet, Part II* (1992) *
- Perry Pontac, *Fatal Loins: Romeo and Juliet Reconsidered* (2001) *
- Toni Morrison and Rokia Traoré, *Desdemona* (2012) (*)
- Caridad Svich, *Twelve Ophelias (A Play with Broken Songs)* (2004) (*)
- David Greig, *Dunsinane* (2010) * H
- John Cargill Thompson, *Macbeth Speaks 1997* (1991; 1997) * H
- Johan Cargill Thompson, *Hamlet II: Prince of Jutland* (1984; 1995) * H

Midquels

Parallel plots:

- Paula Vogel, *Desdemona: A Play about a Handkerchief* (1979) *
- Jean Betts and Wm. Shakespeare, *Ophelia Thinks Harder* (1993) *
- Deborah Levy, *Pushing the Prince into Denmark* (1991)

Interrupting plots:

- Ann-Marie MacDonald, *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* (1990) *
- Howard Barker, *Gertrude – The Cry* (2002) *
- Allison Williams, *Hamlette* (2001) * M
- Allison Williams, *Mmmbeth* (2003) M
- Allison Williams, *Drop Dead Juliet* (2006) * M

(+ *Fatal Loins*, see above)

Meetings across play borders

- Charles George, *When Shakespeare's Ladies Meet* (1942)
- Rae Shirley, *A Merry Regiment of Women* (1966)
- Judy Elliot McDonald, *In Juliet's Garden* (2001)

(+ *Goodnight Desdemona*, see above)

3. Shakespeare's story with new characters in a new setting:

- Dennis Kelly, *The Gods Weep* (2010) (Based on *King Lear*)
- Deborah Levy, *Macbeth – False Memories* (2000)
- Robin Maugham, *Mister Lear: A Comedy in Three Acts* (1956)
- Djanet Sears, *Harlem Duet* (1997) (Based on *Othello*)

4. New frame story around a fictional Shakespeare production with parallels to Shakespeare's story:

- Ronald Harwood, *The Dresser* (1980) (Based on *King Lear*)
- Philip Osmet, *This Island's Mine* (1987) (Based on *The Tempest*)

* Introduces a new condition which could change the perception of Shakespeare's original play
H = Historical revision
F = Feminist re-vision
M = Metatheatrical parody

Appendix 3: Student Response

As part of this study, I have collected responses to three Shakespearean tragedies and re-visions of them from students on an elective course I have constructed and taught: 'Shakespeare's Women in Modern Drama'. The course was given twice: in 2013, nine students read first *King Lear*, *Othello* and *Hamlet* (in that order), and then *Lear's Daughters*, *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* and *Ophelia Thinks Harder*; in 2015, thirteen students started with *Lear's Daughters*, *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* and *Ophelia Thinks Harder*, followed by *King Lear*, *Othello* and *Hamlet*. The rationale behind this reading order was the possibility that those students who had been introduced to the appropriations first would have a different perception of Shakespeare's plays. The 2013 students answered questions about Shakespeare's plays both before and after reading the appropriations, to see if their perception of Shakespeare's plays was changed in any way by reading the appropriations.[1]

Both groups began the course by answering a questionnaire about their previous experience with Shakespeare and their preconceptions about the plays that they would study on the course. Whenever students missed a class and therefore did not complete a particular questionnaire, they were encouraged to submit the missing questionnaire as soon as possible. In most cases, this was done, and, according to these students, they had filled in the questionnaires while they were still at the relevant stage of their reading; in the 2015 group, however, there are a couple of questionnaires still missing. It was of course made clear to the students that their answers would in no way affect their grades, and the students have been an-

1 The 2013 students also read extracts from Paula Vogel's *Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief* and from Perry Pontac's *Codpieces*, and the 2015 students read Pontac's *Fatal Loins: Romeo and Juliet Reconsidered*. However, these did not form part of the questionnaires.

onymised for the purposes of this study. Since the students were free to phrase most of their answers as they wished, I have sometimes grouped semantically similar answers together into categories to better reflect any discernible tendencies. For example, I have counted 'betrayal' and 'deceit' as the same answer.

King Lear and *Lear's Daughters*

Both before and after reading *Lear's Daughters*, the 2013 students found greed/power/money to be the main theme in *King Lear*. One of these or, most frequently, a combination (typically 'greed for power and money', or words to that effect), was mentioned by seven out of nine students in both questionnaires. Fewer students mentioned love as a theme after reading *Lear's Daughters* (6 before, 4 after), while more students mentioned family (3 before, 5 after). Some words featured in the initial descriptions of *King Lear*, but disappeared after the students had read *Lear's Daughters*: treachery/treason, old age, misunderstandings and grief. Similarly, some new words featured in the post-*Lear's-Daughters* descriptions: hate, revenge, honesty, death, violence, ego, deceit and ambition. There was not much unity about the themes in *Lear's Daughters*, but the themes that were mentioned by more than one student were alienation (3), family (2), love (2), absent or neglectful parents (2) and childhood/growing up (2). There was a slight difference in how positive words were used to describe the themes in *King Lear* before and after reading the appropriation. The same number of negative words (18) featured before and after, but the number of positive words decreased (8 before, 4 after), and the number of neutral words increased (5 before, 11 after). This can be compared to the number of positive versus negative words used to describe the themes in *Lear's Daughters*: 2 positive, 11 neutral and 14 negative.

In the 2015 group, who read *Lear's Daughters* before reading *King Lear*, most students found *Lear's Daughters* to be about family (4), gender roles (3), oppression of women (3), childhood (3) and/or absent or neglectful parents (3). Family was also the theme that most students associated with *King Lear* (6), followed by betrayal (4), loyalty (3), love (3), truth/honesty (2) and power (2). Significantly, not a single student mentioned greed or money, which was the most frequently mentioned theme in 2013 both before and after reading *Lear's Daughters*. Certain other themes that are

relevant for *King Lear* and that were not mentioned by the 2013 group were mentioned by individual 2015 students, such as cruelty, kindness, justice and vanity. The clearest difference between the groups was that the students who read *King Lear* first focused more on the theme of greed and the students who read *Lear's Daughters* first focused more on family, which is indeed a central theme in *King Lear*.

Before reading *Lear's Daughters*, there were four 2013 students who identified with Cordelia in *King Lear*, but afterwards only two; in *Lear's Daughters* no one identified with Cordelia. No one identified with Goneril or Regan in *King Lear* before reading *Lear's Daughters*, but after reading it one person identified with Shakespeare's Goneril. Three people identified with either Goneril or Regan in *Lear's Daughters*, and in a discussion they mentioned that it was because they were the eldest or middle child themselves and could therefore identify with the character's situation. Among the 2015 students, most of whom knew nothing at all about *King Lear* when reading *Lear's Daughters*, four identified with the Nanny, four with Goneril, two with Regan, one with Cordelia and one with the Fool. In *King Lear*, most students identified with the two 'good' children, Cordelia (4) and Edgar (4). One student identified with Gloucester, two with Kent (one of whom also identified with Edgar), one with 'Goneril and/or Regan' and Edmund, and two with no one. It is surprising that after reading *Lear's Daughters*, which in many ways takes the part of the 'wicked' sisters, Goneril and Regan were not regarded as characters to be identified with by more students than in the group that had read *King Lear* first.

The real difference in the 2013 students' response to *King Lear* before and after reading *Lear's Daughters* was revealed in a question about how they interpreted the various characters' motivation for acting as they do in the 'love test' (I.1). They tended to use kinder words about Lear before reading *Lear's Daughters*, even though the essence was the same in both questionnaires. They were much more sympathetic towards Goneril and Regan after reading *Lear's Daughters*, and there tended to be more difference between the answers about Goneril and the answers about Regan than there had been the previous time. This time, the answers were also seen more from Goneril and Regan's point of view and showed more psychological insight, and here were more students who mentioned Cordelia's honesty than there were the first time. A new aspect that several of them brought up was the idea that the daughters had been neglected by Lear,

and there was more focus on the significance of being the eldest/middle/youngest child, especially when it came to Regan. On the whole, there was more focus on possible explanations in the characters' background and not *only* on what is actually in the scene. What struck me about this was that the students were beginning to think more like actors; there seemed to be a deeper need to find an explanation and more sense of freedom to imagine one. Focusing more on speculations about backstories and less on the text itself may seem a worrying tendency in students of literature; but they also seemed to have acquired a deeper understanding of *King Lear*. Cordelia's commitment to honesty, for instance, which is such a central part of the scene in Shakespeare's play, was picked up on by more students after reading *Lear's Daughters*. But the greatest difference was that they simply had much more to say about *King Lear* I.1 after having read *Lear's Daughters*. One explanation for this is of course that they had had longer to think about it, and that we had discussed the play in class since their first reading. But *Lear's Daughters* also seems to have made them notice certain aspects of *King Lear* that they had not thought of before.

The interpretation that reading *Lear's Daughters* made the students more aware of certain aspects of Shakespeare's play seems particularly likely since the 2015 students, who read *King Lear* after reading and discussing *Lear's Daughters*, and who answered the *King Lear* questionnaire directly after reading *King Lear* without discussing it in class first, similarly showed a nuanced understanding of the love-test scene. Their readings were mostly conventional and focused on information that can be found in the scene; but two students suggested that Goneril's and/or Cordelia's reactions to the love test could be connected to events that had taken place when they were young. One student wrote that '[p]erhaps Lear knows he hasn't been a good father, and to feel better he wants to hear how much his daughters love him', and one student had the feeling that 'this is not the first time [Goneril] has had to lie to her father about her love for him so it comes naturally'. These ideas can clearly be connected to the idea of a backstory, and to *Lear's Daughters* in particular.

Only one out of nine students in the 2013 group interpreted the Nanny's claim in *Lear's Daughters* that she is Cordelia's mother as truthful. In the 2015 group, by contrast, seven out of twelve students believed that Cordelia was indeed the Nanny's daughter. In the 2013 group, only two students thought that Cordelia in *Lear's Daughters* was abused sexually by Lear, and

another two were not sure. One student thought that Goneril was sexually abused by her father. In the 2015 group, as many as seven students were sure that Cordelia was sexually abused by Lear. In addition, five 2015 students thought, with varying certainty, that Lear abused Regan sexually, based on her pregnancy. These are very clear differences between the students who had already read *King Lear* when they read *Lear's Daughters* and the ones who had not. These two suggestions, made by the text of *Lear's Daughters*, are likely to be thought more far-fetched and shocking by someone who is familiar with *King Lear* than by someone who has no particular expectations on the play, and it seems that the students who had read *King Lear* first showed a tendency to mistrust the text of the appropriation when it appeared to be in conflict with Shakespeare's text. It is very strongly implied in *Lear's Daughters* that Lear abuses Cordelia sexually, but the students who came to this text with the pre-understanding of Shakespeare's play and characters were less likely to pick up on this implication.

When the 2013 students were asked if the appropriation had made them think of Shakespeare's play in a different way, one student said that *Lear's Daughters* had made her think about the daughters' reasons for acting as they do in *King Lear*, and another student said that it had deepened her understanding of *King Lear*. One student thought that Lear was so different in the appropriation that it was difficult to connect it to Shakespeare's play, and one student thought that backtracking to the source of the characters' motivation was not the most interesting way to think about *King Lear* and that *Lear's Daughters* therefore did not change his perception of the play. But a few students certainly had their original perception of *King Lear* rocked: one said that it was hard to forget about the idea of Lear abusing Cordelia, and one said that *Lear's Daughters* had made her like *King Lear* less and that she was now reluctant to reread it. Another student had identified with Lear when she read Shakespeare's play, but was now dismayed at the idea of affinity to the corresponding character in *Lear's Daughters*, and the reading experienced had left her confused.

Judging by these results, it does not seem as if being exposed to an appropriation such as *Lear's Daughters* makes readers more likely to interpret *King Lear* in an unconventional way, whether they are already familiar with Shakespeare's play when reading the appropriation or not. It does not seem that reading an appropriation is reductive in relation to subsequent readings

of Shakespeare's play, but there are some indications that having read Shakespeare's play in some sense reduces the freedom of interpretation of the appropriation as an independent text. Of course this also means that the effect of the introduction of a new condition (such as Cordelia being sexually abused by Lear or her not being his biological daughter) is lost on spectators/readers who are not familiar with Shakespeare's *Lear*, as they lack deep investment in the characters and do not know what to expect from them.

Othello and *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)*

Before reading *Goodnight Desdemona*, most 2013 students thought that the main themes in *Othello* were jealousy (7), love (7) and trust/loyalty versus deception/betrayal (5). The most noticeable change after reading the appropriation was that fewer students found *Othello* to be about love (3). On the other hand, the 2015 students (who had read *Goodnight Desdemona* before reading *Othello*) mentioned love more times than any other theme (8), followed by jealousy (6) and trust/loyalty versus deception/betrayal (6).

Before reading the appropriation, the 2013 students were very appreciative of Desdemona in *Othello*, but after reading the appropriation they liked Shakespeare's Desdemona less. However, rather than being influenced by the depiction of Desdemona in the new play, the students exaggerated the contrast between the two versions of the character. After the first reading many of them saw Desdemona as 'strong', 'honest', a 'role model' and someone who 'stands up for justice'; but after reading the appropriation they tended to see her as 'weak', 'submissive', 'naïve', 'timid', 'not thinking for herself' and the 'opposite' of the corresponding character in *Goodnight Desdemona*. It seems that, rather than letting their impression of MacDonald's Desdemona tint their perception of Shakespeare's, they over-stressed the difference between the two. Most of the 2015 students, who read *Othello* only after reading *Goodnight Desdemona*, saw Shakespeare's character in a favourable light (unlike the 2013 students after reading *Goodnight Desdemona*): they described her as 'very loyal', 'faithful', with a 'strong sense of right and wrong', 'kind and caring', 'strong', 'open-minded and ahead of her time', 'not afraid of speaking her mind', 'brave […] to follow her heart', 'generous', 'passionate', '[p]ure and innocent', someone who 'stands up for herself', 'a loving wife' and 'a good

person'. One student, however, did not think Desdemona seems 'very nice', as she 'lies to her father'; another saw her as 'very naïve', and a third described her as simply being 'in the background'. The prevailing attitude, however, was closer to the 2013 students' opinions on their first reading than to their modified response after reading the appropriation. One of the 2015 students explicitly reflected on her expectations on Desdemona in *Othello* after reading *Goodnight Desdemona*: '[She is a] stronger character than I thought. She was strong in Goodnight Desdemona but I thought that was just for show. [In *Othello*,] [s]he shows that she knows what she wants, and that even though she is a woman she can do more than what is believed of women'.

In *Goodnight Desdemona*, none of the students identified with Desdemona. Interestingly, however, in *Othello* Desdemona was clearly the character that the highest number of 2013 students identified with after reading the appropriation (Desdemona 5, Othello 2, Cassio 1, no one 1), which was not the case before (Desdemona 2, Cassio 2, Emilia 1, Emilia and Bianca 1, all three women 1, Othello 1, Iago 1).[2] In the 2015 group, no such trend was discernible as to which specific character was most often identified with, but no students identified with a character of a different gender from their own. The female students identified with Desdemona (2), Emilia (2), both Desdemona and Emilia (1), or no one (3), while the male students identified with Cassio (3) or Brabantio (1). No one identified with Iago or Othello, even though most students thought of at least one of them as a main character in the play. In *Goodnight Desdemona*, all students identified with Constance Ledbelly apart from one male student who identified with Romeo (according to the student because of Romeo's strong libido) and one female student who did not identify with anyone.[3]

Hamlet and *Ophelia Thinks Harder*

In the 2013 group, who read Shakespeare's play first, revenge was the theme most students associated with *Hamlet* both before and after reading *Oph-*

2 One of the two male students identified with Desdemona before reading the appropriation and with Othello ('at gunpoint') after. The other male student identified with Othello both before and after reading *Goodnight Desdemona* because '[i]t is easy to be jealous and have feelings overpower reason'.

3 This particular student gave this answer for most of the plays, both Shakespeare's and their appropriations, since she found all the characters too 'extreme' or 'exaggerated' to identify with.

elia Thinks Harder. Love increased slightly, while betrayal and insanity decreased slightly. Some themes that were only mentioned after reading the appropriation were power, the meaning of life, justice and loyalty. These are very much part of *Hamlet*, so here too it seems that the appropriation, in combination with the passing of time and class discussions, contributed to a fuller understanding of Shakespeare's play.[4]

In the 2015 group, who read the appropriation first, the most frequently mentioned themes in association with *Ophelia Thinks Harder* were gender roles and oppression of women/patriarchy, followed by feminism, search for identity and the freedom to be who one wants to be. Nine out of eleven students mentioned revenge as a main theme in *Hamlet*, making it by far the most frequently mentioned theme. The other themes that were mentioned by more than one student were love, (in)sanity, power and death, each mentioned by 2-3 students. The only themes that were mentioned in association with both plays were revenge (*Hamlet* 9, *Ophelia Thinks Harder* 1), power (*Hamlet* 2, *Ophelia Thinks Harder* 2), and love (*Hamlet* 2, *Ophelia Thinks Harder* 1). Slightly surprisingly, family and marriage were mentioned in connection with *Hamlet* but not with *Ophelia Thinks Harder*, whereas religion was mentioned in connection with *Ophelia Thinks Harder* but not with *Hamlet*.

In the 2013 group, more people identified with Hamlet before reading *Ophelia Thinks Harder* (4 before, 3 after), while more people identified with Ophelia after reading it (1 before, 2-3 after). This can be compared with *Ophelia Thinks Harder*, where five people in the same group identified with Ophelia and no one identified with Hamlet. In *Ophelia Thinks Harder*, four 2015 students identified with Ophelia, four with Horatio, three with Rosencrantz and/or Guildenstern, two with Gertrude, and none with Hamlet. In *Hamlet*, four students identified with Horatio. Apart from that, not more than one person could identify with any one character, including Hamlet, Ophelia and Gertrude. The clearest difference is that those students who had read *Ophelia Thinks Harder* prior to their first reading of *Hamlet* were less apt to identify with the character of Hamlet than the students who were first introduced to Shakespeare's play.

I also asked the students whether they thought it likely that Ophelia in *Hamlet* would commit suicide, based on what has happened before in the

4 I cannot rule out the possibility that some students had not finished *Hamlet* when answering the first questionnaire, but I saw no particular indications of this.

play. (In *Ophelia Thinks Harder*, she does not commit suicide but escapes to become an actor.) In the 2013 group, there was no significant difference in the number of students who thought it likely that Ophelia would commit suicide (5 yes, 2 no and 1 'probably not' before; 4 yes, 3 no and 2 'rather likely' after), but several of them changed their answers one way or the other. Among the students who had read the appropriation first, however, yes was more clearly the most common answer (9 yes, 2 no, 1 not sure).

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