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**Modes of Adaptation and Appropriation in the Hogarth Shakespeare Series**

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## 1. Introduction

This Master's dissertation aims to analyse processes of adaptation and appropriation in three of the novels that constitute the series Hogarth Shakespeare: *Dunbar*, *Vinegar Girl* and *Shylock Is My Name*. Hogarth, an imprint of Penguin Random House, announced in 2013 a project consisting in asking different best-selling authors to rewrite a Shakespeare's play of their choosing into a novel, a project that would contribute to the commemoration of the Quatercentenary of Shakespeare's death celebrated in 2016. The first book of the series was Jeanette Winterson's "cover version" of *The Winter's Tale*, *The Gap of Time*, published in 2015. It was followed in 2016 by Margaret Atwood's *Hag-Seed*, Howard Jacobson's *Shylock Is My Name*, and Anne Tyler's *Vinegar Girl*, which retold *The Tempest*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, respectively. Tracy Chevalier's *New Boy* and Edward St Aubyn's *Dunbar*, recreations of *Othello* and *King Lear*, appeared in 2017, and Jo Nesbo's *Macbeth* in 2018. The last volume of the series, Gillian Flynn's *Hamlet*, is due for release in 2021.

It is not easy to decide whether the project commemorates Shakespeare the man or the author. From a commercial perspective, one tends to perceive that the publishing house uses the myth as an advertising strategy to sell books. From the perspective of the authors that take part in the project, without underestimating the effect that associating their names to Shakespeare can have on their market value, the act of retelling Shakespeare in a present-day setting may mean a homage to the creativity of an author whose subjects are "for all time." Thus, Adam Gopnik writes:

Saluting Shakespeare with new versions of his stories is a bit like saluting Mozart by commissioning Philip Glass to write a new opera to the plot of 'Cosi Fan Tutte,' with its disguised Albanians and absurd coincidences . . . Most of the authors in the Hogarth series, to their credit, aren't so much "reimagining" the stories as reacting to the plays. They've taken on not the tale itself but the twists in the tale that produced the Shakespearean themes we still debate: anti-Semitism in "Merchant of Venice," the subjugation of women in "The Taming of the Shrew," art and isolation in "The Tempest." Each of the novels gives us a revisionist account of the central Shakespearean subject and asks us to think anew about that subject more than about the story that superintends it. (par. 2-3 original quotation marks)

Following Gopnik, I should add some other Shakespearean themes that are concerns of present times: lust for power in *King Lear*, which in *Dunbar* are transposed to the greediness of financial sharks and big corporations; racism in *Othello*; political corruption in *Macbeth*, which Nesbo links to drug trafficking, urban decay and extinction of traditional industry.

Jeanette Winterson explains in the very text of her version how important for her *The Winter's Tale* is: "I wrote this cover version because the play has been a private text for me for more than thirty years" (284). Jacobson's novel is not only a retelling of the play, but

also it is a continuous examination of the play and its characters' actions, especially "Shylock's. Jacobson's inquiry, Winterson's confession and all the series in general can be an incentive for the reader to go to the original play and to read it for the first time or to reread it. I dare say then that the global balance of the series is a real homage to the author more than to the man.

A recently published text by Douglas Lanier, "The Hogarth Shakespeare Series: Redeeming Shakespeare Literariness," analyses four volumes of the series: *The Gap of Time*, *Hag-Seed*, *Shylock Is My Name*, and *Vinegar Girl*. Lanier approaches the dilemma of adapting language or plot when dealing with Shakespeare, and he puts especial emphasis on the message of redemption that the adapted plays convey. Apart from that dilemma, the essay echoes several questions that are developed in the theoretical section, such as the consideration of adaptation as a secondary mode (Linda Hutcheon XIII) , or the process of reception as a definitory element of adaptations.

As far as I can tell, the only academic work that I have found dealing with the Hogarth project comprehensively is Colleen Etman's 2018 Master's thesis "Feminist Shakespeares: Adapting Shakespeare for a Modern Audience in the Hogarth Shakespeare Project." Its theoretical section relies mainly on Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation*, and the novels subjected to analysis are *The Gap of Time*, *Hag-Seed*, and *Vinegar Girl*. Within the theoretical framework established by Christy Desmet and Robert Sawyer, Douglas Lanier, Linda Hutcheon, and Julie Sanders, this work takes a different approach from Etman's and searches for modes of adaptation and appropriation in the works under exam, and the way the novels dialogue with the source plays. I try to prove that there are three patterns in the way the different authors have approached the Hogarth project. These patterns are exemplified in the three novels that are the focus of the analysis, namely St Aubyn's *Dunbar*, Tyler's *Vinegar Girl*, and Jacobson's *Shylock Is My Name*. In the first pattern, followed by St Aubyn in *Dunbar*, the author "translates" plot, characters and situations of the play to present-day circumstances with few alterations or suppressions. In the second pattern, the author also translates the play, but although characters and situations may be more or less similar to the original, the most important variations are changes of points of view and of the characters' motivations. This is what Tyler has done, as I expect to show, in her version of *The Taming of the Shrew*. In the third pattern, apart from building a story that mirrors the play, the characters of the story establish an explicit dialogue with the source play, as they do in Jacobson's *Shylock Is My Name*. The exploration of theories of adaptation and appropriation will allow to ascertain whether the above patterns match any of the modes of

appropriation and adaptation described in the theoretical works consulted, bearing in mind a certain scepticism about the validity of definite borders between modes.

As for the structure of the present study, the next section includes a brief survey of the works on adaptation and appropriation that constitute the theoretical framework for this research. Section 3 contains an overview of the seven novels published, and an explanation of the criteria that determine the selection of the novels chosen to focus the study, which are analysed in Section 4. Section 5 summarises the conclusions.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

This section includes a summary of the articles and books on adaptation and appropriation, consulted with some commentaries thereupon. The exposition follows a chronological order, according to the publishing date.

### *2.1. Adaptation and Appropriation*

The differences between adaptation and appropriation may seem rather subtle, and the works consulted have often confused me. However, some of the concepts exposed have proved to be useful for my research.

Christy Desmet and Robert Sawyer, in their 1999 book *Shakespeare and Appropriation*, gather a collection of essays that approach Shakespearean appropriation from two points of view, namely “big-time Shakespeare” and “small-time Shakespeare.” “Big-time Shakespeare” is defined by Desmet in the Introduction as the appropriation made with the purpose of increasing economic and political power, and she arranges under this label Garrick as a pioneer, big corporations such as Disney or academic institutions (2-3). “Small-time Shakespeare” has a more individual, local origin and usually the appropriations are motivated by passion, political commitment or the sheer pleasure of rewriting Shakespeare’s plays (2). Desmet acknowledges that boundaries between both approaches can be fuzzy, since even Disney productions have the imprint of their executives, and individual writers can become a sort of high priests of Shakespearian cult (3). One could add that some of the authors of the Hogarth series have strong personal reasons to accept their participation in the project and to choose a particular play, but at the same time one should bear in mind that the series is part of a commercial operation launched by a gigantic multinational publishing corporation, Random House<sup>1</sup>. The essays are grouped in two parts, “Appropriation in Theory” and “Appropriation in Practice” that deal with “appropriation of Shakespeare as a cultural phenomenon” and “specific, local acts of appropriation” respectively (3). With

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<sup>1</sup> The preceding lines are extracted from my TFG.

respect to theory, Desmet notes that “the word ‘appropriation’ implies an exchange, either the theft of something valuable . . . or a gift” (4). The first article of this part, according to Desmet, explains how Shakespeare “has functioned for several centuries as an Anglo-American literary saint” in a process of accumulation of “what Pierre Bourdieu calls ‘cultural capital’” (5). As for practice, I would like to highlight three ideas from Desmet’s text. First, how the “[a]cts of appropriation . . . can be intensely personal” (7). She puts forward the example of the relationship between Paul Robeson and the character of Othello, where Robeson, as an African American, identified himself with the Moor (7-8). Likewise, I might add the example of Jeanette Winterson’s acknowledgement of her personal implication with *The Winter’s Tale*, since she defines herself as a foundling (*The Gap of Time* 284). The second idea is Desmet’s qualification of “quotation (or citation) and simple reading” as the “simplest, and yet most enigmatic, forms of appropriation” (8-9), and she recalls, among others, Maya Angelou’s recitation of Portia’s “quality of mercy” speech, and Prince Charles’s “To Be or Not To Be” (8-9). Thirdly, there are the modes of “Shakespearean appropriation [that] can involve . . . entering a text from a new angle . . . [or] larger revisions of plot and literary form” (9). Here Desmet mentions Margaret Atwood’s *Gertrude Talks Back*, and other cases that are approached in the second part such as Gloria Naylor’s *Mama Day*, and Jane Smiley’s *A Thousand Acres* (9). In the section where I analyse the chosen novels, I return to these three ideas.

Douglas Lanier, in *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture*, published in 2002, distinguishes two modes of appropriation of Shakespeare by popular culture; the first one uses Shakespeare for purposes that vary from writing golfing manuals (52), selling self-help books (53), advertising weapons (55), or spicing television sitcoms (57). Shakespeare provides “artistic or moral respectability . . . becomes a resource . . . to express sentiment . . . or to lend gravity to ceremonial occasions” (53). The second mode described by Lanier uses Shakespeare against the cultural establishment, “to resist, violate, evade or critique the practices, values and institutions of high culture” (54). Starting with Shakespearian fan fiction, “a minor cultural phenomenon [that] nevertheless brings into focus how profoundly popular culture shapes contemporary understandings of Shakespeare” (85), Lanier gives examples of adaptations and appropriations of Shakespeare that include stage performances, films, television series, radio shows, cartoons, comic books, or novels. According to Lanier, the forms of appropriation that “tend to predominate” (83) in Shakespearian fan fiction are the following:

- *extrapolated narrative*, in which plot material is generated from events mentioned but not developed in the ‘master’ narrative . . . ;
- *interpolated narrative*, in which new plot material is dovetailed with the plot of the source;
- *remotivated narrative*, in which the new narrative retains the basic plot line or situation of the source but changes the motivations of the characters;
- *revisionary narrative*, in which the new narrative begins with the characters and situation of the source but changes the plot;
- *reoriented narrative*, in which the narrative is told from a different point of view;
- *hybrid narrative*, in which narrative elements or characters from two or more Shakespearian plays are combined. (83 original *italics*)

Winterson’s version of *The Winter’s Tale* provides an example of *extrapolated narrative*. The play mentions that Leontes and Polixenes “were trained together in their childhoods; and there rooted betwixt them then such an affection which cannot choose but branch now” (1.1.18-21)<sup>2</sup>. From this short mention, Winterson develops a “back story” for Leo and Xeno including several years together in a boarding school where they established a homosexual relationship, and the courting of MiMi by Leo, in which Xeno played an important part. In my analysis below, I place *Shylock Is My Name* among adaptations with an *interpolated narrative*, which is the relationship between Shylock and Strulovitch interwoven with the adapted plot of *The Merchant of Venice*. *Vinegar Girl* might be an example of *remotivated narrative*: Kate’s father does not want to get rid of her, but to keep his research assistant, whose motivation is not the inexistent fortune of Kate’s father, but a green card that would allow him to remain in the States and go on with his research. *Vinegar Girl* may be also conceptualised as reoriented narrative, since, unlike the play, the point of view is exclusively Kate’s, except for a few pages in the Epilogue.

Lanier approaches questions raised by acts of appropriation and adaptation, such as language (56-60), faithfulness to the source (88-89), recognition and change of perception of the original (89), criteria for evaluating the adaptations (98-99), good and bad taste (99-102), or parody (102-109).

The scholarly relevance of the appropriations of Shakespeare’s plays and their influence on popular culture are thoroughly exposed by Ángeles de la Concha in *Shakespeare en la imaginación contemporánea*, published in 2004, where she points out that the huge number of rewritings of Shakespeare has resulted in a kind of subgenre (10). According to De la Concha, Ben Jonson’s line, “a writer for all time,” has been proved true, not only for time but also for all cultures, all countries and all political systems. In the late

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from Shakespeare’s plays use the lineations of The New Cambridge Shakespeare editions.

twentieth century, in addition to recreations of Shakespeare's plays set in our time, his work and its critical reception and interpretation has been submitted to merciless critical examination from the most diverse points of view: new historicism, feminism, cultural materialism and postcolonialism. Shakespeare has become suspect of being an instrument of power or of being used as paragon of an alleged superior culture, the English culture. The paradoxical effect of such an onslaught on Shakespeare's work is that it has grown in influence and vitality. De la Concha advances the hypothesis that Shakespeare's relatively low origins and upbringing were behind his ability to represent concerns of common people and his insight into human weaknesses that explain boundless popularity throughout centuries. From De la Concha's sketches of the studies collected, I would like to single out the feedback action created by the introduction of Shakespearian elements in entertainment products and popular novels. They produce a resonance that arise a chain of associations that contribute to the success of the product.<sup>3</sup> I would add that similarly, Shakespeare adaptations arise associations with other work of the genre to which the play is adapted. Thus, on the one hand, the mere announcement by Hogarth that it is launching a series of Shakespeare adaptations creates positive expectations for the reader, especially those who have followed the work of the commissioned authors. On the other hand, the reader of Nesbo's *Macbeth* will recall his previous works or other pieces of hard-boiled crime fiction; those who are familiar with Jacobson's work will find in *Shylock Is My Name* his usual discussions on the relationship between Jews and Gentiles; some readers might find in Tyler's *Kate* a mix of *Cinderella* and *Elizabeth Bennet*, to name a few possible resonances.

Graham Holderness, in "Dressing Old Words New," an article included in a 2005 issue of *Borrowers and Lenders*, asks "[w]hen dealing with 'appropriations' of Shakespeare . . . are we still dealing with Shakespeare?" (par. 4) and surveys the different responses to the question with special attention to the use of scientific metaphors. Thus, he quotes Jean I. Marsden's affirmation that "appropriation's central tenet is the desire for possession" (par. 6), and although he approves Desmet's view of reciprocal appropriation, Holderness finds that "this approach encounters the same difficulty in defining exactly what the driver of that counter-appropriation is; what of the work exists beyond its multiple appropriations" (par. 10). Holderness refers to Descartes's reflections on the changes of the physical state of a wax bar as a "possible model for understanding . . . *Hamlet*" (par. 31). Moreover, Holderness mentions metallic similes applied to Shakespeare because of his ductility, flexibility and

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<sup>3</sup> This paragraph is extracted from my TFG.



malleability, properties that allow metals to remain unchanged in their molecular structure despite being altered in shape (par. 32). From metaphors taken from physics, Holderness proceeds to biological ones and quotes Stephen Greenblatt's qualifying Shakespeare's works as "protean" (par. 35), and Linda Charnes's comparison of Shakespeare with superficial fungi that appear in some forests, and that are projections of a "gigantic subterranean fungus" (par. 44). "All these models . . ." – writes Holderness – "reinforce our intuitive sense that *Hamlet*, and Shakespeare, are both one and many, formed but still forming" (par. 46).

Expanding the scope of adaptation and appropriation beyond Shakespeare, Julie Sanders published in 2006 *Adaptation and Appropriation*, in the Introduction of which she states that "adaptations . . . openly declare themselves as an interpretation or re-reading of a canonical precursor" whereas "[i]n appropriations the intertextual relationship may be less explicit, more embedded" (2). Sanders describes the differences and relationship between adaptation and appropriation, and other resources such as quotation, citation, echo, allusion, musical sampling or pastiche (4). Sanders introduces James Joyce's *Ulysses* "as the archetype of the adaptive text" (5), although the subsequent analysis seems to indicate that "adaptative" refers not only to adaptation. Chapters one and two of Sander's book deal with the definitions of adaptation and appropriation, respectively. She underlines the character of adaptation as "a transpositional practice, casting a specific genre into another generic mode" (18), and compares it to "editorial practice . . . in the exercise of trimming and pruning" (18), although "it can also be an amplificatory procedure engaged in addition, expansion, accretion, and interpolation" (18). Furthermore,

Adaptation is frequently involved in offering commentary on a sourcetext [sic]. This is achieved most often by offering a revised point of view from the 'original', adding hypothetical motivation, or voicing the silenced and marginalized. Yet adaptation can also constitute a simpler attempt to make texts 'relevant' or easily comprehensible to new audiences and readerships via the processes of proximation and updating . . . Shakespeare has been a particular focus, a beneficiary even, of these 'proximations' or datings. (18-19)

It may be also worthwhile to quote Sanders's mention of Deborah Cartmell's "three broad categories of adaptation [from novel to film]: (i) transposition, (ii) commentary (iii) analogue" (qtd. in Sanders 20). As an example of transposition, Sanders offers Baz Luhrmann's 1996 film *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*, which presents not only a transposition of genre, but also of time and space (20). Commentary is defined as "adaptations that comment on the politics of the source text, or those of the new mise-en-scène, or both, usually by means of alteration or addition" (21), and Sanders gives as examples, among others, film adaptations of *The Tempest* that "featured an onscreen

Sycorax” (21-22). The third category, analogue, includes adaptations that may be enjoyed without knowing the adapted text, although they “deepen when their status as analogue is revealed” (22), as it happens, for instance, with Francis Ford Coppola’s film *Apocalypse Now* and Joseph Conrad’s novel *Heart of Darkness* (22-23).

Sanders begins chapter two, “What Is Appropriation?” with a short description of the differences between adaptation and appropriation that I quote partially:

An adaptation signals a relationship with an informing source text or original; a cinematic version of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* . . . 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 . . . But the appropriated text or texts are not always as clearly signalled or acknowledged as in the adaptive process. (Sanders 26)

Sanders analyses several films, plays and novels to illustrate “diverse modes and operations of appropriation” (26), which she groups “into two broad categories: embedded texts and sustained appropriations” (26). However, from her analysis I cannot manage to extract a clear distinction between adaptation and appropriation. Thus, after exposing some of the relationships between *Romeo and Juliet* and *West Side Story*, she concludes: “This is adaptation, then, but it is adaptation in another mode . . . This is a fine example of the more sustained reworking of the source text which we have identified as intrinsic to appropriation . . . we have a wholesale rethinking of the terms of the original” (28). This conclusion seems to indicate that appropriation is not a distinct category from adaptation, but a subtype thereof. Furthermore, I cannot see the reason for regarding *West Side Story* as an embedded text; however, in another example, *Kiss Me Kate*, based on Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew*, the embedding is clearly explained (28-29).

The second category defined by Sanders, sustained appropriation, is illustrated with a long discussion of Graham Swift’s novel *Last Orders*, the charges of plagiarism of Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* it aroused, and the subsequent polemic. According to Sanders, although “consonances between the two works . . . are inescapable . . . to tie an adaptive and appropriative text to one sole intertext may in fact close down the opportunity to read it in relationship with others” (34-35). Sanders supports her argument with the example of Joyce’s *Ulysses*, which apart from its relationship with *The Odyssey*, it “is also linked to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*” (35). Similarly, in *Last Orders* one can find appropriation from other authors, especially Chaucer (36-38).

Applying to the Hogarth series Sanders’s criterium of proximity to the source as distinctive character between adaptation and appropriation, one could say that the versions

of Winterson, Chevalier, St Aubyn and Nesbo are adaptations, whereas Atwood's, Jacobson's and Tyler are appropriations. However, at the end of this section I expose my reservations about such a clear-cut distinction.

Linda Hutcheon, in *A Theory of Adaptation*, the first edition of which appeared in 2006, the same year as Sanders's work, states that her purpose is to find answers to the "curious double fact of the popularity and yet consistent scorning of adaptation" (XIV). She approaches adaptation as a product, as a process of creation, and as a process of reception (7-8). She proposes the following definition of adaptation:

- An acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works
- A creative *and* an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging
- An extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work (8 original *italics*)

The transposition "can involve a shift of medium (a poem to a film) or genre (an epic to novel), or a change of frame and therefore context: telling the same story from a different point of view, for instance, can create a manifestly different interpretation" (7-8). Adaptation as a process of creation "always involves both (re)-interpretation and then (re)-creation; this has been called both appropriation and salvaging" (8). Seen as a process of reception, "adaptation is a form of intertextuality: we experience adaptations (*as adaptations*) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation" (8 original *italics*). Hutcheon's emphasis on adaptations as adaptations recalls that they are experienced "not only as autonomous works" (XIV, 6). In her words, "an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative – a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing" (9). Hutcheon argues the advantages of her definition:

My more restricted double definition of adaptation as process and product is closer to the common usage of the word and is broad enough to allow me to treat not just films and stage productions, but also musical arrangements and song covers, visual art revisitations of prior works and comic book versions of history, poems put to music and remakes of films, and videogames and interactive art. It also permits me to draw distinctions; for instance, allusions to and brief echoes of other works would not qualify as extended engagements, nor do most examples of musical sampling, because they recontextualize only short fragments of music. Plagiarisms are not acknowledged appropriations, and sequels and prequels are not really adaptations either, nor is fan fiction. (9)

It may be interesting to point out Hutcheon's dismissing of fan fiction, which seems to disagree with Lanier's consideration.

Hutcheon surveys different opinions about "[w]hat precisely is 'recast' and 'transformed'" (9). She affirms that answers to that question such as the "spirit" of a work, its "tone" or its "style" are "equally subjective and . . . difficult to discuss, much less theorize" (10), and therefore she turns her attention to the story, which "[m]ost theories of

adaptation assume . . . [it] is the common denominator, the core of what is transposed” (10). She comments on the different “elements of the story: its themes, events, world, characters, motivations, points of view, consequences, contexts, symbols, imagery, and so on” (10), especially themes – “perhaps the easiest story elements to see as adaptable across media and even genres or framing contexts” (10) – and characters. She illustrates her comment with examples and explains how the adaptation can induce important changes. Thus, “separate units of the story” can be affected “not only . . . in terms of their plot ordering. Pacing can be transformed, time compressed or expanded. Shifts in the focalization or point of view . . . may lead to major differences” (11), and “[i]n other cases, it might be the point of departure or conclusion that is totally transfigured in adaptation” (12).

Hutcheon develops further the double perspective, product and process, to surmount the difficulty of defining adaptation: “As a product, an adaptation can be given a formal definition, but as a process – of creation and of reception – other aspects have to be considered (15-16).

From the point of view of product, Hutcheon refers to the usual comparison of adaptation with translation and extends the comparison to the evolution of translation theory from the consideration of the source text as invested with “primacy and authority,” to a notion of translation as “a transaction between texts and languages” (16).

As a process of creation, Hutcheon states that “what is involved in adapting can be a process of appropriation, of taking possession of another’s story, and filtering it . . . through one’s own sensibility, interests, and talents. Therefore, adapters are first interpreters and then creators” (18). Adaptation from novel to film may involve “subtraction or contraction” (19); nevertheless, short stories have been also adapted to films that “have had to expand their source material considerably (19).

The process of reception, according to Hutcheon, implies a dialogue between adapted work and receivers that varies according to the degree of their direct or indirect familiarity with the source. For instance, “films about Dracula today are as often seen as adaptations of other earlier films as they are of Bram Stoker’s novel” (21). Hutcheon stresses the importance of recognition in the process: “[p]art of both the pleasure and the frustration of experiencing an adaptation is the familiarity bred through repetition and memory” (21) and concludes that “we need memory in order to experience difference as well as similarity” (22).

The reviewers’ attitude to the novels of the Hogarth project is usually one of scepticism about the ability of the authors to create characters as powerful as their

counterparts in the original plays, and whether the adaptation adds anything to the understanding or enjoyment of Shakespeare. In my opinion, the more the reviewers seem to know Shakespeare's work, the more negative is their critic of the new version.

In her contribution to Alexa Huang's, and Elizabeth Rivlin's *Shakespeare and the Ethics of Appropriation*, published in 2014, Christy Desmet develops some points from her introduction to *Shakespeare and Appropriation* and proposes to go beyond negative concepts associated with appropriation such as winners and losers, abduction, theft or usurpation, and see it "as a dialogical phenomenon – not simply a conversation or collaboration between appropriating and source texts, but an exchange that involves both sharing and contested ownership" ("Recognizing" 42), which allows "to look at appropriation in terms of artistic reception as well as production" (43). In a series of examples illustrating recognition in Shakespearean appropriation, Desmet deals with the paradox involved in appropriations in form of citation of quotation, since "citation as appropriation frustrates the act of recognition it promises through the elegance of its formal fidelity" (45). The following section of her text, intitled *Mimesis as Appropriation, or Shakespeare Recycled*, is centred on Charles Marowitz, who without changing a word from Shakespeare's plays, rewrote them by cutting and rearranging lines "often assigning them to different characters and piecing together new scenes from fragments of familiar ones" (47). Desmet describes Marowitz's treatment of *Macbeth* and quotes his assumption that the audience is well acquainted with Shakespeare's plots (49). Therefore,

In these "recyclings" of Shakespeare, we see played out on a larger stage the paradoxes of quotation as appropriation. By the rules of his own game, Marowitz constructs his play purely from Shakespearean lines. He is faithful in the extreme to his famous source, working through pure textual mimesis. On the other hand, the technique of collage violates the structure of the play in which those utterances are embedded: fidelity is also infidelity. Through a final twist, Marowitz depends on the audience's recognition of Shakespeare . . . in order for his plays to make sense and achieve their desired effect. (49-50)

The last two examples offered by Desmet are a film based on *Macbeth*, and a historical incident that epitomizes what she calls accidental appropriation. The film is a 2006 Australian production, directed by Geoffrey Wright, that transposes *Macbeth* to a world of gangsters, drugs and crime in present-day Melbourne. The film, according to Desmet, "offers a splendid example of appropriation that operates through a tension between fidelity and infidelity" (50). The historical episode took place in 1841 when a group of Seminoles went to a fort dressed in costumes that they had taken from a troupe of actors they had attacked the previous year, and the soldiers of the fort "*recognized* without difficulty the Shakespearean characters signified by the Seminoles' borrowed robes" (54 original *italics*).

I would like to close this survey with Christy Desmet's and Sujata Iyengar's 2015 article "Adaptation, Appropriation, or What You Will," which lightens my uneasiness about subtle differences between adaptation and appropriation. The text reviews most of the works surveyed in this section and applies the above exposed Desmet's ideas to the discussion. Nevertheless, I appreciate its comprehensiveness and its proposal to get the best from the relation between adaptation and appropriation. The essay is organized around four sections under the headings "Adaptation" (11), "Appropriation" (13), "What you will?" (15), and "(In)Conclusion" (17). In the first section the authors discuss Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* and affirm that she "retains intertextuality as her governing metaphor" (11), that she leaves "undetermined the relation of the two processes [of interpreting and creating]" (11), and they relate Hutcheon's ideas to "Douglas Lanier's proposal for a Shakespearean 'rhizomatics'" (12). "Appropriation" reintroduces the reasons for appropriation understood as an exchange exposed in Desmet's previous works ("Introduction" 4; "Recognizing" 41-42), as well as the aforementioned "small time Shakespeare" (14). Reflecting on the Latin root of the word, the authors state:

To appropriate something is to make it one's own, part of oneself, not just one's property. This back-and-forth . . . creates a space for an "interested" identification among readers, viewers, and writers. To appropriate Shakespeare is to make it part of one's own mental furniture as well as to extend the solitary self out towards the broader world of Shakespeare and what Shakespeare touches. (14)

The section entitled "What you will?" relates the evolution of the relationship between the terms adaptation and appropriation, from a preference for the former to a "comeback" of the latter (15). After discussing new legal, political, cultural and ethical issues, and "[t]he work of defining boundaries for both adaptation and appropriation by Cartelli, Sanders, and others" (16), the authors "suggest that the difference between adaptation and appropriation . . . proves to be a difference in degree rather than kind" (16). They propose "a constant shifting in perspective that corresponds to equally dynamic shifts in motive, whether of producers, consumers of institutional regulators of Shakespeare's cultural capital . . . such an oscillation would be responsive to context" (16). The last section of the essay, "(In)Conclusion," illustrates the importance of context in the relation between adaptation and appropriation by relating different interpretations of Maya Angelou's recitation of Portia's "quality of mercy" speech which resulted in "[t]wo stories, two Angelous . . . in which the poet alternates between appropriator and appropriated" (17). The essay concludes with a call to "explore the oscillation between these concepts" (17) and to "keep writing and

talking; the field variously called Shakespearean adaptation or appropriation is, in fact, a hybrid whose motives and context shift as surely as the night follows day” (17-18).

The ideas explored in this section include the personal implications and the corporate interests in the revisitations of Shakespeare, the different ways to adapt his plays; and the explicit or implicit relationship with the adapted text. From an initial purpose of finding a definite category for each of the novels of the Hogarth project, I came to a certain scepticism about the interest of doing so. For instance, both Sanders and Hutcheon consider acknowledgement of the appropriated text as characteristic of adaptations. According to this criterium, all the Hogarth novels are adaptations, since the retelling of Shakespeare is the trade mark of the project. On the other hand, if, as Sanders writes, “appropriation frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source” (26), *Shylock Is My Name*, in my opinion, would be an example of appropriation. Moreover, Sanders says that “[a]n adaptation signals a relationship with an informing source text or original; a cinematic version of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* . . . remains ostensibly *Hamlet*” (26). I daresay that not even in the novels that are more “faithful” to the original text one can say that they remain ostensibly *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Macbeth* or *The Winter’s Tale*. Therefore, to Holderness’s question, “are we still dealing with Shakespeare?” (see above), I would answer, no we are not. We are not dealing with Shakespeare’s works, but with a publishing project and some authors that pay a homage to Shakespeare.

### **3. The Hogarth Series**

#### *3.1. Critical Reception*

Critique of the Hogarth series as whole until recently have been mostly limited to newspaper and magazine reviews. Many of them were written before the first volume was published, and they were articles about the launching of the project rather than literary reviews. However, Lanier’s 2018 essay, “The Hogarth Shakespeare Series: Redeeming Shakespeare Literariness,” compensates the scarcity of academic and scholarly texts on the Hogarth series that I found during the early stages of my research for this dissertation. His article analyses *The Gap of Time*, *Hag-Seed*, *Shylock Is My Name*<sup>4</sup>, and *Vinegar Girl*. Lanier approaches the series from two perspectives: the first one is related to the confronting theories and practices of Shakespearean adaptations; the second one deals with the main themes found in the books

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<sup>4</sup> In the first paragraph, it appears as *My Name Is Shylock*, instead of *Shylock Is My Name* (230). In the rest of the text, it is given the right title.

under analysis. From the first point of view, Lanier reviews the controversial issues on whether adaptations of Shakespeare's plays must keep the language, that relatively few people can nowadays understand, or the plot, which is seldom original and often "terrible," as Anne Tyler puts it. Lanier posits that the Hogarth authors have taken the second position, that is, to translate the plot to "a modern idiom" (230). To fill the void that the absence of the richness and the metaphorical power of Shakespeare's language, the authors add new plot material. This additional material gives details of the characters's background or their family relationships that help the reader to understand their behaviour and motivations that Shakespeare conveys through his masterly use of language. Lanier criticises what he calls "a somewhat narrow transpositional range" (234), which results from the similarity of the social extraction of the characters – "middle to upper-middle class, college-educated professionals engaged in intellectual labor" (234). This limited spectrum conditions the reception of the project which in this way seems aimed to an audience akin to the characters.

As for the second perspective, the issues approached by the series, Lanier sees "a persistent theme throughout the first four novels: the theme of redemption" (239). In Winterson's *The Gap of Time*, Lanier highlights how redemption reaches all the characters, even the minor ones; he recalls that Winterson herself acknowledges her stress on redemption in the final paragraphs of *The Gap of Time*. In *Vinegar Girl*, Lanier describes how Tyler "provides a . . . redemptive vision of the *Shrew* . . . purged of Petruccio's [sic] taming regime or Kate's final collapse into acquiescence" (243). The redemption in *Shylock Is My Name*, according to Lanier, is "complex and richly ironic" (243); it involves a certain inversion of roles, with Strulovitch recovering some of his lost allegiance to Jewish tradition, and Shylock delivering Portia's "quality of mercy" speech. Moreover, through his conversations with Strulovitch, Shylock can justify his actions in *The Merchant*. In *Hag-Seed*, redemption "occurs on several levels at once" (244), these levels being adequacy of imprisonment to produce redemption; the redemption in the source play, *The Tempest*; and the redemption for the characters of the novel. Lanier argues that Atwood's novel "is the clearest . . . in its stress upon the redemptive nature of the Shakespearean text" (244). Lanier closes his article in positive terms. He retakes the idea of substituting additional information about the characters for Shakespeare language skills and defends that this is not done for conventional reasons, but to convey the "extraordinary redemptive force" that the authors see in the plays they retell (246).

Lanier's article, in my opinion, is very enlightening, and I have found a rich interrelation with his previous work and with other authors that have been reviewed here in



the theoretical section, especially Linda Hutcheon. I only regret that it has not been published earlier, since I only have been able to read it in the very final stages of my work<sup>5</sup>.

### 3.2. A Brief Consideration of the Seven Novels

*The Gap of Time*, Jeanette Winterson's recreation of *The Winter's Tale*, is set in twenty-first century London and the United States. Leontes's counterpart, Leo, is a hedge fund manager, Hermione becomes MiMi, a French-American singer, Polixenes is Xeno, a computer games designer, and Mamillius is Milo. Paulina is Pauline, a highly qualified personal assistant to Leo. Florizel is Zel and Perdita keeps her name. The Shepherd is Shep, an African American piano player, his son is Clo and Autolycus is a car dealer. The firm managed and owned by Leo is called Sicilia, and the American scenes are set in New Bohemia, a fictional name for a city in Louisiana very similar to New Orleans. *The Gap of Time* mirrors the structure of *The Winter's Tale* and its alternative settings in Sicilia/London, Bohemia/New Bohemia and again Sicilia/London. The novel is preceded by an introduction, "The Original," where the plot of the play is summarised. The rest of the book appears under the general title "The Cover Version." There are three parts separated by two intervals. Each chapter is entitled after a line or phrase from *The Winter's Tale* that except for some paraphrasing, is quoted literally. Winterson constructs a "back story" for the intertwined currents of love and friendship that bond MiMi, Leo and Xeno that make their reactions easier to understand than those of their counterparts in the play. The figure of Time has no similar character in the novel, but the sense of time ever present in the play is also evident in Winterson's version through the voice of the narrator, in explicit comments of the characters or even by the very structure of the text.<sup>6</sup>

*Hag-Seed*, Margaret Atwood's version of *The Tempest*, mirrors the structure of the play in its five parts and an Epilogue, although their contents does not correspond to those of the five acts. The titles of each part, and their chapters, are quotations or paraphrases of lines from the play. The novel tells the story of Felix, a disgraced former director of a theatre festival who was ousted when he was preparing a production of *The Tempest* and replaced by his second in command. Subsequently, Felix secludes himself from society, and after nine years of solitude, under the assumed name of "Mr Duke," he applies for a position as English teacher in a correctional centre and gets it. He implements a plan to teach English by

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<sup>5</sup> I have other minor regrets concerning some slight mishaps. For example, Alison Flood, is quoted repeatedly as Floyd (235, 236, and *References*). See her profile at [www.theguardian.com/profile/alisonflood](http://www.theguardian.com/profile/alisonflood), and the article referenced by Lanier at [www.theguardian.com/books/2013/jun/27/shakespeare-reworked-jeanette-winterson-anne-tyler](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/jun/27/shakespeare-reworked-jeanette-winterson-anne-tyler).

<sup>6</sup> The preceding lines combine and summarise pages 14 and 31 of my TFG.

producing Shakespeare's plays with the inmates as actors that becomes a success. Three years later, the people who caused Felix's disgrace, and who now hold high political offices, visit the prison. This gives Felix an opportunity to have his revenge and decides to use a production of *The Tempest* to put it into practice. In the warden office, a previously recorded representation of the play is fed as a live performance, while in the theatre hall Felix has orchestrated a parallel *Tempest* with the help of the inmate-actors and a former pupil of his who plays Miranda. Felix creates situations in which the politicians react like Prospero's enemies in *The Tempest* do, including murder plans and the anguish of a father believing that his son has been killed in a prison riot that is part of Felix's *mise en scène*. In the meanwhile, his pupil and the said son have fallen in love with one another. Felix and his crew have recorded all and drugged the politicians into sleep, and when they come to their senses Felix, dressed as Prospero, reveals himself to them and blackmails them into a series of measures, including to restore him to his place as director of the festival. They are forced to agree, lest the recordings go viral. In the Epilogue, as Felix is packing to leave his shelter of twelve years, the reader learns that Felix's recovering of the direction of the festival is symbolic, since he has left its reins to his pupil and her fiancé. The parallels between the novel and the play are evident. Felix/Prospero is dispossessed of his dukedom, the festival; he is twelve years in exile and manages to orchestrate a revenge which takes place in just one day; and after recovering the power, he hands it over to the young heirs. In Atwood's characterization of Felix, his traits are modified with the years, and Mr Duke, the teacher in the prison, is a very different person from the Felix who was fired from the festival. When he stages his version of *The Tempest*, he seems to be enjoying more the direction of the play than an act of revenge. Somehow, Felix is a more complete and attractive character than the original Prospero. In part five, Atwood adds an interesting twist in the handling of the adaptation, since the play leaves some questions unanswered. Given Antonio's and Sebastian's attitudes, one cannot be sure if the return to Milan and Naples will follow what it seems to be a happy ending. The fates of Caliban and Ariel are equally indeterminate. In the novel, the different actors' teams, one for each character in the play, prompted by Felix, present what could have become of each character after the end of the play<sup>7</sup>.

Tracy Chevalier transposes *Othello* to an all-white elementary school in suburban Washington in 1974 on the first school day for the only black student (6, 10). Her novel, *New Boy*, replicates structure, characters and plot of the play, although the action takes place

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<sup>7</sup> The preceding lines summarise pages 5-8 of my Shakespeare and Popular Culture Final Paper.

in a single day. It is divided into five parts, the main characters are eleven-year-old children, and the acting adult people are limited to school staff, except for fleeting references to parents. Othello is Osei, the eponymous new boy, a black child son of a Ghanaian diplomat; Desdemona is Dee, Emilia is Mimi, Iago is Ian, Roderigo is Rod, Bianca is Blanca, and Casio is Casper. Desdemona's father, Brabantio, has his counterpart in Mr Brabant, a teacher and Vietnam veteran, whose pet student is Dee (4); the Duke of Venice is represented by the principal of the school, Mrs Duke (55), and Ludovico is Miss Lode, the math teacher (43). The story is told by an omniscient narrator from the points of view of Dee, Ian, Mimi and Osei, the order of which changes in each of the five parts. The novel develops in almost exact symmetry to the play: Dee and Osei initial fascination for each other, Ian's machinations, with Dee's pencil case substituting for Desdemona's handkerchief, Osei's growing jealousy and the tragic final. However, there are, in my opinion, two noticeable deviations from the original plot. First, the racist attitude towards Osei is heavier in the novel and it is shown more crudely in Mr Brabant's behaviour and words. His "boy" on page 75 does not sound as an adult talking to a young person, but as a white racist addressing black men of any age. "Seeing his hand on her made me sick" he adds in page 76, and again the derogatory "boy" in "I've seen your kind before. You planning to be a troublemaker at this school, boy?" (147). The climax comes with the use of the 'n-word' on the second to last page: "Did you hear me, boy? . . . Get down from there, nigger!" (187). I daresay that Osei's final decision is triggered by Mr Brabant's racism rather than the realization of his unfair treatment of Dee. The second important difference I perceive is that the final may be not as tragic as in the original: Dee does not die – she flees from the schoolyard and "disappeared around the corner" (178); Mimi falls from "the jungle gym" pulled by Ian (182-183), she is apparently paralysed and passes out (188), but the reader does not know whether the paralysis is permanent or not, or whether she dies or not. Even Osei's death is uncertain – he throws himself from the top of the jungle gym, but he is not explicitly pronounced dead (188). The novel catches the attention of the reader, but its very "fidelity" to the play deprives it of much of its power to surprise. Moreover, I agree with *The Guardian* reviewer's appreciation, "I found it difficult to believe that I was reading true lives of 11-year-olds" (Allfrey par.5).

Jo Nesbo's novel keeps the title of the original play, *Macbeth*, and is set in a nameless Scottish city in the early nineteen seventies. Macbeth, "a gigantic man" (23), is the head of a SWAT police team; Macduff, renamed Duff, leads the Narcotics Unit and Duncan is the new Chief Commissioner. In a declining town where industry is disappearing, a new drug,

'brew,' has boosted addiction. The main brew producer is Hecate, who hires three sisters who know the secret composition of the drug. Duncan's predecessor was in cahoots with Hecate, who sees that his empire is endangered by Duncan's decision to declare a war on crime and corruption. The head of the Gang Unit, Cawdor, is found to be a confidant of the drug lords, and he hangs himself before he is arrested. Macbeth is sentimentally involved with Lady, whose age "was definitely a good deal more than Macbeth's thirty-three years" (46). Lady convinces Macbeth that he has to kill Duncan to advance his career and protect her business. He tries to do the deed, but he cannot hurt a defenceless person and must go and buy brew, which he takes and then can achieve the murder. The novel develops in parallel to the play's plot. There are a few changes and some additions that provide insights into some characters' past. For example, Duff and Macbeth met in an orphanage where Duff protected Macbeth and killed the orphanage's director, who had been sexually abusing Macbeth for years. Lady was raped and got pregnant when she was thirteen, had a baby and smashed it against a wall. She started as a young prostitute, and now she is the owner of Inverness, the best casino in town. She met Macbeth four years earlier when he dealt successfully with a hostage situation at her casino. There are characters with the same names as in the play, but whose role has changed. Inspector Caithness is a woman who heads the Forensic Unit and has a love affair with Duff. Seyton is present throughout the novel, whereas in the play he only appears in the last scenes; he is some kind of undead, as the phonetics of his name suggest, Seyton/Satan, who has healing powers and has to be terminated by Macbeth with a silver dagger. Lastly, in the final confrontation with Duff, Macbeth makes Duff believe that he is producing a hidden weapon forcing Duff to kill him. This suicidal attitude contrasts with the original Macbeth, who after an initial hesitation, "I'll not fight with thee" (5.8.22), decides that "I will not yield" (5.8.28) and "damned be him that first cries 'Hold, enough!'" (5.8.34). Nesbo's novel, in my opinion, suffers from the same flaw than *New Boy*, that is, a too close fidelity of the original plot which challenges the patience of the reader trudging through its 503 pages. As Andrew Taylor writes in his review in *The Spectator*, "Nesbo's *Macbeth* takes 503 pages to do what Shakespeare does, in my edition of the play, in 86. It's a cruelly unfair comparison, but I know which I prefer" (par. 9). I do agree with Taylor.

The seven novels show some common elements in all of them, such as giving visibility to mothers, which in the original plays are absent, except for a short reference in *The Merchant of Venice*, and of course *The Winter's Tale*, where fatherhood and motherhood are central themes. The transposition of the power structures from play to novel is, however,

approached in different ways. Thus, Winterson and St Aubyn transforms kingdoms into powerful corporations; Nesbo's *Macbeth* and other characters of his novel are part of the political establishment, as in the original play, but at the same time they are involved in criminal networks; in Chevalier's *New Boy*, the staff of a school substitute Venetian nobility; *Vinegar Girl* keeps the patriarchal structure of *The Taming of Shrew*, although, in my opinion, Kate's father, in spite of his milder manners, is more of a tyrant in the novel than in the play, unlike Petruchio's counterpart; finally, in Jacobson's retelling of *The Merchant of Venice* there is no identifiable political structure like the Dukedom of Venice, but as in the play it does exist a tension between a dominant Christian society and a member of the Jewish minority.

According to the above defined patterns, Chevalier's and Nesbo's works fit into the first pattern, where the author "translates" plot, characters and situations of the play to present-day circumstances with few alterations or suppressions, whereas I put Atwood's novel into the third pattern, in which the characters of the story establish an explicit dialogue with the source play, since she makes of *The Tempest* itself a central theme of the novel. Winterson's *Gap of Time* is a mixed case. For the most part, it is in my opinion a very successful adaptation of *The Winter's Tale*, therefore that would put it under the first pattern, but at the same time, in addition of heading each chapter with a title taken from lines of the original play, at the end of the book the author appears with her own voice explaining her motives for choosing that play and her relationship with it throughout her life. Furthermore, Winterson privileges the issue of the abandoned child over marital trust as a central theme of her story, and the point of view of Polixenes's counterpart is more relevant than in the original play, which gives the novel traits of the second pattern, where the author of the adaptation introduces changes of points of view and of the characters' motivations.

### 3.3. Selection Criteria

There are several reasons behind the criteria used to select or not any specific novel in this research. *The Gap of Time* was the subject of my TFG, and I took *Hag-Seed* as an example of popular adaptation of Shakespeare in a final paper in the master's course on Shakespeare and popular culture, and since I would rather work on something new, I have excluded them. I have left out Nesbo's *Macbeth* because I did not feel comfortable including a translation from Norwegian in a study on English literature; furthermore, Nesbo's book follows the adapted work so narrowly that it is too predictable, and it makes the progress through its five hundred pages rather tiresome. I am less familiar with *Othello* than with *Macbeth* – my knowledge of the former comes just from reading the play several times and watching film

and opera adaptations, whereas I worked on *Macbeth* in my undergraduate courses. However, I daresay that I know *Othello* enough to perceive that, in spite of its characters' transposition from grownups to children, Chevalier's *New Boy*, like Nesbo's book, is in excess "faithful" to the original source,

I have chosen Jacobson's novel as a challenge: first because *The Merchant of Venice* had not been the object of any of the courses I have taken, and second because *Shylock Is My Name* is perhaps the more complex of the novels of the series. *The Taming of the Shrew* did form part of one of the master's courses, but none of the film adaptations included in the course material appealed to me, and neither did Tyler's version. However, a second reading of *Vinegar Girl* allowed me to grasp nuances that had escaped me, and I took a definitive liking for the main feminine character, Kate. Since I had never read any of Tyler's works, after *Vinegar Girl* I bought and read her last one, *Clock Dance*. *King Lear* was one of the first plays I studied during my first year in the UNED and made a great impression on me, and I had never heard of Edward St Aubyn; therefore *Dunbar* had a double attractive to be included in my selection. After my first reading of *Dunbar*, I immersed myself in St Aubyn's five novels that constitute the Patrick Melrose cycle; that gave me some insights into the author's personality and his version of *King Lear*.

#### **4. The Chosen Novels**

The following sections follow the same structure: a survey of the critical reception, an analysis of the novel with the adapted play as reference, and an attempt to fit the novel into some of the modes of adaptation surveyed in the theoretical part and into one of the patterns defined above.

##### *4.1. Dunbar*

###### **4.1.1. Critical Reception**

I find rather surprising the insistence of most of the reviewers on relating St Aubyn's life and autobiographical Melrose series to his retelling of *King Lear*. It is obvious that his personal experiences and social background influence his approach to the play in a way similar to the influence that Howard Jacobson's experiences as an English Jew have on his work. However, in the reviews of *Shylock Is My Name*, I have not perceived so much emphasis on the personal aspects of the author.

Brian Bethune and Emily Donaldson regard *Dunbar* as the most inspired novel in the Hogarth project. Comparing *Dunbar* with St Aubyn's five Melrose novels, they see in his work a combination of "familial vivisection" and "the blackest comedy" (par. 2). They

conclude that “a reader can see both the tragedy of Shakespeare’s old man . . . and hints of the journey to self-awareness that must once have saved a much younger St Aubyn” (par. 3).

Patrick Skene Catling reviews *Dunbar* in *The Spectator* without mentioning *King Lear* or William Shakespeare. He deals with the novel as an autonomous work on “a family’s internecine struggle for control of a global fortune” and states that “St Aubyn is a connoisseur of depravity, yet also shows he cherishes the possibility of redemption” (par. 1). Apart from a couple of sentences praising the author’s prose and a final line where Catling concludes that the novel is “harsh” and “entertaining” (par. 6), the review is just a summary of the novel.

The start of Kate Clanchy’s review anticipates a favorable critique, and the tone of most of it seems to confirm this sensation. However, after pointing out the flaws in the description of characters other than Dunbar, the closing paragraph makes an unfavourable comparison between St Aubyn’s work and Jane Smiley’s:

Jane Smiley demonstrated in *A Thousand Acres* that it is possible to make *King Lear* say something new . . . St Aubyn’s *Dunbar*, in contrast, simply recounts the tale of how painful it is when an old, powerful man loses everything. It’s still a sad story, but it is also a more limited one than this immensely talented writer can tell. (par. 11)

Nevertheless, the review has interesting points, although I disagree with some of them. Clanchy opens her article by stating that “[o]f all the novelist and play matches in the Hogarth Shakespeare series, that of Edward St Aubyn with *King Lear* seems the finest” (par. 1). She concurs with Catling in her appreciation that St Aubyn is “a true connoisseur of the perverse and sadistic” (par 1). She praises the characters of Dunbar/Lear and Peter/Fool and writes that “[t]he other characters, even minor ones, are also wittily and cleverly updated” (par. 6). In my opinion, this contradicts what she says in the second to last paragraph, that is, “this same focus on Dunbar doesn’t leave the plot or the other characters quite enough places to go” and especially about the evil daughters, who “are elegant ciphers in the plot . . . unlike the more nuanced female characters of St Aubyn’s Melrose novels” (par. 10). I disagree partially with the parallelism that Clanchy sees between Shakespeare’s Edgar and St Aubyn’s Simon – “Edgar is Simon” (par. 6); I agree that Simon is Edgar when he poses as Tom, but I think that Edgar as himself is Chris, son of Wilson. I do agree with Clanchy’s question about the real existence of Simon – “or is Simon a chimera?” (par. 7); I had the same doubt.

Andrew Dickson begins his critique with the inevitable reference to St Aubyn’s experience with parental abuse and its treatment in the Melrose series. He considers St Aubyn’s “reinvention of Shakespeare . . . both free and relatively faithful” (par. 2), that is,

“St Aubyn isn’t much interested in remixing the play’s ingredients, preferring to serve it to us straight, with a dash of added gall” (par. 3). Some of Dickson’s comments are rather comical – “the sisters make Goneril and Regan look like models of moral restraint” (par. 4) – and as it happens with the critical reception of other Hogarth novels, he regrets that the author’s abilities shown in his previous work are not displayed in his retelling of the play: “St Aubyn – so meticulous and merciless about a precise cross-section of the English moneyed classes – seems a little adrift” (par. 5). Dickson believes that the novel lacks a precise direction, that it moves between “action thriller” and “a waspish, Waugh-ish satire that doesn’t feel entirely adequate to the emotional and psychological brutality of the material” (par. 5). I am not sure whether the balance of the review is favourable or not, whether positive comments like “the language feels sculpted and precise, Dunbar’s obsessive solipsism both violent and convincing” (par 6) compensate the negative ones, some of which I have reproduced.

The review published by *British Heritage Travel* praises St Aubyn’s capacity of combining humour, “psychological understanding” and “beautiful prose – acerbic, brisk and moving” (par. 3). There is the usual reference to the Melrose series.

The positive judgement of *Dunbar* by *Kirkus Reviews* – “brilliant . . . superb” – includes some interesting points. It notices the change in “the order of the play” and affirms that “the best of Shakespeare stands up readily to adaptation in every age.” The review focuses on the novel, with no reference to the Melrose series or to St Aubyn’s troubled past.

*Publishers Weekly* highlights that the novel eliminates characters of the original and “concentrates on Dunbar’s suffering and inner conflict,” and although it qualifies the end of the story as “abrupt and unsatisfying,” ends up by praising St Aubyn’s prose and his ability to expose the corrupt upper classes.

Charles Finch writes an extremely negative review that seems a critique of St Aubyn the writer rather than of the novel, which he qualifies as “a flimsy, antic, disappointing adaptation of *King Lear*” (par. 1). Finch devotes two paragraphs to St Aubyn’s life and the Melrose series to conclude that *Dunbar* has “neither the same sensitivity nor the same richness” (par. 5). He criticises the characters as unidimensional and too numerous, since despite St Aubyn’s leaving out much of the original plot, “*Dunbar* still feels overstuffed with secondary characters” (par. 6). In the closing paragraph, the reviewer dismisses St Aubyn’s work posterior to the Melrose series, where the author displayed “his real gift . . . for the autobiographical” (par 8), which Finch seems to imply it was exhausted after the Melrose books.



Stephanie Merritt's review is rather more positive than the one her colleague Kate Clanchy writes in the same newspaper, *The Guardian*. She alludes to St Aubyn's adequacy to adapt *King Lear*, given his personal experiences, and affirms that "*Dunbar* emerges as one of the finest contributions" to the Hogarth project (par. 1). To Merritt, *Dunbar* is "a fairly straightforward reworking of the play" (par. 3), and surprisingly affirms that "St Aubyn's version is much funnier than Shakespeare's" (par. 3). She concludes that St Aubyn "has transplanted the heart of the story into the present and made it feel remarkably authentic" (par. 5).

Douglas Murray's "Dark Visionary" is an article on the whole work of St Aubyn where three paragraphs deal with *Dunbar*. Murray maintains that everything that St Aubyn has written after the Melrose novels, including *Dunbar*, is a failure. The second to last sentence of the article is demolishing: "Of course the question will remain over whether (still only in his fifties) St. Aubyn has anything left to produce" (33). Regarding *Dunbar*, Murray approves St Aubyn's leaving out the Gloucester sub-plot and praises some "sparkling phrases and flashes of humor", but for the rest "the author seems to be on autopilot" (33). Murray implies that *Dunbar* is a failure not because St Aubyn cannot produce an adaptation of the play like Ivan Turgenev's *King Lear of the Steppes*, but because he has lost interest in the project.

Gracy Olmstead's long article begins with a reference to St Aubyn's past, his previous work and his familiarity with *King Lear* since he was a young man. She quotes St Aubyn's motives to turn Lear from king into a media mogul in comparison with Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*: land ownership is no longer a sign of power. Throughout the article, Olmstead compares the play with the novel and points out the different meaning that Lear's values and vices have today; "Dunbar the capitalist does not bear the same dignity as Lear the king. He . . . is ruled by his appetites, desirous of money and power . . . Lear was his daughters' prey; here, he is their prototype" (72), she writes. According to Olmstead, since in our time respect for the elders is not what it was in Shakespeare's time, by making of Dunbar a tyrant, "St Aubyn has to turn Abigail and Megan into sadistic monsters" (72) to appreciate the enormity of the daughters' villainy. As other reviewers, Olmstead considers that the best part of the book is Dunbar's "lonely journey through the snowy wasteland of northern England" (73), although she misses the characters that accompany the original Lear in his pilgrimage. She criticises St Aubyn's use of psychology to explain the characters' vices; she states that "therapeutic explanation dulls Shakespeare's horror and tragedy" since in Shakespeare's times "there was no explanation for betrayal or parricide" (73). In my

opinion, Olstead's review shows a good knowledge of the play and a thorough read of the novel, and her points are well reasoned and exposed. However, I think that she idealises Lear, and that he is not a lesser tyrant than Dunbar.

*New York Times* critic Cynthia Ozick qualifies Dunbar as a thriller, "a crime thriller, a corporate megamogul thriller and even . . . a sadistic thriller" (par. 6). She centres her analysis on Peter, "a feeble echo of Lear's fool" (par. 7) to prove her argument that "in reconceiving Shakespeare, it isn't story that counts; the meaning of story is all" (par. 9). Her conclusion is that *Dunbar* "keeps the story and loses the meaning" (11), although she concedes that the "passage where, as Dunbar wanders half-hallucinating in the Cumbrian wilderness, the only dialogue is between the mind and itself" (par 11), relives Shakespeare.

Donna Seaman's short review is highly favourable; contrarily to Cynthia Ozick, she considers Peter an "exemplary fool," and the novel a "complexly vicious and profusely hallucinatory reimagining," and a "resplendent rendering of nature's grand drama and Dunbar's shattered psyche, Florence's love, and her sisters' malevolence."

Among the reviews that I have summarised above, the positive judgements outnumber the negative ones. There is a general agreement that the narration of Dunbar's wandering through the wilderness is the best part of the book. I have not detected any mistake that might indicate a superficial reading of the play or the novel. As far as I can tell, the reviewers show a good knowledge of both the original play and its retelling, and therefore their evaluations are trustworthy.

#### 4.1.2. The Tragedy of a Media Mogul

*The Tragedy of King Lear* is retold by Edward St Aubyn in the novel *Dunbar* through an omniscient narrator from variable points of view. The characters of the play have their counterparts in the novel, although some of them have been left out or combined in a single one. The Gloucester subplot has been eliminated. Lear is Dunbar, a Canadian media mogul; Gonerill<sup>8</sup> is Abigail, Regan is Megan and Cordelia is Florence. Wilson is a combination of Kent and Gloucester; Dr Bob is Edmond, but he is no relative of Wilson. Chris, Wilson's son, is Edgar. The Fool's parallel is Peter, an alcoholic and a famous actor. The counterpart of Gonerill's husband, Albany, is Mark, Abigail's husband, whereas Regan is a widow in the timespan of the story. Other characters are described in the analysis below.

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<sup>8</sup> Except for quotations from other authors, the spelling of the characters' names follows the one used in the New Cambridge Shakespeare edition of the play.

The book is divided into eighteen chapters in which the omniscient narrator's point of view varies steadily from chapter one to eleven; each chapter follows the perspective of one single character. In chapter twelve, which roughly parallels act four, the points of view change very quickly among different characters, and after two chapters, thirteen and fourteen, each one with a single perspective, the pace of change accelerates again in chapters fifteen to seventeen, to recover a one person's point of view in the closing chapter.

Chapter one, told from Dunbar's point of view, is set in Dunbar's room at the Lake District sanatorium where Abigail and Megan have confined him with the complicity of Dr Bob, Dunbar's personal physician. The chapter begins with a dialogue between Dunbar and Peter, a fellow guest – or inmate – in which the former explains how, against the counsel of Wilson, Dunbar's lawyer and friend, he decided to transfer the executive functions of his media empire to his daughters Abigail and Megan while he intended to remain as an honorary chairman with the same perquisites he had been enjoying – executive plane and the like. Dunbar's tale is continuously interrupted by the witticisms of Peter, who does not believe Dunbar's story until it is well advanced. Dunbar tries to tell Peter how Abigail and Megan dispossessed him, but Nurse Roberts and her aid come in with the medication and they have to stop talking. Peter reminds Dunbar not to take the pills, since they are planning to flee next morning. Left alone, Dunbar continues remembering his daughters' and his doctor's treason and curses them. In the chapter there are some paraphrases of the play, like Peter's "he turned his daughters into his mother" (7), which echoes the Fool's "thou mad'st thy daughters thy mothers" (1.4.134); Dunbar's "Monsters . . . vultures tearing at my heart and entrails" (11) recalls Lear's "she hath tied / Sharp-toothed unkindness, like a vulture here" (2.4.126-27). Dunbar's own's recounting exposes traits of his personality defined by his reported acts and words: authoritarian, "I am informing you of my decision, not asking your advice. Just make it happen!" (3); and choleric, violent ("I shouted, flinging the egg into the fireplace behind my desk" (4). Peter's character is best defined by his words, which reveal him as a witty, congenial fellow whose speech is full of resonances that can mix Leslie Charteris with antipsychiatry, "as R. D. Laing said to the Bishop" (2), impersonate iconic actors like John Wayne (4), or affect a Viennese accent (7). Nurse Roberts's characterization, in my opinion, is almost a caricature, with an exaggerated display of linguistic mannerisms typically found in fictional nurses, like the use of first-person plural.

The point of view in chapter two is Dr Bob's, although it opens with a telephone conversation between Florence and Abigail both parts of which are given to the reader. Florence wants to know where his father is, and Abigail pretends not to know it. During the

phone call, Abigail, Dr Bob and Megan are lying together in a bed somewhere in Manhattan, and in the subsequent dialogue Abigail and Megan, to Dr Bob's alarm, half-jokingly, half seriously, speculate on the idea of killing Florence. The reader learns that Florence's mother was not Abigail's and Megan's. They speak about their next steps to complete Dunbar's ousting, quote some of his reactions, and the sisters ask Dr Bob about the medication he gave Dunbar to alter his behaviour and facilitate his internment. One of Dunbar's decisions before being confined was to fire Wilson, his lawyer. The sisters and Dr Bob have a brief sadomasochist play still in bed, the result of which is Dr Bob's need to go to the bathroom to mend his nipple. While Dr Bob is still in the bathroom, Megan comes in, submitting him again to her sexual tricks, including how "with one swift movement, like a bird of prey, she pecked at the wound in his chest with her sharp teeth" (20), which again sends the reader to the line quoted above, and to Lear's "pelican daughters" in 3.4.70. However, the "Sharp-toothed unkindness" refers to Gonerill, Abigail's counterpart, not Regan's.

Chapter 3 takes the reader back to the sanatorium and to Dunbar's perspective. At breakfast, Dunbar dodges Nurse Roberts's attempts to make him socialise with other people, meets Peter and, thanks to the latter's friendship with the cook, they go outside and start their flight. Dunbar shows signs of mental confusion and he is aware of them: "Dunbar suddenly remembered what they were doing. He had drifted off somewhere" (30). Peter and Dunbar find a "quad utility vehicle parked behind the wall" (31), take it and, while Peter drives, Dunbar thinks of Florence, who "had inherited her mother's beauty as well as her disarming sympathy . . . Apart from her virtues, he loved Florence simply because she was Catherine's daughter, and Catherine was the great love of his life" (32). He regrets that he heeded her older daughters and gave Florence's shares to them; "Florence was the one with the real stubbornness and pride. She had just walked away and never faltered" (33). Dunbar's thoughts are cut when the vehicle stops to take Mrs Harrod, another patient of the sanatorium who is in the middle of the path. Dunbar realises that Peter is "just off on a drunken escapade" (34), and that he is "going to have to escape alone" (34). The chapter closes with a paragraph full of visual imagery and simile that reflect the impression caused on Dunbar by the vision of the woodland in winter.

In chapter four, the point of view changes to Florence, who has flown to New York from her home in Wyoming to investigate her father's whereabouts. She contacts Mark, Abigail's husband, and asks him for help with no success. I would like to note a moment in her dialogue with Mark, when Florence tries to justify a vicious trick Abby played on her in their childhood, Mark's response is "[y]ou're too forgiving" (36), In the context of their

conversation, the answer seems irrelevant, but it can be understood as foreshadowing the development of forgiveness as central theme in the novel.

The chapter gives more details about Florence's breakup with her father. He had told her "that she would always win the competition for his favor" (37), but when she told him that she was not interested in the family business – Florence is married to Benjamin, has children and wanted to go to live in Wyoming – "Dunbar was overtaken by one of his rages, removing her from the Board, cutting her out of his will, and spitefully excluding her children from the Trust" (37). Florence has her version of the relationship between her father, the memory of her mother and herself that complements Dunbar's thoughts on the quad: "Florence was given the job of perpetuating the qualities he admired in her [mother]" (39), and furthermore,

It was what Henry Dunbar was used to: mergers and acquisitions, delegation and rebranding. Florence was merged with Catherine's ghost, rebranded as the companion, best friend, sweet-natured woman, and heir apparent that his psyche required. When she chose her husband over her father, and the next generation over the last, she knew that in his eyes she was heartlessly destroying his last defense against acknowledging Catherine's complete extinction. Given his temperament, she was not surprised that he preferred to turn his grief into rage. What she didn't anticipate was how long he would resist any reconciliation, and that one of them might die before it was achieved. (38)

I have reproduced this long paragraph because on the one hand it gives reasons for Dunbar's behaviour that are not explained in Lear's case; on the other hand, it does evoke Cordelia's attitude reflected in these lines:

Why have my sisters husbands, if they say  
They love you all? Happily, 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. (1.1.94-98)

Nevertheless, Florence chooses her husband *over* her father, whereas Cordelia distributes her love into two equivalent halves.

The action shifts again to Dunbar's perspective, and chapter five begins with Dunbar, Peter and Mrs Harrod in the bar of a lakeside hotel, The King's Head. Dunbar's state of mind varies between full awareness of where he is, regret for his lost power, a fight not to think about his situation, and a "longing to see Florence again . . . His yearning for reconciliation was so intense that if she had been there now he would have fallen to his knees to beg for her forgiveness" (55). Here forgiveness is no longer a friendly retort between relatives, but one of the driving forces behind Dunbar's determination to face the ordeal of his flight. Dunbar and Peter part, Peter to deliver himself to the sanatorium staff and Dunbar heading to the mountains towards a pass to the next valley.

The next chapter takes place entirely in a Manchester hotel where Abigail, Megan and Dr Bob have checked in. Dr Bob has a phone conversation with Steve Cogniccenti, the president of a rival media organisation who wants to take Dunbar's empire over, to inform him of the sisters' machinations. He is summoned to the sisters' suite and is told about Dunbar's escape.

Dr Bob's parallelism with Edmond is far from perfect. Edmond's ability for scheming is especially distasteful when he applies it to harm his father and half-brother. This aspect of the character disappears in the novel with the absence of the Gloucester subplot. Moreover, Dr Bob's characterization in this chapter and in chapter two reveals a subservient individual, dependent and afraid of the Dunbar women. The power relationships between Edmond and the sisters, in particular in the sexual plane, are rather the reverse. Furthermore, Edmond's intrigues not only have political consequences, they also poison personal links. Dr Bob's interests are centred on making money, and it is not clear whether his conspiracies have any real effect.

Meanwhile, Dunbar is alone in the wilderness. Chapter seven displays a rich description of elements of the landscape and of the association of ideas they arouse in Dunbar's mind: "the stream looked to him like an incision, a comparison that immediately gave him the mad feeling that a surgical knife was running down the center of his own torso" (68-69). He is aware that he may be losing his reason: "'Please don't let me go mad,' he muttered" (69). His half hallucinations alternate with thoughts about Dr Bob, his daughters, Wilson, his beginnings as heir to a provincial Canadian newspaper, and his dead wife Catherine: "[t]he collision of ideas and images . . . the weird equivalence between what had really happened and what he had just imagined: they were all thoughts, all images fighting for control of his mind" (71). At the closing of the chapter, Dunbar has reached the pass after trudging through the snow, he can see the valley he has left and the next one, it is growing dark, he cannot return, and he finds no shelter (74-75).

The first half of chapter eight deals with Megan's thoughts. She feels that she is beginning to distance herself from Abigail, partly because Megan would like to have Dr Bob to herself. She is also disappointed by Abigail's behaviour in questioning Peter's last evening, in which Peter gave them false leads about Dunbar's whereabouts. In the second half of the chapter, Megan, Abigail, Dr Bob and two aids submit Peter to tortures that include dousing him with whisky, setting fire to his hair and chest and letting him fall into gelid waters. The sisters, in addition to enjoying the scene immensely, manage to make Peter confess to where Dunbar was heading: to the pass to the next valley (87-90). This passage

transposes scene 3.7 of the play, where Gloucester is humiliated – “By the kind gods, 'tis most ignobly done, /To pluck me by the beard” (3.7.34) – and tortured – “Upon these eyes of thine I'll set my foot” (3.7.67) – to punish him and to extract from him which way had taken Lear, “To Dover” (3.7.50). The characters in scene 3.7 are Cornwall, Regan, Gonerill, Edmond, Oswald, servants and Gloucester. Oswald exits before Gloucester enters, and Edmond has no speaking part. In the novel there are Abigail, Regan, Dr Bob, Peter and the aids. Dr Bob does not take active part in the physical torment. The aids are two new characters, Kevin and Jesus. They may be seen as components of a split Oswald. In the play, Oswald is Gonerill's steward and lover; in the novel, the stress is put on Jesus's relationship with Megan, Regan's counterpart. This chapter is a very good example, in my opinion, of appropriation of a situation in the play to adapt it to characters in the novel whose imperfect parallelism to the original ones does not affect the coherence of the whole work.

Chapter nine has a circular structure, beginning in the story's real time, followed by an analepsis which includes other analepses, to return to the fictional present time. The first paragraph shows Dunbar climbing a fence and looking at the barn where he has spent the night. Before entering the analepsis, a second paragraph includes a piece of Dunbar's reflections that alludes to one of the central themes of *King Lear*, namely, mental blindness:

Perhaps there was a point at which the disorder would become a new kind of order, or at least a new kind of perspective, like a pilot who struggles through an overcast sky and then emerges from blindness into the serene light of the upper atmosphere, looking down on a sea of cloud beneath the wings, seeing completely what had just prevented him from seeing at all. Yes, that's what he wanted, that's what he desperately wanted. (92-93)

The first analepsis describes how Dunbar took refuge in a barn, hidden between bales of hay. After a few hours of light sleep, he was awakened by the arrival of Kevin and Jesus. When they were about to discover him, “the cattle grew restless and their restlessness grew contagious; one or two cows bellowed, while others barged against the clanging metal gates of the pen. Moments later a dog started to bark and then another” (95), and therefore his pursuers had to leave. This triggers the second analepsis, where Dunbar remembers that the dogs and the cattle noises helped him to find his shelter. A third analepsis, within the first one, takes Dunbar to his youth in Ontario when he developed his “strong connection with nature” (96). He is overjoyed, but soon realises that he must leave; he does so when dawn is approaching, the analepses are closed and the action returns to the beginning. He climbs the wall, crouches behind it and see his pursuers (97). After a while, he lies down, wishing a close contact with the earth (98-99). He remembers scenes from his infancy and punishments her mother gave to him. He stands up again, sees that his enemies are gone and begins to

walk uphill, decided not to be caught. The chapter closes with hunting scenes that Dunbar's mind compares with his situation.

The first paragraphs of chapter ten take place in a jet rented by Florence that flies her, Wilson, his son Chris and Abigail's husband, Mark, to Manchester. Alone in her cabin, Florence reviews the recent facts. She and Wilson have decided to form two searching teams, Wilson and Mark, and Florence and Chris. Florence is worried because she and Chris had been involved in a love relationship in their late teens and early twenties. It seems that St Aubyn evokes Nahum Tate's 1681 version of the play by moving its happy ending – Edgar and Cordelia fall in love – to the background of the story (Halio 10, 25, 34; Hutcheon 12). Florence and Chris meet the director of the sanatorium, who receives them with hostility because he has been threatened by the lawyers of Florence's sisters. He tells them about Peter, who has been found "an hour ago . . . in a state of abject terror" (109). Chris and Florence convince him that their intention is not to press charges, but to find Dunbar and take him home; they argue that "[t]he reason he's exposed himself to a storm in this mountainous country is that Abigail and Megan are more of a threat to him than lightning and frost and hypothermia" (109). They comment on Dunbar's stubbornness and determination, leave the sanatorium and go to join Wilson and the police in the search for Dunbar.

Dunbar's wandering continues in chapter eleven, where again the text is very rich in visual imagery. Dunbar's hallucinations have increased, and they mix landscape, his memories as a powerful business man, hatred for his older daughters and repentance for his behaviour towards Florence. There are passages in the text where the parallel with the play is evident. For instance, Lear's defiance against nature in 3.4.6 – "No, I will weep no more. In such a night / To shut me out? Pour on, I will endure" – is clearly reflected here: "He . . . brought both his fists against his chest, inviting that child-devouring sky-god to do his worst" (113). In other instance, the parallel is not with Lear, but with Gloucester; thus, "perhaps at the top of this next hill there would be a precipice . . . from which to throw himself head first onto some rocks" (115), echoes Gloucester's wishes:

There is a cliff whose high and bending head  
Looks fearfully in the confined deep.  
Bring me but to the very brim of it,  
And I'll repair the misery thou dost bear  
With something rich about me. From that place  
I shall no leading need. (4.2.68-73)

However, for all his hallucinatory state, I should say that Dunbar's mental condition is not so bad as Lear's, and his moments of lucidity are more frequent; moreover, he is more



conscious of the part his own acts have played in his situation. Lear believes that her daughters' cruelty is innate; Dunbar acknowledges that "if his daughters were monsters it was because he had made them that way" (117). In the same paragraph, the recurrent theme of forgiveness appears again, almost with the same words as in chapter five: "If there was any reason to stay alive it was to sink to his knees to beg Florence's forgiveness" (117). The sentence becomes something akin to a prayer. This idea is reinforced in the closing paragraph of this chapter, where it is near to words of evident religious connotations: "Dunbar, who was in awe of his new companion, started to imitate his walk, and with each partial genuflexion . . . he imagined that he was going down on his knees to beg the forgiveness, one after another, of all the people he had harmed" (121).

The sunset is near. Dunbar halts for a while and hears a voice crying for help. He sees "what seemed to be a low mound crack open and take on a human shape. A man in a filthy brown overcoat, his beard loaded with earth" (119). It is Simon the hermit, a former gay priest and compulsive gambler who was disgraced by Dunbar's press. Dunbar washes Simon's bleeding, blistered feet and helps him to walk to a cave where they spend the night. Simon is the counterpart of Edgar as Tom o'Bedlam, but his real existence is doubtful, as the events in chapter twelve suggest.

As it has been noted above, chapter twelve is narrated from different points of view; Dunbar's journey is interspersed with scenes that let the reader know the actions, thoughts, motivations and background of other characters. New information is given about Mark, Abigail's husband: his family ancestry, his marriage and his fruitless attempts to be accepted by Florence to be part of her searching team. Abigail cherishes the idea of how good for her plans would be to find Dunbar dead; her musings are interrupted by a phone call from the head of the sanatorium, who tells her that Peter has committed suicide, and that he is going to sue her as responsible.

From Dunbar's point of view, the action of this chapter twelve begins when he wakes up before dawn; he remembers that "[t]here had once been a man called Henry Dunbar, an expert on the glories and shortcomings of some of the greatest properties in the world" (125), but he feels that now it is "the man freezing to death under a ledge of rock who was the real Dunbar" (126). He calls Simon but gets no answer. Dunbar is afraid of dying "alone and unforgiven" (126): another reference to forgiveness. This account is interrupted by a short paragraph in which Florence wakes up from a dream where his father "was under a ledge of rock, freezing to death" (126). When the sun comes, Simon appears again and helps Dunbar to stand up and walk; they are supposedly going to a nearby farm to have something to eat.

Dunbar's physical condition does not allow him to walk and "go on talking at the same time" (131). His mind is still occupied by memories and hallucinations. It is worthwhile to reproduce an example of them:

In his eyes, the landscape had now taken on the sort of pliancy and suggestiveness usually reserved for passing clouds. Its wild plasticity was checked by the narrow choice of forms that it conjured up. Dunbar saw only a series of crouching animals, often piebald with snow, their heads rearing up, their mouths jutting forward, their limbs extended in spurs, or planted underground to give their assault a more deadly impetus. Over to his left was one of Cerberus's monstrous heads, which might be woken by the clatter of a loose stone, or the thud of a falling body. The rounded back of his serpent's tail, pretending to be a hill, disappeared a few hundred yards away but might surface at any moment under Dunbar's bruised feet. The spurs jutting out from the mountain to his right were the outstretched limbs of a Sphinx, its claws embedded in the earth. He didn't dare look behind him at the open jaws of the white-backed wolf waiting for a final surge in the fluidity of the rock to leap forward and tear out his throat. (138)

The omniscient narrator, using the third person narrative, reports Dunbar's stream of consciousness. Despite his mental state, Dunbar's ramblings denote a considerable culture, a gift for description and a familiarity with mythological characters, including their physical traits in different mythologies, as the reference to Cerberus's heads and serpent's tail shows. Naturally, Cerberus evokes the underworld, The serpents might recall the "gilded serpent" phrase, which in the novel is applied by Dunbar to Dr Bob (6), and in the play by Albany to Gonerill (5.3.78).

This train of thoughts is cut by the roar of a helicopter that makes Dunbar imagine he is a Vietcong or a Taliban about to be shot; the machine is approaching, and Dunbar tries to hide behind a rock. He takes a Swiss Army knife from his pocket decided not to be taken prisoner and to "go down fighting" (142). He cannot see Simon anywhere. The helicopter is the one that flights Florence. She calls Dunbar's name and "Dunbar gradually emerged, his white hair matted and filthy, his face unshaven and emaciated, his overcoat streaked with mud; a penknife thrust forward in his right hand. He looked at Florence with astonishment, not knowing what to make of her appearance" (145). He tells her that they must take Simon with them, but Simon has disappeared. The chapter closes with Florence and her father walking arm in arm towards the helicopter.

This chapter parallels act four in the play; there are several recognisable allusions to lines of this act, but also to others. Thus, in the final dialogue of the chapter, there is the following dialogue:

'We have a stretcher for you,' said Florence.  
'I think I can walk if you help me,' said Dunbar. (146)

Whereas act four closing lines are:

CORDELIA Will't please your highness walk?  
LEAR You must bear with me. Pray you now, forget  
And forgive. I am old and foolish. (4.6.80-82)

Halio considers these lines “a deeply moving scene of reconciliation and forgiveness between Lear and Cordelia” (28). The piece of dialogue that I have chosen as parallel does not have the same strength. Nevertheless, a few pages bellow the parallelism is more visible: “‘Can you ever forgive me?’ he said, ‘cutting you and your children off and giving everything to those two monsters? I have been proud and tyrannical and, worst of all, stupid’” (155). Forgiveness, once again.

An example of reference to other acts is given when Abigail is told by the sanatorium director that “Peter hanged himself” (133), which echoes Lear’s lament: “And my poor fool is hanged” (5.3.279). However, the editor of the play observes that “most commentators believe Lear refers to Cordelia” (5.3.279 n.).

Chapter thirteen is told from the point of view of Florence. The sight of her father’s ravaged face triggers memories of her childhood, which are followed by a mental revision of what has happened after Dunbar’s rescue. He was incoherent and asked several times about Simon and Peter. When Dunbar awakes, he is still confused. He recognises Florence intermittently, but in one moment of lucidity asks her for forgiveness with the words that I have reproduced two paragraphs above, and immediately thinks she is his dead wife Catherine.

Most of chapter fourteen is Megan’s stream of consciousness while she is in bed with Jesus, the bodyguard. She reviews past events and her future financial plans, which are in danger because of Florence’s interference. Her thoughts seem to indicate that she deems it necessary to have Florence killed. That entails the problem of eliminating the eliminator (162), unless one does the killing on one’s own. Megan’s mentions no name, but the text suggests that she staged the car crash that killed Florence’s mother. To entice Jesus to do the crime, she will play the game of the unhappy woman comforted by a man who understands her and whom she really loves. To that end, she utters signs of pleasure that contrast with her cynical thoughts, and at the end of the sexual performance, she bursts into tears. Jesus is willing to do “anything at all” (166).

Chapter fifteen is divided into five parts that correspond to the points of view of Florence, Abigail, Chris, Dr Bob, and Dunbar. All of them are in New York. Florence considers quitting the struggle and taking his father to her home in Wyoming to live enjoying

the contemplation of nature. She dismisses the idea, thinking it would be another way of kidnapping him, just as her sisters did. She decides to ask him first.

Abigail, Chris and Dr Bob are worried about different things. Abigail is worried by the British police inquiry following Peter's suicide; Chris, to his father's question, admits that he is still in love with Florence; and Dr Bob's dealings with Cognicenti are on the brink of failure.

Dunbar wakes up from a nightmare and is not sure whether he is dead or alive. His confusion disappears when Florence enters his room. He recognises her and they exchange gestures of endearment that move Dunbar to tears. Florence makes her proposal of taking him to her home, but he has had enough nature and refuses; he has heard Wilson speaking about a meeting and he wants to attend it. Florence is "half pleased and half alarmed to see the return of her father's old habit of authority" (176). The theme of forgiveness appears again:

'Can you forgive me?' He asked. 'I've been so confused, not just recently but always—'  
'There's nothing to forgive,' she interrupted him.  
'This is what matters,' he said, pressing her hand. (176)

This last section of chapter fifteen suggests echoes of the third scene, act five of the play, with a curious inversion of roles. In the novel, Florence proposes to leave the world of finance and retire to a rural life, but Dunbar chooses to stay in the city and go on with the fight. In the play, as Cordelia laments the reality, Lear sees a world of "gilded butterflies" even in prison (5.3.3-19).

Chapter sixteen begins early in the morning, with Jesus elated at the prospect of a happy life with Megan; he is going to do "the 'special favour' she has requested" (178-79). The point of view shifts to Mark, whose support to Florence has only lasted a few days, since he gave his wife "an exhaustive account of everything he'd found out from Florence" (180); he has decided to remain neutral, but the financial news make him change of opinion; he sees an opportunity to increase his fortune and get rid of his wife. He relishes the idea of becoming "the man who destroyed the Dunbar trust" (183).

A new change of perspective takes the action to Wilson, who tries to find ways to save Dunbar's empire; the main obstacle he sees is Dunbar's "emotional chaos. The only man who could save the company was himself in need of being saved" (184), an idea that leads Wilson to remember the first time he met Dunbar.

Megan waits for Kevin's visit; she wants to commission him to kill Jesus, on the grounds of an alleged blackmail.

Dunbar is in Florence's apartment; he feels healthy, "happy" and "blessed" (189); he and Florence go out for a walk in the park. Dunbar accepts her offer to go to Wyoming (190). Suddenly, Florence feels a pain in her neck, "like a bee sting" (191); she refuses to see a doctor but does not look well and they return to her apartment. Dunbar is "no longer feeling as solid as he had claimed" (192).

Abigail is "having the worst day of her life" (192) because of the stock market news; she has not been able to talk to Megan until the afternoon, and that has made her suspicious of her sister. Moreover, she has learnt that "Dunbar had reinstated Wilson as his counsel" (193); that makes her day still worse.

The last part of this chapter is told from Dunbar's point of view. Dunbar feels something odd in his attitude; in contrast with his old self, he realises that he is not furious about the idea of losing his empire to a rival (194). Forgiveness and reconciliation are the underlying reasons: "His apology to Wilson had been as effortless and natural as Wilson's dismissal of any grievances" (193). He is decided to fight a last battle against her older daughters, but only to retire to Florence's home: "[h]is reconciliation with Florence seemed to have given him a sense of peace that was too deep for a corporate war, even such a personal one, to disturb" (194).

The quick succession of different points of view that the previous paragraphs reflect is repeated in chapter seventeen. It is the morning of the decisive meeting of the Trust Board. Dr Bob is anxious about his immediate future. Abigail discusses the situation with one of her advisers, and they consider the possibility of leaks from inside the company. In Florence's apartment, Dunbar is getting ready to go to the meeting and feels "a kind of unprecedented calm" (198); suddenly Florence comes into his room, looking very ill, and vomits blood. Kevin goes to Jesus's apartment to kill him, they have a fight, Kevin loses but, before dying, he manages to tell Jesus that he is sent by Megan; Jesus "emptied his mind of every thought except revenge" (202). In Florence's apartment, she, Wilson, Chris and Dunbar are told by the doctor that an ambulance is coming to take her to an intensive care unit. Megan is worried about the lack of news from Kevin; Abigail joins her in the car that is taking them to the meeting and tells her that things are not going well in their plans about the company. In contrast, Cogniccenti and the above-mentioned Abigail's adviser, who obviously is double-crossing her, celebrate their victory beforehand.

The last chapter of the novel is told entirely from Dunbar's point of view. Florence is dying from poisoning. Dunbar is desperate, has a heart attack and demands that they let him die, but the doctor convinces him to accept treatment arguing that he should not allow

that Florence would “spend the last few hours of her life watching you [Dunbar] die “(210). He agrees, but he asks Wilson,

‘But when this is over, can you stop these bastards from saving my life?’

‘We could draw up a living will for you.’

‘Make it happen,’ said Dunbar, as if trying to remember a quotation. ‘Don’t let the girls get hold of the company. Help Cogniccenti, if that’s the only way to keep them from getting control. And find out if either of them was involved in poisoning Florence and, if so, then make sure that she spends the rest of her life in prison.’

‘I’ll make sure of it,’ said Wilson. ‘Abby’s already wanted by the British police in connection with Peter Walker’s suicide.’

Dunbar did not know about Peter’s death, he is very impressed, but he feels unable to assume more grief. The chapter and the book close with a short dialogue between Dunbar and Wilson on death, understanding and truth.

In comparison with the play, it is interesting to note the way in which St Aubyn deals with the characters’ deaths. Peter’s suicide is not shown but it is reported to have happened, whereas his counterpart in the play, the Fool, notwithstanding Lear’s lament mentioned in the commentary on chapter twelve above, disappears after 3.6 (Halio 8). Kevin’s death in his fight with Jesus is described in detail in chapter seventeen; Oswald, Gonerill’s steward, is killed by Edgar in a fight (4.5.234-239). Dr Bob is last seen and mentioned in chapter seventeen, but nothing indicates he is to die soon; Edmond dies after fighting with Edgar (5.3.140; 5.3.269). However, in contrast with the accumulation of dead bodies at the end of *King Lear*, the deaths of the main characters of the novel are implicit or even nonexistent. Thus, Megan will probably die at Jesus’s hands; Abigail only seems to risk prison; Dunbar is expected to die soon, but not immediately; and Florence’s imminent death is certain, but it is not shown.

#### 4.1.3. Modes of Adaptation in *Dunbar*

The previous section has shown some examples of the relationship between *Dunbar* and *The Tragedy of King Lear*. The following pages try to systematise this relationship according to the modes of adaptation and appropriation summarised in the theoretical part of this dissertation.

In the theoretical section, Christy Desmet’s distinction between “big-time Shakespeare” and “small-time Shakespeare” has been associated with the Hogarth Shakespeare project as a commercial action by a big multinational group, Random House. On the other hand, Desmet’s “small-time Shakespeare” refers to the personal reasons of authors to use Shakespeare’s plays as source for their own creative work. St Aubyn, in *The New York Times* interview, explains his motivations to accept to participate in the Hogarth

series. There is an outside stimulus, namely the proposal of the publishing house, which could be seen as the confluence of “big-time Shakespeare” and “small-time” Shakespeare. In a more personal plane, St Aubyn says that he “was better suited to *King Lear* rather than *Romeo and Juliet*” and that he is rather specialised in “unhappy families and failing fathers and the misuse of power” (St Aubyn, “Challenge” par. 9 original lack of *italics*). He adds that he likes “*Lear* for being very familial and political, as well as metaphysical” (par. 10 original lack of *italics*). His answer to the question about the influence of his own family history is interesting and somewhat surprising:

I think it was rather the other way around, in that it was a great relief to be writing about someone else’s unhappiness. “*Dunbar*” was more of a holiday – oh, someone else’s unhappy family, what a relief not to be so burningly personal. But of course, in another sense, preparation is the right word, in that I knew about what drew me to *Lear*. I’ve already written about the misuse of power and unhappy families and tyrannical fathers. (par. 18 original quotation marks and lack of *italics*)

This paragraph seems indicate that in *Dunbar* St Aubyn does not appropriate *King Lear* with the attitude that Desmet calls “intensely personal” (*Shakespeare and Appropriation* 7), in contrast, for instance, with Jeanette Winterson’s personal implication with *The Winter’s Tale*.

There are two other passages of the interview that are relevant to forms of appropriation. On the one hand, St Aubyn says, “I didn’t want to get into too many verbal reverberations, unless they arose naturally, or too many pedantic parallels” (par. 12). On the other hand, he explains how he had to reread one of his books, *Mother’s Milk*, of which he “had only a hazy recollection of it, so I reread it, and it’s riddled with references to *Lear*” (par. 18). Therefore, one may surmise that the echoes from the play that have been mentioned in the analysis of the novel belong to the reverberations that arose naturally.

Congruent with St Aubyn’s words, it is the fact that I have found no example in *Dunbar* of another form of appropriation described by Desmet, that is quotation. A third kind of mode of appropriation considered by Desmet in *Shakespeare and Appropriation* implies “entering a text from a new angle . . . [or] larger revisions of plot and literary form” (9). As for the first one, in my opinion there are not significant changes of angle; the shifts of point of view in the different chapters of *Dunbar* are similar to the changes of scene in the play. As for revisions of the plot, there are minor alterations in the assignation of actions to characters and in the relations between them, and the Gloucester subplot is left out, but the main plot, in my opinion, does not undergo large revisions. Some additions to the plot of the play that appear in *Dunbar* could be examples of Lanier’s *interpolated narrative*; that is

the case of the past love relationship between Chris and Florence, her current marriage and children, or the story of Durban's second wife.

Within the somewhat fuzzy distinction between adaptation and appropriation made by Julie Sanders, I should classify *Dunbar* as an adaptation; paraphrasing one of her work's excerpts reproduced in the theoretical section, *Dunbar* is not too far away from its "informing source" (Sanders 26). Moreover, the additions mentioned in the precedent paragraph are, according to Sanders, a common feature of adaptations (Sanders 18-19). Furthermore, following Deborah Cartmell's categories quoted by Sanders, they constitute a commentary on the source (Sanders 20). Of the other two categories, transposition and analogue, transposition, as it is the case of all the Hogarth novels, is quite obvious: it is a novel, not a play (transposition of genre), and it happens in the twenty first century, not in an indefinite past (transposition of time). Transposition of space is not so clear; Lear's kingdom is probably somewhere in Britain, since some important scenes take place in Dover; therefore, there is no transposition of space in the British passages of *Dunbar*, but there certainly is when the characters are in New York. Cartmell's third category, analogue, can be applied to *Dunbar*; indeed, one can read and enjoy *Dunbar* without knowing the play (Sanders 22).

In *Dunbar*, one can perceive the elements of Linda Hutcheon's definition of adaptation: The first one, "[a]n acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works" (Hutcheon 8) includes two conditions, acknowledgement and recognition. As in the rest of the novels, the first condition is wholly satisfied by the mere fact that the novel is part of a series of Shakespeare's retellings; recognition depends on the reader's knowledge of Shakespeare's plays, and I daresay that with a minimum degree of familiarity with them, the origin of *Dunbar* is easily detectable. The second element of Hutcheon's definition, "[a] creative and an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging" (8), is met by St Aubyn in *Dunbar*; he appropriates the plot, interprets it by adapting power relations to present time reality, and creates a new literary piece. The third element, "[a]n extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work" (8), will also depend on the reader's knowledge of the original and of other adaptations of the play; for instance, people who have read Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* or seen its film adaptation will no doubt grasp the connections.

I have previously stated that the authors in the Hogarth project approach their retellings of the plays following three patterns; in the first one the author "translates" plot, characters and situations of the play to present-day circumstances with few alterations or suppressions. From the analysis of the novel in the previous section, one might question



whether the alterations and suppressions are really few or, more importantly, relevant. The elimination of the Gloucester subplot is undoubtedly the most debatable issue. Nevertheless, I am willing to posit that despite the changes in characters and situations that it entails, the novel transposes not only the main themes of the play – family, power, guilt, forgiveness – but also its structure and development. The detailed exposition of the chapters of the novel has shown sufficient evidence to justify that *Dunbar* follows the first pattern.

## 4.2. *Vinegar Girl*

### 4.2.1. Critical Reception

Most of the reviews consulted are rather positive, although some of them point out that Tyler is a good enough writer to imagine a story of her own and does not need to work on a borrowed one. Some of the reviews convey the same feeling of superficial reading as in Jacobson's case. For example, many of them say that Petruchio's counterpart, Pyotr, is Russian, while the words 'Russia' or 'Russian' never appear in the novel. He comes obviously from a Slavonic country, but it could be Russia, Ukraine or Belarus, or even some other country of the extinct Soviet Union with strong Russian minorities. Almost no reviewer spells Pyotr's last name correctly, Shcherbakov, several variations of which are given in the reviews. Other reviewers affirm that the marriage plot is intended to avoid deportation, although Pyotr's status has not reached this stage; he only wants his green card renewed, and the word 'deportation' is never mentioned.

Steve Giegerich's verdict is that "Tyler, for the most part, pulls it off" (par. 6). He concludes that "Tyler at times seems constrained by a plot other than her own" (par. 26), but "to borrow from another Shakespeare work, 'all's well that ends well'" (par. 27), and "'Vinegar Girl,' like all Tyler efforts, is no exception" (par. 28).

Sarah Gilmartin sees that "Tyler's comic touch is evident from the beginning of *Vinegar Girl*, a witty and heartwarming tale of a pre-school assistant that has grown old before her time" (par. 4). Gilmartin shows signs of superficial reading when she quotes an alleged "sardonic response typical of her wit: 'Didn't 'restrain' cover all three'" (par. 6), when in fact these words are not uttered, but they are part of Kate's stream of consciousness, and moreover the exact quotation is "Wouldn't" instead of "Didn't" (*Vinegar* 29). She closes her review saying that Tyler's "fans, critics and Shakespeare enthusiasts alike should be pleased she came out of retirement" (par. 13).

Adam Gopnik writes that "Anne Tyler's take on 'The Taming of the Shrew' is, predictably, winsome, straightforward, and smart . . . It is the fate of Tyler's Kate not to be tamed . . . but to be socialized . . . by a still more socially awkward Russian-émigré biologist

named Pyotr” (par. 13). He concludes that “[f]or Tyler, the very idea of the taming of the shrew is obviously defunct. But the shaming of the true – our struggle with the truth that only authentically facing another can enable any of us to be ourselves – continues” (par. 24).

The start of Viv Groskop’s review is rather devastating: “This update of *The Taming of the Shrew* is enjoyable but never manages to convince that it’s more than a mere marketing exercise” (par. 1). She is sceptic about the idea behind the Hogarth project: “the process of commissioning these works ramps up the pressure and gives the whole enterprise an artificiality that is hard to overcome” (par. 4). Some comments are somewhat contradictory, since on the one hand she writes “[w]hile Tyler has a lot of fun with it, it never rings entirely true or escapes what this is: an experiment in form” (par. 6), and on the other hand, “[t]he efforts of Kate’s father and of Pyotr to get Kate to go along with the plan are endearingly desperate in a way that feels authentic” (par. 7). Groskop shares the opinion of other reviewers about how the author writes better pieces when she is left to her own resources, “it just feels like tying the hands of an author who’s perfectly capable of creating her own world and really doesn’t need to borrow someone else’s . . . not even Shakespeare’s . . . Fun, accomplished, readable, enjoyable. But Anne Tyler originals do all this and so much more” (par. 8).

Barbara Hoffert quotes Anne Tyler’s comments on the absurdity of the original plot of *The Taming of the Shrew*: “Tyler herself is notably forthright about her writing experience . . . claiming that she’s always been appalled by *The Taming of the Shrew* – and not just because it’s ‘laughably misogynistic.’ . . . Tyler finds the play simply illogical” (par. 2). She says that Tyler “has also written a delightful and flowing read about one young woman’s making her way through a world still fraught with weighty expectations for both sexes” (par. 6). Hoffert follows the variations on Pyotr’s name, and she places his birthplace more westwards than other reviewers, “his Polish assistant Pyotr Cherbakov” (par. 6).

Barbara Love’s short review, which exceptionally spells Pyotr’s name correctly, concludes that “this delightful reinvention . . . owes as much to Tyler’s quirky sensibilities as it does to its literary forebear. Come for the Shakespeare, stay for the wonderful Tyler” (par. 1).

Elizabeth Lowry mentions “the imminent deportation of his brilliant Russian lab assistant” (par. 2) and writes that Kate’s neighbour “sneaks in under the pretext that he is giving her Italian lessons” (par. 5), when in fact are Spanish lessons (*Vinegar* 33). However, in spite of these flaws, the reviewer makes interesting comments: “Shakespeare’s blunt shrew-tamer, Petruchio, is one of his more problematic male characters. In a neat twist, Tyler

rewrites his boorishness as foreignness” (par. 3); “Tyler has fun spelling out what Shakespeare implies: that the shrew, despite her lack of conventional feminine appeal, is in fact beautiful, witty and honest, and that only the eccentric Pyotr has the originality to see this” (par 6.); “Tyler draws out the warning implicit in the play: that if men will persist in finding weakness and deviousness in women sexually attractive, they are going to get the half-formed partners they deserve” (par. 8). The balance of the review is very favourable, as its closing paragraph shows: “This sparky, intelligent spin on Shakespeare’s controversial classic demolishes the old saw that you can catch more flies with honey than vinegar with a simple question posed by Pyotr. That may be true, he says – but why would you want to catch flies?” (par. 9).

Leo Robson’s review is rather negative, as these sentences prove: “*Vinegar Girl* exacerbates the play’s structural problems, devoting virtually its entire length to the arrangement of the marriage” (par. 7); “Tyler exhibits none of her habitual precision, displaying instead a fluffy levity that will serve as ammunition to her doubters” (par. 8). The conclusion is implacable: “With its chugging narrative hydraulics and charmless, scrappy haste, *Vinegar Girl* occupies roughly the same position in this author’s body of work as *The Taming of the Shrew* does in Shakespeare’s: as something like the exception that proves the rule” (par. 8). I think that neither Tyler’s novel nor Shakespeare’s play deserve these deprecatory comments. I do not know what Robson exactly means by “chugging narrative hydraulics” or “scrappy haste,” but I do believe that *Vinegar Girl* is far from being “charmless.” One of the things that made me like this novel is that in my second reading I was caught by the charm of its characters and situations: Kate, her father, Pyotr, even secondary characters like aunt Thea and her husband, have a human quality that makes them irresistible. The scenes at the school where Kate works are most appealing. As for the play, Adrian Turpin, in his review that I comment below, does not share Robson’s vision, and neither does Ann Thompson, responsible of the NCS edition of the play: “There has always been considerable admiration for the skills of dramatic construction displayed in *The Shrew*” (Thompson 30); “I have found that my own problem with its overt endorsement of patriarchy does not decrease, though my pleasure in its formal qualities, the sheer craft and detail of the construction, continues to grow” (41).

Donna Seaman mentions an inexistent “Pyotr’s impending deportation back to Russia” (par. 1) and concludes her short review with this highly favourable paragraph: “Deeply and pleurably inspired by her source, Tyler is marvelously nimble and

effervescent in this charming, hilarious, and wickedly shrewd tale of reversal and revelation” (par. 1).

Jane Smiley, who has a successful experience of adapting a Shakespeare’s play, signs a very positive review in *The New York Times*. She sees the novel “full of Tyler’s signature virtues – domestic detail, familial conflict, emotional ambivalence, a sharp sense of place” (par. 1) and writes that “Tyler’s signature skill as a novelist is portraying her characters and her setting with such precise and amusing detail . . . that pretty soon the reader is drawn in, willy-nilly” (par. 3). Smiley points out the presence of the mother, “she remembers her mother, a character unexplored by Shakespeare” (par. 4) and posits that “the tamer of Kate is not Pyotr . . . it is Kate who tames herself by coming to understand what is going on, . . . to acknowledge that change and growth and acceptance are to be welcomed” (par. 5). Smiley concludes that “Shakespeare . . . would be pleased . . . Novels such as Anne Tyler’s . . . are like photographs or digital clock faces that tell us where we are and where we are coming from at the same time. “Vinegar Girl” is an earthy reflection of this fleeting moment, both lively and thoughtful” (par. 6 original quotation marks).

Adrian Turpin writes a review where interesting comments, “[Kate’s] father’s specialism is autoimmunity, which is apt, given how much this story is concerned with faulty defence mechanisms” (par. 5), coexist with lukewarm appreciations, “Tyler draws gentle humour with mixed results . . . But even confirmed Tyler fans (and I count myself among them) may find it hard to love Pyotr as much as the book clearly would like us to” (par. 7). Turpin affirms that “the outlandish plot is the most interesting thing about *The Taming of the Shrew* . . . it feels as if Shakespeare is already testing the genre of romantic comedy to breaking point. Deny the extremity of expression and you rob the play of its essence” (par. 9). From Kate’s final monologue, Turpin deduces his conclusion: “This provocative sally into the gender wars, at least, is in the spirit of Shakespeare’s source material. But for the most part, Tyler’s amiable retelling could do with a dash more vinegar to accompany all those pinches of salt we are required to take” (par. 13). There is a paragraph in the review, “[w]ith a minimal alteration, *Vinegar Girl* might just pass itself off as a retelling of *Pride and Prejudice*” (par. 10), that I find of special interest, since it agrees with a remark I make in the theoretical part of this dissertation: “some readers might find in Tyler’s Kate a mix of Cinderella and Elizabeth Bennet” (see 2.1 above).

The anonymous reviewers of *Kirkus* make a surprising statement, “these characters have more depth than Shakespeare allows his broadly drawn protagonists” (par. 1). However, the final verdict is not very favourable: “Tyler can’t help but invest this mishmash

with a good deal of her own rueful humor and tart compassion for her bewildered characters, but her special qualities as a writer don't make a very good fit with the original" (par. 1). I am not sure if that is a fair judgement. It is true that some points of the novel are not clear, like Kate's ultimate motivation to marry Pyotr. I have tried to find some answers in the last section of my analysis of the novel, but perhaps the answer is that there is no answer. Ann Thompson writes, "another crucial issue in the play, which Shakespeare leaves surprisingly open, namely whether, when, and to what extent Katherina and Petruchio fall in love" (40); therefore, the apparent flaw in the novel may have its source in the play.

Colleen Etman's thesis on the Hogarth project approaches aspects of Kate's character that had escaped me, for instance, the way Kate "notices plants on the sidewalks" (Etman 74), which reveals Kate's interest in botany, or the caring way she deals with children at school, which contradicts her affirmations about disliking children. These aspects of Kate's personality foreshadow the happy ending described in the epilogue of the novel, which implies that Kate has retaken her studies and become a successful scientist and a mother. Etman expands considerably on Kate's mother character and her mental illness, to which I paid little attention. One of the main foci of the thesis is the difficulty of adapting *The Taming of the Shrew* leaving out its violent aspects. This point of view is based on the harsh judgement that Etman makes on Shakespeare's play; she posits that "a close read of the text reveals disturbing themes of domestic violence, misogyny, and outright torture" (63) and considers the play "overtly violent toward women" (72). However, I think that appreciation could be nuanced by reading Ann Thompson's Introduction to the play, especially pages 25-41, where she writes, "[t]he real problem lies outside the play in the fact that the subjection of women to men, although patently unfair and unjustifiable, is still virtually universal. It is the world which offends us, not Shakespeare" (41). Moreover, a great deal of the physical violence in the play is exerted by Katherina, against her sister (2.1.1-20), Hortensio (2.1.138-155), Petrucchio (2.1.213) and Grumio (4.3.31).

In this survey I have paid attention to details of the reviews that may be considered trivia, like the correct spelling of the names, the status of Pyotr's visa or his nationality. I am not an expert on Tyler's work, therefore I wonder to what extent I can rely on reviewers that are so careless about these matters, however minor they are. In defense of the reviewers, one may argue that their pieces are hastily written under the pressure of their editors to follow the newly published books. Nevertheless, some of the reviews have help me to better understand the novel. For instance, my first reaction to Gopnik's vision of Pyotr as an agent of Kate's socialization was of total disagreement. I found more accurate Smiley's perception

of Kate taming herself. However, thinking it over, I realised that Kate's family warm welcome to Pyotr induces a change of Kate towards them, a process which is not contradictory with Smiley's position. Finally, I hope that Colleen Etman's thesis is followed by other academic works on the Hogarth series that go beyond the newspaper reviews.

#### 4.2.2. A Marriage Plot

Anne Tyler's recreation of *The Taming of the Shrew, Vinegar Girl*, is divided into twelve chapters and an epilogue. The novel does not include the Induction, and the courting of Bianca subplot is reduced to a minimum. The characters of the main plot have their counterparts in the novel, but their characteristics and motivations are very different. Thus, Louis Battista, Baptista Minola's parallel, is not a rich citizen of Padua, but a Baltimore scientist of uncertain means. He is not desperate about her elder daughter Kate, but very happy having her managing the house according to the rules he dictates, that go from the visits allowed to the younger sister to the microwave operation to washdays to the food regime. The infamous meat mash they have for supper every night is not a product of Kate's lack of domestic abilities, as some reviewers imply (Gilmartin par. 11), but a concoction invented by her control freak father (37). He does not want to get rid of Kate by marrying her to a stranger living in another city, but he intends to keep her at home after a white marriage to his assistant who in this way can renew his visa. Kate's attitude towards her fifteen-year-old sister Bunny has nothing to do with Katherina's sadistic behaviour with Bianca that the play describes in 2.1.1-22. She has acted as a surrogate mother since Bunny's first year, and although sometimes she is jealous of Bunny's looks – "Kate allowed herself a little fantasy: one day Bunny would get old, and she would age in that unfortunate way that blondes so often did" (84) – she cares about her and misses her childhood: "I was the only one who could comfort her when she was crying. But after she reached her teens she kind of, I don't know, left me behind . . . And somehow she turned *me* into this viperish, disapproving old maid when I'm barely twenty-nine" (90). Petruchio's counterpart, Pyotr, is not the arrogant boor of the play, but an awkward amiable fellow intent on winning over Kate. Although "Bunny was in great demand" (48) and "has all those young men chasing after her" (62), Bianca's three suitors are reduced to a neighbour, Edward Mintz, "an unhealthy-looking young man . . . his mother claimed he had 'that Japanese disease' . . . Except that Edward seemed bound not to his bedroom but to the glassed-in porch . . . where . . . he could be seen . . . smoking suspiciously tiny cigarettes" (33).

The story is told by an omniscient narrator under Kate's point of view exclusively, except for the epilogue. Most of the novel develops before the wedding, and the reader

knows how Kate thinks and how her life is at home and at her workplace. This is a sharp contrast with the play, where the wedding takes place in the third act and very little is known about Katherine previously to her marriage, except for what people say about her, her answers to Hortensio and her father in 1.1.57-104, what the violent scene with her sister shows, what Hortensio tells about his frustrated lute lesson (2.1.137-155), and her first encounter with Petruchio in 2.1.179-288. The first two chapters introduce the main characters and their physical environment. The novel opens with Kate working at her garden on a Sunday noon, when she receives a telephone call from her father who asks her to bring his allegedly forgotten lunch to his laboratory. When she gets there, her father, Dr Battista, introduces her to his assistant, Pyotr Shcherbakov and behaves in a strange manner, telling Pyotr about Kate's domestic virtues. The scene includes descriptions of the protagonists, and Pyotr is impressed by Kate's physical presence: "'Vwouwv!' he said. Or that was what it sounded like, at least. He was gazing at Kate admiringly. Men often wore that look when they first saw her. It was due to a bunch of dead cells: her hair, which was blue-black and billowy and extended below her waist" (6). Oddly enough, Kate do not seem to consider the admiration she arouses as a positive quality, since the perception she has of her own body is rather self-deprecatory, as it is deduced from other passages of the book that are commented below.

Chapter two takes the reader to Kate's working world, a preschool owned and managed by the same women who started it "forty-five years ago" (14) and who need younger assistants like Kate "because who could expect them to chase around after a gang of little rascallions at their advanced stage of life?" (15). The omniscient narrator explains that Kate was expelled from college in her second year because "she had told her botany professor that his explanation of photosynthesis was 'half-assed'" (15), and she got her position at the preschool thanks to her aunt Thelma. Although she "could have applied for readmission to her college" (16), it suited her father "to have her around to run things and look after her little sister, only five at the time" (16). The chapter is full of comic passages in the description of Kate's relationship with the children and the staff: "She completely lacked authority, and all the children knew it; they seemed to view her as just an extra-tall, more obstreperous four-year-old" (16). Kate is summoned to the principal's office, where she is reprimanded for her tactless behaviour towards parents. Later, in a passage telling Kate's attitude to the only male assistant in the staff, Adam, some details about how she sees herself are given: "Unlike most men, he stood noticeably taller than Kate, and yet somehow in his presence she always felt too big and too gangling. She longed all at once to be softer,

daintier, more ladylike, and she was embarrassed by her own gracelessness” (29). Walking home after work, she is approached by Pyotr, who says he is going to work, although the laboratory is in the opposite direction. At home, Kate finds her sister with their neighbour Edward Mintz who supposedly is giving Bunny Spanish lessons. Bunny is described as “all frothy golden curls and oh-so-innocent face and off-the-shoulder blouse far too lightweight for the season” (33). After a reference to their dead mother, her illness and her death “before Bunny’s first birthday” (35), Kate’s portrait is completed in contrast with Bunny’s: “Kate was dark-skinned and big-boned and gawky . . . and nobody had ever called her sweet” (36). The chapter closes with Dr Battista joining Kate while she is preparing supper, and for the first time he suggests Pyotr’s marriage to Kate as a solution to Pyotr’s problems with his visa, which expires in two months. Kate does not take the comment seriously.

After another frustrating day at work, where she is reprimanded again, Kate gets home to find that her father comes unexpectedly with Pyotr to whom he has invited to supper. Kate is once again surprised about Dr Battista’s behaviour, who is taking photos with a phone that he had never used before. After Pyotr has taken his leave, Dr Battista asks Kate whether she would marry Pyotr. She feels deeply humiliated and retires to her room crying. The next chapter is devoted entirely to describe Kate’s hurt feelings while at home and at work and to her ruminations on her relationships with men. In chapter five Kate is alone at home when Pyotr comes to apologise for his and her father’s having offended her. They have a rather friendly conversation where Kate even tells Pyotr about her relationship with Bunny. She feels at ease because she thinks this is the last time she will see Pyotr. However, the message that Dr Battista deduces from Pyotr’s report of this meeting, as it is told in chapter six, is that Kate likes him. Kate blames her father for trafficking with her, because he is “trying to trade me off against my will. You’re sending me to live with a stranger, *sleep* with a stranger, just for your own personal gain. What is that if not trafficking?” (97). Her father is shocked: “I would never expect you to *sleep* with him . . . All I had in mind was, we would go on more or less as before except that Pyoder would move in with us . . . he would have Mrs. Larkin’s old room, and you would stay on in your room. I just assumed you knew that” (98). In the subsequent dialogue, Dr Battista tells Kate things about her mother that she did not know, such as that she had loved Katie and that she died of a heart failure induced by the side effects of an experimental drug that he had given her to fight depression, with apparent success that had resulted in the decision of having another child. The conversation and the chapter end up with Kate’s acquiescence to marry Pyotr under the conditions stated by her father. In chapter seven, Kate’s announces her engagement at her school. She did not mean



to do it, but her father insists that she should, because they need evidence that the marriage is not a trick to get a visa, hence Dr Battista's obsession with taking photos of Pyotr and Kate together. Bunny seems to be not so "airhead" as it appears; "[s]he made no secret, though, of her horror at the marriage plan. 'What are you?' she asked Kate. 'Chattel?'" (115), a phrase that echoes Petruchio's words in *The Taming of the Shrew*, "She is my goods, my chattels; she is my house" (3.2.219). Kate goes to the supermarket with Pyotr to shop for a dinner they offer to her aunt Thelma, her husband, and aunt Theron. Thelma and Theron are twins, and Kate's mother, Thea, was their sister. Theron is a minister and will be officiating Kate's wedding. Pyotr seems to take their marriage as something more than a formal arrangement, and he even shows signs of male supremacist attitudes, like his movement to stretch his arm "propriatorially along the back of the seat behind Kate" (114), and "doing his arm-along-the-seat-back thing" (115) that a couple of photos show, or in the supermarket, when Kate "snagged a cart and started inside, but Pyotr caught up with her to reach for the cart and take over. She was beginning to suspect that he had some kind of he-man complex" (119). At the dinner with her aunt and uncles, when aunt Thelma asks if Kate will go on working after the marriage, Pyotr says "'I can support her' . . . 'If she likes, she may retire now. Or go to college! Go to Hopkins! I will pay. She is my responsibility now'" (135). However, Kate's thoughts reveal some changes towards Pyotr, "she felt embarrassed by him, and embarrassed for him, and filled with a mixture of pity and impatience" (138). Nevertheless, the dinner is quite a success, in spite of the inadequacy of the food and drinks; aunt Thelma likes Pyotr – "'He's a cutie!'" (139) – and although she is not invited to the ceremony, aunt Thelma manages to get a reluctant consent from Kate to let her organise a reception at her home. There is an important discussion in which, to Dr Battista's astonishment, Pyotr shows his determination to bring Kate to live with him at his apartment after the wedding, and Kate does not seem to oppose the idea. Pyotr is exultant, and in a moment alone with Kate in the kitchen, "he flung an arm exuberantly around her waist and pulled her close and kissed her cheek. For a moment, she didn't resist; his arm enclosed her so securely, and his fresh-hay smell was quite pleasant. But then, 'Whoa!' she said, jerking away" (151). The guests were "acting quite animated" (152), but Kate feels dejected, because she thinks that they "were happy to be getting rid of her" (152).

In chapter nine, Kate takes her belongings to Pyotr's apartment and visits it for the first time. It is on the top floor of "one of those big old faculty houses . . . a white clapboard Colonial with faded green shutters" (154) owned by Mrs Murphy, an old woman who moves around in a wheel chair and has a live-in attendant, Mrs Liu. Kate likes the apartment, and

after leaving there her things, meets the two ladies, who greet her very warmly and show a great affection for Pyotr. The next chapter begins in the wedding morning, with Bunny in Kate's room, who is still in bed and is surprised by Bunny's concern: "I know you think you're just doing a little something on paper to fool Immigration,' Bunny said, 'but this guy is starting to act like he owns you! He's telling you what last name to use and where to live and whether to go on working'" (163-64). The dialogue between the sisters conclude with a set of Kate's reasonings which may shock the reader: "Here in this house I'm just part of the furniture, somebody going nowhere, and twenty years from now I'll be the old-maid daughter still keeping house for her father . . . This is my chance to turn my life around . . . Can you blame me for wanting to try?" (165). Kate, Bunny and their father dress as smartly as their wardrobe allows. At the church they wait for Pyotr for a long time, until an exchange of messages tells them that the test mice have disappeared from Dr Battista's lab. Dr Battista is desperate, sees his research finished and therefore no reason for the wedding to be held. They start to leave the church when unexpectedly Pyotr appears wearing "an outfit so shabby that he looked like a homeless person: a stained white T-shirt torn at the neck and translucent with age, very short baggy plaid shorts that Kate worried might be his underwear, and red rubber flip-flops" (183). He blames Bunny for the disappearance of the mice. To Bunny's consternation, Kate and Pyotr decide to go on with the wedding. Dr Battista protests for having to get dressed while Pyotr did not; Pyotr replies, "[s]he is marrying me, not my clothes" (186), which is a paraphrase of Petruchio's words in *The Taming of the Shrew*, "To me she's married, not unto my clothes" (3. 2. 107). Uncle Theron's ritual performative words are interspersed with a dialogue between Dr Battista and Pyotr about the fate of the mice and their research, and when Uncle Theron pronounces "You may kiss the bride" (186), Pyotr, without interrupting the conversation, is ready to give Kate a perfunctory kiss on the cheek, but she "stepped squarely in front of him and took his face between both of her hands and kissed him very gently on the lips" (186). The newlyweds go to Pyotr's apartment in an almost suicidal ride in his Volkswagen. His behaviour towards Kate is rather rude, leaves her alone, she takes a long nap and is awakened by Pyotr's arrival, who has found the missing mice in Edward Mintz's room. They leave to attend aunt Thelma's reception without changing their clothes. In spite of their late arrival and improper attire, they are received by aunt Thelma with cordiality and affection. At the party, everybody is very friendly to them, and thanks to a casual comment by aunt Thelma, Kate learns that her father refused to give her and Bunny to her aunt when he lost his wife. However, Bunny is very angry, and even refuses to sit next to Pyotr, as aunt Thelma had planned. She explains that the rescue of the

mice was not peaceful at all, since Pyotr burst in Edward's home and hurt him. Edward's mother called the police, as Pyotr had done, but they agreed not to press charges to one another. Bunny reproaches Kate her submission to Pyotr in a very bitter speech, which closes with this sentence: "You'll never see *me* backing down like that when *I* have a husband" (226). Kate stands up and answers with a speech of her own that begins with the word "Fine" (226), an echo of Katherina's "Fie, fie" in *The Taming*, 5.2.136, and follows with "Treat your husband any way you like . . . but I pity him, whoever he is. It's *hard* being a man. Have you ever thought about that? Anything that's bothering them, men think they have to hide it". The rest of the speech goes on in this fashion, which has nothing to do with Shakespeare's original play.

The epilogue of the novel is told from the point of view of Louie Shcherbakov, a boy who has just entered first grade, who has "his dad's straight yellow hair" and whose "mom's aunt Thelma said he looked so much like his dad that it was comical" (230). Her mother has been awarded a prize from the Botanical Federation, and as both his parents are going to Washington to get the prize, he is going to spend the night with his honorary aunts, Mrs Liu and Mrs Murphy, who live downstairs. His real aunt Bunny "had married her personal trainer and moved to New Jersey" (231). Usually his baby-sitter is his grandfather, but tonight he is going to Washington too. The reader can deduce that Louie's father and grandfather also received a prize, probably the Nobel award. Furthermore, it seems that her mother, apart from being a renowned scientist, is also a glamorous woman, whose "long black hair . . . [flares] out around her shoulders" and who wears a "surprising red party dress with her two bare legs sticking out" (233).

This epilogue is very gratifying for the readers, who see their expectations of a happy ending more than fulfilled, but in my opinion, it is superfluous, it is an unnecessary extra reassurance that the ugly duckling becomes a beautiful swan.

#### 4.2.3. Modes of Adaptation in *Vinegar Girl*

Anne Tyler declares herself reluctant to interviews ("Wuthering" par. 3), therefore it is not easy to guess her motivations to take part in the Hogarth project and the way she can be positioned within the frame defined by Desmet as "small-time Shakespeare." As it may be deduced from her article in *The Guardian* of 3 June 2016, her implication with Shakespeare does not seem as strong as in Jacobson's case: "I wasn't so sure about the Shakespeare Project at first. Face it, his plots are terrible" (par. 2), and "I have to admit that I've been slow in coming to a true appreciation of Shakespeare" (par. 4). However, the choice of *The*

*Taming of the Shrew* was her decision, because “[i]t’s a most outlandish story. I thought maybe I could make it more believable” (par. 3).

Linda Hutcheon’s defines adaptation as an “acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works” (8). Therefore, from this point of view, all the Hogarth Shakespeare novels are adaptations. Nevertheless, according to Sanders’s criterium of proximity to the source, I have no doubt that *Vinegar Girl* is an appropriation. In the novel there are several parallels with the play, certainly: there is a father with two daughters, there is a suitor who at the beginning is rejected but to whom the elder daughter accepts reluctantly to be married, there is a wedding to which the bridegroom arrives late and improperly dressed, there is a banquet where the bride pronounces a speech, and the main characters have names that are very similar to the original ones. However, *Vinegar Girl* is a work that stands alone, that can be read without having no knowledge of the source play. It fits into Lanier’s *remotivated narrative* mode of appropriation and into Desmet’s already mentioned modes of “Shakespearean appropriation [that] can involve . . . entering a text from a new angle . . . [or] larger revisions of plot and literary form” (*Shakespeare and Appropriation* 9).

As for the motivations of the characters, I have already pointed out twice the radical difference between those of the play and those of the novel, especially regarding the father and the suitor. Let me insist on the sharp contrast between Petruchio and Pyotr. The former is the heir to a deceased rich gentleman of Verona and nevertheless greedy enough to bargain on Katharine’s dowry; Pyotr was raised in an orphanage in an unnamed East European country, a background full of sinister associations for everyone who has read anything about the conditions of such institutions in the former Soviet Union and satellite countries; Pyotr’s sole ambition is to help Dr Battista to complete his research. Kate’s motivations are not so clear. Shakespeare’s Katherina was subjected to a kind of parental authority that in those times was unquestionable. On the other hand, Kate’s father could not force her to marry against her will. There is an explicit confession by Kate quoted above, “[t]his is my chance to turn my life around . . . Can you blame me for wanting to try?” (165), but I think that her motives are better understood bearing in mind her final speech where, contrarily to the one that Katherina pronounces in the play, she stresses the fragility hidden behind the apparent strength of men. She has come to realise it through insights into her father’s character that she has apprehended thorough the course of the novel. On pages 168-69, there is a scene between Kate and her father that takes place just before they leave to the church, in which Dr Battista seems moved before her daughter who is “looking very grown up . . . but it’s somewhat of a surprise, you see, because I remember when you were born. Neither your

mother nor I had ever held a baby before and your aunt had to show us how” and Kate “was pleased, in spite of herself. She knew what he was trying to say.” The passage closes with Kate’s thoughts:

It crossed her mind that if her mother had known too—if she had been able to read the signals—the lives of all four of them might have been much happier.

For the first time, it occurred to her that she herself was getting much better at reading signals. (169)

Later, during the banquet, aunt Thelma’s praising words about Dr Battista decision to keep the girls when he became a widower surprise Kate, who “stopped chewing” (222); he dismisses the praise with a short “Yes, well” (222) and tries to divert Kate’s attention by talking about immigration papers. Therefore, Kate seems motivated by a growing affection for his father that she has discovered at the same time that his hidden feelings. Her final speech summarises what she had learnt from her father about men, who “don’t dare show their true feelings” (227).

*Vinegar Girl* also enters Shakespeare’s text from a new angle, as Desmet says, or following a reoriented narrative, in Lanier’s terms. All the novel, except for the short epilogue, is narrated from Kate’s perspective, whereas in *The Taming of the Shrew* Katherina’s point of view is almost completely absent, and it is only perceived in 2.1, 4.3, and in her final speech. Tyler herself writes in the aforementioned article that her intention was to find “another side to this” (par. 2).

As far as I am aware, quotation from the play is scarce in the novel and never literal. I have given a couple of examples, but I cannot affirm that they are the only ones. Deborah Catmell’s three categories of adaptation can be found in *Vinegar Girl*: as in the other novels of the series, there is transposition of genre (from play to novel), time (from the seventeenth to the twenty-first century), and space (from Padua to Baltimore). There are several instances of commentary by means of addition: the novel gives abundant information about Kate’s thoughts, her life outside home and her relationship with her father and sister, which in the play are absent. There are also references to her mother, who in the play is not mentioned. Finally, *Vinegar Girl* fits into the category of analogue, since it can be enjoyed without knowing *The Taming of the Shrew*, as I have noted above.

Comparing *Vinegar Girl* with Linda Hutcheon’s definition of adaptation, I dare say that it is “an acknowledged transposition” because it has been profusely advertised as a part of a project to retold Shakespeare’s plays, with signs as obvious as the title *The Taming of the Shrew* printed on the very back cover of the book with the same types and floral designs as the front cover title. However, I do not think that without all this publicity apparatus an

average reader could recognise immediately the novel as a transposition of the play. The novel does tell the story from a different point of view, but I am not sure that one can say that it is the same story. Indeed, it is “a creative and interpretive act of appropriation,” but this act takes the story to a decisive journey so much more “away from the informing source” (Sanders 26), to paraphrase Julie Sanders’s words, that it cannot be called an adaptation. As for the third element of Hutcheon’s definition, which sees adaptations as a process of reception, as “an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work” I think that this engagement can only happen if the reader knows beforehand that the novel is inspired by the play. Nevertheless, I think that the reader does experience the novel “as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation” (Hutcheon 8), but these other works are not necessarily Shakespeare’s plays. I have already alluded to echoes of *Pride and Prejudice*, *Cinderella* and *The Ugly Duckling*, but surely other readers may find different associations.

In the introduction to this dissertation, I define as second pattern of adaptation in the Hogarth series the one in which the most important variations are changes of points of view and of the characters’ motivations. The previous paragraphs have shown how these changes occur in *Vinegar Girl* and justify the categorisation of the novel as belonging to the second pattern.

### 4.3. *Shylock Is My Name*

#### 4.3.1. Critical Reception

Except for a short reference in Colleen Etman’s thesis, I have found no academic text on *Shylock Is My Name*, but only newspaper and magazine reviews. In general terms, they are neither excessively enthusiastic nor totally negative. Rather surprisingly, it seems that some of the reviewers have not read the novels or even the plays with due attention. Thus, Frank Felsenstein writes that Strulovitch is “a successful art dealer” who is at the cemetery to mourn his wife (387); Dan Friedman describes Strulovitch as “today’s wealthy Jewish merchant who has lost his wife” (par.9); Adam Gopnik sends Shylock back to Venice (par. 10); and Sara Keating labels Shylock as a “merchant” (par. 2) and Strulovitch as having “old money” (par. 7).

Rebecca Abrams closes a quite negative review with a positive conclusion, “despite all this, Jacobson somehow pulls it off . . . and the end when it comes is extremely satisfying” (par. 12). Previously she affirms that except for Shylock, the rest of the characters of the novel are much weaker than those in the play, that the plot is “ludicrous” and that “the tone . . . slides queasily between moral seriousness and farce” (par.10).

Felsenstein reviews Jacobson's book in *The Jewish Quarterly Review* together with other four works on Jewish themes. He states that the book "adds little or nothing to one's understanding of *The Merchant of Venice* and perhaps reveals better than intended the neuroses of its author" (388). Felsenstein points out the relevance given in the novel to Shylock's wife Leah, who in the play is just passingly mentioned (388). His only positive comments on the novel are that "on the occasions when he tasks himself to echo the play within a modern idiom, he comes closer to achieving the aim of the Hogarth series" (389), and his approval of Jacobson's decision to give Shylock an act five.

Friedman entitles his review "In Which the Quality of Prejudice Is Not Strained," a paraphrase of *The Merchant of Venice* 4.1.180 which, in turn, is paraphrased on page 265 of the novel. Friedman compares his doubts about how to categorise Jacobson's novel with his reflections on the way the shelves of a bookshop are labeled. He affirms that *Shylock Is My Name* is superior to the author's Man Booker prize-winning *The Finkler Question*, and that "it's not amazing, but it is delicious and it rewards knowledge" (par. 13). According to Friedman, the "provocative point of this comedy" is that "all Jewish men are the same in the eyes of the world" (par. 22). Friedman's review, in spite some interesting observations, arouses the suspicion of superficial reading of both the play and the novel. Thus, he writes that Strulovitch "is today's wealthy Jewish merchant who has lost his wife" (par. 9) and again he qualifies Strulovitch and Shylock as "two Jewish merchants" (par. 16).

Gopnik, in an article that deals with some of the Hogarth novels alongside other versions of Shakespeare's plays, says about Jacobson's version that it "has a plotline so complicated, so overpopulated with players and ideas and unrelated riffs, that I will confess I had to go back and reread it before I could make sense of it" (par. 4) – incidentally, I must confess that I found myself in the same situation. Playing with the comparison that often it has been made between Jacobson and Philip Roth, Gopnik affirms that whereas the former is sarcastic, the latter is ironic. As most of the reviewers consulted, Gopnik points out to "the philosophical-historical exchanges between Strulovitch and Shylock" as the best parts of the book (par. 8). After some ironic comments on the differences between British and American humour and between British and American Jews' attitudes towards Gentile culture and English language, Gopnik concludes that "[w]ith mercy and charity claimed as Jewish specificities, the sarcasms of the book at last rise and resolve into something like poetry" (par. 12).

Keating, in her review, contraposes Shakespeare's Shylock, who "is judged by his actions" to Jacobson's philosopher Shylock (par. 5). I find a contradiction in that on the one

hand, she says it is better to read the novel “without reference to its original text” (par. 13), and on the other hand, “without the context [of the play] surely the convoluted narrative of his novel would collapse” (par. 14).

The anonymous reviewers from *Kirkus* state that “*The Merchant* is well-suited to Jacobson.” Although they also have doubts about whether the “novel stands well on its own” and believe that “the facile asides and riffs for which Jacobson has been praised and spanked [are] comic patter that pales amid the fine, thoughtful talk when his two heroes hold forth in this uneven effort” (par. 1).

James Lasdun sees Shylock functioning “as a phantasmal projection of Strulovitch’s conscience, but he is also very much a freestanding character” (par. 2)., According to Lasdun “the novel excels” in Shylock’s and Strulovitch’s “talking and thinking” (par. 4). But he does not feel that the same can be said about the “‘Christian’ material” because “painting your entire Gentile cast as little Julius Streichers only plays into the nastiest anti-Semite trope of all: that [antisemitism] is just a Jewish persecution fantasy” (par. 5). However, the conclusion of the review is very positive and praises the multiples readings of the play that can be found in the novel, which “deepens and enhances one’s appreciation of the original” (par. 6).

Paul Levy sees in the novel, which he qualifies as an “almost perversely serious comic novel” (par. 2), a meditation on what means to be a Jew. Levy praises Jacobson’s “full power and ingenuity” and his giving Portia’s speech to Shylock, “because Jews formed the concepts of mercy and compassion millennia before Christianity appeared” (par. 4).

Stephanie Merritt sees the novel as a “provocative interrogation” of the play, rather than a retelling (par. 1). She considers Shylock and Strulovitch the most interesting characters, which make the other “appear as comic types, gaudy tabloid cartoons who converse in quips” (par. 11). Merritt gives especial importance to the dialogues between Shylock and his dead wife, since they allow “him a humanity – and tragedy beyond victim or villain” (par. 12).

David Patrikarakos highlights as main themes of the novel Jacobson’s intent to rehabilitate Shylock, the relationships between fathers and daughters, and an interrogation on the condition of British Jews and on antisemitism in British society. According to Patrikarakos, Jacobson describes “a Shylock that can love, articulately and unconditionally” (par. 3), and he completes his revindication by giving Shylock presence in an act five, where he delivers Portia’s ‘quality of mercy’ speech. Patrikarakos associates father-daughter relationships with “a world of binaries” (par. 16), which also includes the relationships



between Jews and Gentiles. The closing paragraph of the review summarises the good opinion of the reviewer:

In the end the Shylock of the novel is a product not only of Shakespeare but of Pirandello: he is a character in search of an author, or at least an author who will write him fully, fill in the blanks and give him a voice where once he was voiceless. And in Jacobson, after just over 400 years, he has found a mensch who has done – with considerable skill – exactly that. (par. 42)

Alexi Sargeant states that “*Shylock Is My Name* is both a retelling of *The Merchant of Venice* and a sequel to it” (par. 2). However, according to Sargeant, apart from Shylock and Strulovitch, the characters of the novel “never meet their counterparts from the play and their resemblances to those counterparts is not always very deep” (par. 4). As an example, Sargeant contraposes Lorenzo’s lines in *The Merchant* 5.1.63-65 with the rudeness of the footballer lover of Strulovitch’s daughter. Moreover, “Jacobson shines a spotlight on Shylock and his strained relationship with Jewry, but consigns the other players to the outer darkness” (par. 11). The reviewer sees the novel more as a complement of the play than as “a novel that can stand on its own” (par. 2).

Erica Wagner’s review summarises the novel and concludes with a severe judgement: “*Shylock Is My Name* does not have much to offer. No character comes alive: they are all mouthpieces for the author’s debate with himself and with us” (par. 7).

This survey of reviews show that the appreciation of the novel varies from extremely negative, Felsenstein’s, for instance, to praiseworthy like Patrikarakos’s. Nevertheless, there is a consensus that the best parts are those dealing with the conversations between Shylock and Strulovitch.

#### 4.3.2. The Novel and the Play

I see *Shylock Is My Name* as two different interwoven stories: on the one hand, there is the relationship between Strulovitch and Shylock, their dialogues and inner monologues on the Jewish condition and on Shylock’s behaviour in Shakespeare’s play; on the other hand, a story that loosely follows *The Merchant of Venice*’s plot. The characters of the novel are first, Shylock himself and his dead wife, Leah, with whom Shylock is in constant dialogue, although she is not physically present in the action. Then there come the counterparts of the play: Simon Strulovitch, a rich British Jewish philanthropist and art collector, who would be the ‘Shylock’ of the adapted play; his daughter Beatrice; Plurabelle, ‘Plury,’ short for Anna Livia Plurabelle Cleopatra A Thing Of Beauty Is A Joy Forever Christine, who assumes Portia’s role; D’Anton, an art dealer and importer, is the play’s merchant Antonio; Gratan Howsome, whose role is a mix of the play’s Gratiano and Lorenzo, is a rude footballer and

Beatrice's boyfriend; Barnaby, 'Barney,' is Bassanio. There is no Nerissa in the novel, her task as Portia's confidant is performed by D'Anton and partially by Beatrice. The cast is completed with Kay, Strulovitch's wife, bedridden and mute because of a stroke, with whom Strulovitch speaks in a similar way to Shylock's with Leah. There is also Strulovitch's Gentile first wife, Ophelia-Jane, who appears in his recollections. I do not think that Strulovitch's chauffeur, Brendan, is any counterpart to any character of the original play; it would be rather farfetched, in my opinion, to associate him, for instance, with Lancelot Gobbo.

The novel is divided into twenty-three chapters and an Act Five, where Shylock has a prominent part, unlike the play, in which he disappears after act four. The story is told by an omniscient narrator from shifting points of view, mainly Shylock's, Strulovitch's, and D'Anton's, in a lesser degree Plurabelle's, and occasionally Beatrice's, Gratan's or Barnaby's. Sometimes the narration is given in report form, as in chapters eleven and sixteen. There are frequent analepsis, especially in Strulovitch's recollections, or in reports of scenes he made trying to control his daughter. The alternance Venice/Belmont in the play is reflected here in changes in points of view in alternative chapters; thus, chapter one is told from the points of view of Strulovitch and Shylock, chapter two from Plurabelle's and D'Anton's. The sequence goes on until chapter eleven, where in report form it is told the background of the relationship between Strulovitch and D'Anton, and from then on, the two worlds are intermingled. However, as D'Anton, unlike his counterpart Antonio, is also a friend and confidant of Plurabelle's, the parallel between play and novel is not exact. The flesh-bond, which in the play appears as early as in 1.3.136-144, is mirrored in the novel by Strulovitch's demand that Beatrice's boyfriend should be circumcised, which does not happen until chapter twelve, and by D'Anton's offering himself as a proxy, in chapter twenty-one.

The story begins in a Northern English cemetery where Shylock is mourning his wife Leah and Strulovitch is visiting his mother's tomb. The narration shifts from Strulovitch's to Shylock's point of view throughout the first chapter. The omniscient narrator lets the reader know through Strulovitch's recollections how his father disowned him when he married a Gentile woman. His intimate musings reveal not only what he said, but also what he should have said and did not. Thus, in his honeymoon with his first wife in Venice, instead of linking his Jewish heritage to the enlightened world of medieval Spanish Jews in Cordoba, he revels in telling coarse Yiddish jokes that transport her to "some malodorous Balto-Slavic shtetl peopled by potato-faced bumpkins" (10). Shylock is reading from a book to his dead

wife Leah and talking to her, although he does not tell her that Jessica, their daughter, has left him. Strulovitch also has troubles with his daughter, Beatrice, he thinks that she “should have a Jewish husband” (38) and remembers how his father reconciled with him when, after divorcing his first wife, he married a Jewish woman. Strulovitch, who has “a passion for Shakespeare” (1), recognises Shylock and invites him to his house, and they begin a dialogue that continues throughout the novel and deals with Jewishness, relationships with Christians, daughters and comments on Shylock’s behaviour in Venice four centuries back. Even before they have reached the car that will take them to Strulovitch’s, Shylock illustrates the attitude of Christians towards Jews alluding to a passage in *The Merchant* 2.8.11-24 when he “ran out to the streets calling for Jessica” (52). Incidentally, Shylock expresses his surprise because Strulovitch rides a German car, a Mercedes (55).

The chapters where those facts are depicted are interspersed with others that introduce the world of Plurabelle. She is a rich heiress whose father had established in his will “the ordeals of character to which every aspirant to her bed must be submitted” (20), among them “a viable scheme for assassinating Toni Blair” (21). But she dismisses them and devises a test of her own consisting in confronting suitors to a choice between a Volkswagen Beetle, a BMW, and a Porsche, the novel’s version of the lead, silver and gold caskets. No one passes the test and then she devotes herself to various pursuits before settling for running a restaurant in her inherited mansion, Old Belfry. The restaurant becomes the centre of a television show about food, love and judgement which she conducts, and which becomes a success. Nevertheless, Plurabelle is sad, and on her mother’s suggestion she attends a group of sadness management, where she meets D’Anton, who becomes her intimate friend and adviser. Here the novel relates to the very first line of the play, which informs about Antonio’s sadness. D’Anton expands Plurabelle’s circle of acquaintances, and among the new ones she meets Gratan Howsome, a footballer who is disgraced because he performed the Nazi salute on the field, a mode imported from France. Moreover, D’Anton orchestrates a ruse to make Plurabelle fall in love with a friend of his, Barnaby, tipping him to slide under the VW Beetle and act as a mechanic when Plurabelle would find him. Barnaby wants to buy a special present to Plurabelle, and on D’Anton’s advice they decide to bid for *Love’s First Lesson*, a painting by Solomon Joseph Solomon, but they arrive late to the auction to discover that the painting has been sold to Strulovitch.

Chapter eight tells about the troubles of Strulovitch and Shylock with their daughters, Beatrice and Jessica. Beatrice at thirteen looked twenty-three and since then her father had been “tailing” her (78), obsessed with the idea that she was dating “boys who were beneath

her” (79). He burst into parties she attended, “dragged her into the Mercedes” (79) and treated her with violence. It is in one of such scenes where he utters the memorable phrase “chthonic arsehole” (79) that as a reviewer writes, “made the reader . . . reach for the dictionary” (Levy par. 6). Shylock, in his first night at Strulovitch’s, lies in bed awake thinking of Jessica, her conversion to Christianity, and her changing Shylock’s ring for a monkey. In the morning he returns to his dialogues with Leah, which are interrupted by Strulovitch. They speculate again on Jewishness and Christianity and comment on Shylock’s forced conversion in *The Merchant*. The scene is interrupted by chapter nine, in which Plurabelle asks D’Anton for help to find a girlfriend for Gratan, who “has a thing for Jewish women” (45). D’Anton complies, and remembering a student of his, he introduces Beatrice to Plurabelle and they both become intimate friends, to Gratan’s delight. Chapter ten resumes the scene at Strulovitch’s, where Beatrice appears fresh from the shower and meets Shylock. Strulovitch feels a mixture of jealousy and embarrassment listening to the dialogue between Shylock and Beatrice, who explains him that she is a student of performance art. After she leaves, both men talk again about what being a Jew means, and Strulovitch tells Shylock about Beatrice’s boyfriend, “someone who’s probably never opened a book . . . a hyper-possessive uneducated uber-goy” (107).

Chapter eleven is intended to explain D’Anton’s worries about how he could convince Strulovitch to deliver Solomon’s painting to him. His doubts are grounded on the enmity that Strulovitch developed towards D’Anton since the latter opposed the former’s project to found a museum of Anglo-Jewish art dedicated to the memory of his parents. After this chapter, the plot becomes more complicated with Gratan’s courting of Beatrice, Strulovitch’s demands thereof, D’Anton’s attempts to obtain the painting, the loss by Barnaby of a ring that was a gift from Plurabelle, all of this intertwined with Shylock’s monologues and dialogues on Jewishness and his past behaviour, with increasing textual references to the source play. Thus, chapter twelve deals with the first interview between Gratan and Strulovitch, with a brief interruption with a monologue from Shylock, who ponders why Jessica left him and what he could have done to avoid it. Moreover, on page 124 there are several textual quotations from *The Merchant*: “*What news on the Rialto*” (original italics), from 3.1.1; “*I am right loath to go*” (original italics), from 2.5.16; “*You called me dog...*” (original italics), from 1.3.120; “*I am as like to call thee so again...*” (original italics), from 1.3.122; “*But since I am a dog, beware my fangs...*” (original italics), from 3.3.7; “I neither lend nor borrow by taking nor by giving of excess,” from 1.3.53-54,

and “O father Abram, what these Christians are,” from 1.3.153. The chapter ends hinting that Strulovitch is ready to ask Gratan to be circumcised.

In chapter thirteen, D’Anton writes a letter to Strulovitch asking him to “consider parting with” the painting (133); Strulovitch comments with Shylock Gratan’s visit, the latter’s refusal to be circumcised and Beatrice’s leaving the house in anger. They discuss the meaning of the circumcision ritual, and Shylock criticises Strulovitch’s behaviour towards Beatrice. Chapter fourteen extends further on circumcision, beginning with Strulovitch’s remembrances of conversations with Kay, his wife, about it and about his reactions to Beatrice’s boyfriends. Over a dinner in an expensive restaurant, he seeks counsel from Shylock by asking him about Antonio’s bond and whether the pound of flesh was in fact Antonio’s penis. Chapter fifteen is narrated entirely from D’Anton’s point of view and introduces the subplot of the lost ring. Furthermore, it gives insights on Barnaby’s and Gratan’s characters and D’Anton’s relationship with them. Chapter sixteen alternates analepsis and prolepsis describing Beatrice alone in a room prepared by Plurabelle for her and Gratan to fulfil their love. In her thoughts, she paraphrases *The Merchant* 5.1.1-20, “In such a night as this” (162). The prolepsis explains the cause of her being alone, namely D’Anton’s invitation to Gratan to join him, Barnaby and his friends to have dinner. Gratan tells D’Anton what Strulovitch said to him, “Get yourself circumcised and we can talk again. Until then there is no more to say” (169). Chapter seventeen again deals with circumcision. Shylock asks Strulovitch whether he really wants Gratan to be circumcised or he hopes that the footballer prefers to leave Beatrice. Shylock also asks Strulovitch if he is ready to perform the procedure himself. Strulovitch is unable to answer and counterattacks asking Shylock if he hoped that “Antonio would fail to meet his bond” so he could harm him (177). The conversation goes on around motivations, intentions, real and metaphorical acts, with references to Abraham’s disposition to kill his son. The point of view of the narration alternates between Strulovitch’s and Shylock’s.

Beatrice, in chapter eighteen, remembers a dialogue with her father in which she asked him why he wanted her to date Jewish boys while they were not observant of Jewish rituals and traditions. In an implicit reference to Gratan’s circumcision, Beatrice concludes that her father “might love me but he’s a butcher . . . His mind’s an abattoir” (187). Beatrice confides her worries to Plurabelle. This is followed by D’Anton’s inner thoughts about how to appease Strulovitch on Gratan’s situation and on his yielding of Solomon’s painting. He refers to Strulovitch as “that Jew” (188), or “the Jew” (190) and his antisemitism is denoted by sentences such as “Had there ever been a Jew yet . . . that was not inflexible and

vengeful?” (189). This characterization of D’Anton as an anti-Semite is continued in chapter nineteen, as it is shown in this dialogue with Plurabelle:

D’Anton wasn’t sure. ‘Do we want to rile a man as vile as this?’ he wondered.  
‘The Jew?’  
‘The wealthy Jew, yes.’  
‘The Hebrew?’  
‘E’en him. The moneybags, who else?’  
They laughed. It was fun, even in worrying times, to play Jewepithets.  
‘Now I’ve lost my thread. Would you be so good as to repeat your question,’ Plurabelle begged.  
‘I asked how good an idea it was to rile the Jew.’  
‘You mean the execrable dog –’ (196)

D’Anton and Plurabelle consider different ways of approaching Beatrice’s and Gratan’s troubles, like sending them abroad, and then the narration shifts to Strulovitch and Shylock. The latter suggests that Strulovitch could threaten Gratan with suing him for rape, since Beatrice was under sixteen when she slept with him for the first time. In their dialogue and their thoughts there are textual references to *The Merchant*: “*Thou torturest me, Tubal*” (original italics), from 3.1.95 (201); “*Your daughter spent in Genoa, as I heard, one night four score ducats*” (original italics), from 3.1.85 (201); or “*Thou stick’st a dagger in me*” (original italics), from 3.1.87 (202).

In chapter twenty, Beatrice and Gratan are in Venice, where Plurabelle and D’Anton have sent them, and they begin to feel disappointed with one another. Strulovitch calls on D’Anton in response to his letter, and after a tense exchange, he demands that D’Anton brings his daughter back to him, and he menaces D’Anton with denouncing him as accomplice to rape. Plurabelle and D’Anton discuss the credibility of Strulovitch’s threats, and they decide to call Gratan back so that he submits himself to circumcision. However, Gratan, in chapter twenty-one, refuses. Later in the chapter, D’Anton, Plurabelle and Barnaby meet to discuss the situation and she asks about the lost ring. D’Anton and Barnaby had rehearsed their attitude in case of this scene would happen, and among their answers they should paraphrase a line from *The Merchant*, “I were best to cut my left hand off” (5.1.177), which in the novel is transformed into “I would rather cut my left hand off” (219). There are new exhibitions of antisemitism:

‘As I see it,’ he went on, ‘the Jew will not back down. I’ve never heard of a Jew who will. They believe they lose face if they relent. It’s against their religion. My father who met many Jews told me the same thing. They have hearts of stone. Try standing on a beach and ordering the tide to go back—that’s what it’s like persuading a Jew to change his mind. So if Gratan himself won’t return to face the music we have no choice but to find a proxy Gratan to satisfy the Jew’s bloodlust.’ (219)

Therefore, they decide to offer D'Anton to be circumcised as a proxy. They write a letter to Strulovitch to that effect, Plurabelle goes to deliver it personally and meets Shylock. Previously, D'Anton has confided to Plurabelle a secret not revealed to the reader that has provoked her to laugh wildly and that triggers the following dialogue:

'I can't wait,' she said, between gasps of unaccustomed merriment, 'to see the bloodsucker's face.'  
'The Jew's you mean?'  
'The Hebrew's, yes,'  
'You must be referring to the Israelite.'  
'The Christ-Killer, yes. The crooked-nose...'  
'Plury, stop that!' D'Anton laughed. (226-27)

These paragraphs seem to prove what the reviewer James Lasdun says about Jacobson overdoing the caricature of Gentiles as unrepentant anti-Semites.

In chapter twenty-two, Shylock takes the letter to Strulovitch and advises him to "proceed carefully" (231). In his response, Strulovitch reminds him of what he had said in *The Merchant* 4.1.292-93, "Didn't you say of Jessica that you would rather any of the stock of Barabbas had been her husband than a Christian?" (232). After this passage, there is an analepsis to the moment when Plurabelle finds herself face to face with Shylock, which begins with a line from *Macbeth* 1.7.1-2, "'If it were done when 'tis done then 'twere well it were done at my place,' that Plurabelle tells Shylock" (234). Plurabelle leaves thinking that Shylock is Strulovitch's lawyer. Chapter twenty-three alternates scenes in Strulovitch's house with others of Beatrice and Gratan in Venice, where she tries not to miss his father and how well they understood each other in previous stays in Venice, where Gratan is bored to death.

The title of the last chapter of the novel, Act Five, is important because in it Shylock is one of the protagonists, whereas in the play he disappears in act four. The first sentence of the chapter reproduces the one that opens the novel: "It is one of those better-to-be-dead-than-alive mornings you get in the north of England" (253). There are in the chapter numerous paraphrases and textual quotations from the play that often are spoken by characters different from recreations of the original speakers. The most important is the ascription to Shylock of Portia's "quality of mercy" speech (266). The setting is Plurabelle's gardens, where it is going to take place a party that recreates *The Merchant* trial. Plurabelle does not want Barnaby to attend the party because "your very presence is suggestive of sexual pleasure. You are so young and so beautiful and so indolent that no one will believe we devote ourselves to anything here but indulgence of the flesh" (255). Plurabelle meets Strulovitch for the first time and feels an immediate dislike for him. It has been agreed that

if Beatrice does not appear by noon, D'Anton will be taken to a clinic to be circumcised, and once the surgical procedure has been done, he and his friends will be discharged of any obligation towards Strulovitch, and Beatrice will do as she wishes. D'Anton misses Barnaby, to whom he would have liked to tell similar words to those from Antonio to Bassanio in 4.1.260-272: "Give me your hand, Barnaby . . . Bid your wife judge whether Barnaby had not once a love..." (261). Plurabelle makes a last attempt to convince Strulovitch to forsake his claim, but he refuses. When he and D'Anton are ready to go, Shylock stops them, using a word from Portia in 4.1.301, "tarry" (263). He asks D'Anton whether he accepts the terms and considers them just. D'Anton agrees and then Shylock addresses Strulovitch with Portia's words in 4.1.178-180, which are answered by Strulovitch with Shylock's words:

Shylock, unamused, nodded and turned his face back to Strulovitch's.

'Then,' he said, 'must the Jew be merciful...'

Strulovitch knew exactly what he had to say in return. You don't always have a choice.

'On what compulsion must I?' he asked.

Whereupon Shylock said what he too had to say. 'The quality of mercy is not strained, it droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven...' (265)

The narration stops here to offer Strulovitch's thoughts, in which he imagines himself as Ulysses with his ears plugged with wax to avoid hearing Shylock. Nevertheless, he has no alternative to listen to Shylock paraphrasing Portia's speech in 4.1.180-201, which Shylock closes using the Yiddish word for mercy, "rachmones" (266). Nevertheless, Strulovitch does not retract and goes with D'Anton to the clinic. Plurabelle becomes fascinated by Shylock, but he rejects her advances by telling her about Jewish grievances against Christians, reminding her that "Jesus was a Jewish thinker" and that charity "is a Jewish concept" (270). The exchange closes with these lines:

Plurabelle looked as though she were about to cry. She put a hand on her chest. 'I feel you've laid a curse on me,' she said.

'Well now you know the sensation from the other end,' Shylock said.

And this time Plurabelle could have sworn he *did* spit on her. (270)

In the next lines, Shylock has a dialogue with his wife Leah, who admonishes him about his lack of "rachmones to that poor girl" (271). After a few more words, Shylock leaves the party and the story. Plurabelle announces news from the clinic, which are that D'Anton was circumcised as a child and therefore he cannot be circumcised again. Strulovitch accepts his defeat, goes home, writes a note to D'Anton where he tells him that the Solomon painting will be delivered to him, and wishes him that this will end the sadness that D'Anton's look conveys. Strulovitch calls on his wife and finds their daughter with her. She is "unbetrothed" (277), and the book closes with a line from *Twelfth Night* 5.1.355, "I will be revenged on the



whole pack of you” (277), which Strulovitch thinks that would be Beatrice’s answer if she was asked what the reasons for her behaviour were.

#### 4.3.3. Modes of Adaptation in *Shylock Is My Name*

In Jacobson’s novel one can find instances of the different modes of adaptation and appropriation discussed in the theoretical section, where it has been mentioned Christy Desmet’s “big-time Shakespeare” and “small-time Shakespeare” modes of appropriation. The former has already been related to the Hogarth Shakespeare project as a commercial action by a big publishing group. With respect to the personal reasons of the authors to take part in the project, which would be regarded as “small-time Shakespeare,” there is scarce doubt that, without discarding economic reasons, Howard Jacobson was strongly motivated to accept the proposal of the publishing house. He has written extensively on Jewishness, antisemitism and his attitudes towards them as a British Jew, and he has a good knowledge of Shakespeare’s work. In his article in *The Guardian* of 7 April 2018, for example, he explains some of his experiences with antisemitism, his family background, his position with respect to Zionism and Israel and his concern about the rising antisemitism he perceives in Britain. In a previous article also in *The Guardian*, he writes about *The Merchant*, stressing the impact of Jessica’s betrayal on Shylock’s behaviour and the importance of the ring she barter for a monkey, and about his version of the play. His intention is not “to save Shylock from his Jewishness. I simply recount the play . . . Because I am deeply touched by his passing reference to his wife, I imagine him in constant conversation with her” (“Villain or Victim” par. 11-12). Moreover, in “How Human Beings Learn to Hate” he writes that our age “more than ever needs Shakespeare’s scepticism” (par. 1), and on Shylock’s defeat he argues that “Shakespeare never lectures, but he teaches that we needn’t revere a man to pity him: it is enough to recognise the humanity we share” (par. 6). In his interview with Liam Hoare he argues that “it’s a Jewish thing to remember as acutely as we do . . . the past is an inescapable thing for us, and so is Shylock. Although Shylock comes from the mind of someone who isn’t Jewish, he has entered the Jewish imagination” (par. 11).

The previous analysis of *Shylock Is My Name* has shown different examples of quotation, which Desmet qualifies, as already noted, as the “simplest, and yet most enigmatic, forms of appropriation” (*Shakespeare and Appropriation* 8-9). Jacobson’s use of quotation is reminiscent of Desmet’s discussion of quotation in Huang and Rivlin, in the sense that he attributes lines from the play to characters that are not counterparts of the original, although not to the extent of the example she offers, Marowitz’s *A Macbeth*. I have also pointed out above that to Desmet’s there are the modes of “Shakespearean appropriation

[that] can involve . . . entering a text from a new angle . . . [or] larger revisions of plot and literary form” (9). In my opinion, Jacobson makes two important revisions: first, in the novel it is Shylock who gives a lesson to Plurabelle/Portia; second, that the runaway daughter gets rid of her Gentile suitor and returns home. Those changes are congruent with Jacobson’s ideas expressed in *The Guardian* of 5 February 2016, “I never saw it as my function to give Shylock a second chance. Where things ended for him, they end forever. But he does have one thing he would like to say to Portia/Plurabelle. And I allow him to say it” (“Villain or Victim” last paragraph). Also, in his conversation with Adrian Poole, he affirms that his “Jessica is a much more admirable figure than Shakespeare’s Jessica . . . I cannot bear Jessica, Shakespeare does not allow me to bear Jessica. I think she’s one of the most horrible characters he ever created” (Howard Jacobson and Adrian Poole. “Shakespeare and the Novel: A Conversation” par. 22).

From Douglas Lanier’s predominant trends in appropriation, I should include *Shylock Is My Name* in the form of *interpolated narrative*, where the new plot material would be the interactions produced by Shylock’s presence, especially his dialogues with Strulovitch and Leah. If according to Julie Sanders a characteristic of adaptations is their open declaration that they are interpretations or re-readings of precursors, then all the novels considered are adaptations, since they belong to a series that announces itself as seeing Shakespeare’s works retold by novelists of today. As for Cartmell’s three categories of adaptation quoted by Sanders, Jacobson’s book is obviously a transposition of genre (from play to novel), time (from the seventeenth to the twenty-first century), and space (from Venice to Northern England). It is also a commentary, since it gives voice to Leah, absent in the play. I do not believe that *Shylock Is My Name* fits into the third category, analogue, because although some reviewers say that the novel can stand alone, I think that many of Shylock’s dialogues and monologues could not be understood without some familiarity with *The Merchant*. Moreover, Jacobson’s book complies with the three elements of Linda Hutcheon’s description of adaptation: it is “an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work,” as it has been stated above; it is “a creative *and* an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging,” since it creates a new plot from the author’s interpretation of the play; and it is “an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work,” since no doubt many readers will have in mind previous stage representations or film adaptations, like Michael Radford’s 2004 film, starring Al Pacino as Shylock.

The previous pages show abundant evidence that *Shylock Is My Name* follows what I have designed as third pattern of adaptation, that is, the coexistence of a plot that adapts

the original play with an explicit dialogue with the play itself. It is not only the profusion of literal quotations and paraphrases, but also the discussion of passages and situations of the play presented as true experiences of Shylock. Some examples have been commented above, therefore I only add here a few significative samples. Thus, in his first dialogue with Strulovitch, Shylock says, “it wasn’t just to spite me that Jessica bought the monkey...” (53), which elicits Strulovitch question, “So why did she buy the monkey?” (54). Later, in his first night at Strulovitch’s, awake in bed, Shylock thinks of his daughter, Jessica and Lorenzo, “the rascal who pilfered her” (84). The following morning Strulovitch asks him whether he did become a Christian after his exit in 4.1.396 obeying the Duke’s order “*Get thee gone*” (87), and the dialogue ends with these lines:

‘So when you declared yourself “content” to be converted you didn’t mean it?’

‘I was answering a question in the form it was presented to me. “Art thou contented, Jew?” If that was not a sneer, what was it? I had no fight left in me, but my reply – “I am content” –at least returned the compliment.’

‘It was never your intention, then?’

‘I only say “I hope” I’d have taken a knife to my own throat. I can’t pretend to know what I’d have done had they summoned the energy to do more than congratulate one another and actually drag me off to church. But “content” I would never have been. Do I strike you as a contented man?’ (89)

In my comment on chapter twenty-two, I quote a question from Strulovitch to Shylock reminding him his stated preference for a son in law of the stock of Barabbas over a Christian, to which Shylock answers:

‘You take me out of context. Those Christian husbands were falling over one another to shed their wives, so they could rescue Antonio from my clutches. A father wants his daughter to marry a man who values her above his friends. It was more the loyalty they swore to one another than the icons they prayed to in church that rendered them undesirable. And anyway...’

‘Anyway what?’

‘Though I can no more reasonably regret than I can look forward, I do from time to time wonder whether I’d have been better advised to let her marry a Christian than lose her altogether.’ (232)

The dialogues between Strulovitch and Shylock are the quintessence of Jacobson’s dialogue with *The Merchant of Venice*. Although he says, as it has been noted above, that “I never saw it as my function to give Shylock a second chance” I do think that he tries to convey his conviction that Shakespeare was not antisemitic, as he posits in his conversation with Adrian Poole: “I do not think *The Merchant of Venice* is an antisemitic play . . . To me, it’s inconceivable that Shakespeare would be an anti-Semite . . . he goes to find the human in the object of others disdain . . . he finds the man” (par. 48). The explicit dialogue between the novel and the play reinforces Shylock’s human condition. This is most evident in Shylock’s dialogues with Leah and in “the quality of mercy” speech given to Shylock, but

also in other passages of the novel. See for instance the dialogue on circumcision in chapter seventeen, where Shylock brings out the contradictions behind Strulovitch's motivation to see Gratan circumcised, and at the same time he exposes his own doubts regarding his exacting Antonio's flesh bond.

The selected paragraphs are examples of how the characters of the novel comment on situations of the play, offering different developments to what general knowledge takes for granted, discussing alternative possibilities and giving reasons for Shylock's actions. Therefore, the explicit dialogue with the source play is proved. In the Jacobson-Poole conversation, the latter says that "the comparisons that novelists invite with their Shakespearean source tend to remain implicit, whereas you have made yours absolutely explicit" (par. 53). I am glad to support my argument with the opinion of such a distinguished scholar.

## **5. Conclusions**

The stated purpose of this dissertation was to analyse a selection of novels of the Hogarth Shakespeare series to prove that, to rewrite Shakespeare's plays, their authors had followed three different patterns defined by different combinations of modes of adaptation and appropriation. In the first pattern, the play is transposed to the twentieth or the twenty-first century and retold with few alterations or suppressions in its plots, characters or situations. In the second pattern, the transposition keeps characters and situations but changes points of view and motivations. In the third pattern, there is a story that parallels the play and, at the same time, an explicit dialogue between novel and play. The novels selected to exemplify those patterns have been, for the first one, Edward St Aubyn's *Dunbar*, a retelling of *The Tragedy of King Lear*; for the second pattern, Anne Tyler's *Vinegar Girl*, her version of *The Taming of the Shrew*; and for the third one Howard Jacobson's *Shylock Is My Name*, where he deals with *The Merchant of Venice*.

The identification of the modes of adaptation and appropriation used in the novels required a theoretical support, which had to be provided mainly by the works of Christy Desmet, Douglas Lanier, Linda Hutcheon, Julie Sanders and Robert Sawyer. The research into the scholarly production of those and other authors, however, led to a certain scepticism about the usefulness of this approach: the distinctions between adaption and appropriation – and between the different subtypes within each one – were found too subtle to assign clear-cut modes to the novels and plays under examination. Nevertheless, an article by Christy Desmet's and Sujata Iyengar helped to reconsider that scepticism by adopting their suggestion that the differences were "in degree rather than kind" (16). That point of view

facilitated the idea that assigning the novels to different patterns was compatible with finding in all of them analogous modes of adaptation and appropriation.

The tension between the aim of this dissertation and the analytical tools that the theory was expected to provide has resulted in a continuous and useful self-assessment of the evolution of the research. That has allowed a better understanding of the novels under study and their sources, reflected in the commentaries on the novels and their critical reception.

Among the three novels selected, *Dunbar* is the work in which the doubts about the validity of the proposed patterns have been more intense. The elimination of the Gloucester subplot produces a set of effects on the transposition of the characters that are not easy to assimilate. However, keeping in mind the concept that the difference between adaptation and appropriation is fundamentally in degree, *Dunbar* is nearer to an exact replication of the play than to an incidental use of references to it. The themes approached in *King Lear* – power, family, madness, guilt, love, forgiveness, to name but a few – are dealt with in the novel, which exposes them following a structure, a development of the action, and an evolution of the relationships among its characters very similar to the play. Therefore, the adscription of *Dunbar* to the first pattern is confirmed.

*Vinegar Girl*, in contrast to *Dunbar*, fits perfectly into the definition of the second pattern. Its characters have their counterparts in *The Taming of the Shrew*, but their personalities and motivations are very different. The story is told from Kate's point of view exclusively, except for a five page epilogue. Several situations parallel the play; for example, there is a father with two daughters, there is a suitor who at the beginning is rejected but to whom the elder daughter accepts reluctantly to be married, there is a wedding to which the bridegroom arrives late and improperly dressed, and there is a banquet where the bride pronounces a speech. However, the differences in motivations and point of view turn the novel into an autonomous work, that can be read and understood without knowing the play.

*Shylock Is My Name*, for its part, is also a good example of the third pattern, that is, it parallels the play and, at the same time, establishes an explicit dialogue with *The Merchant of Venice*. The problems encountered in analysing it lie in the complexity of its structure rather than in an inadequacy of the tools. The story that follows the plot of the play and the dialogue are so inextricably linked that it is not easy to find one's bearings. However, a careful reading or rereading allows to distinguish both aspects of Jacobson's work. The task is much easier if the reader is well acquainted with the play.

The theories of adaptation and appropriation, despite their limitations, provide the researcher with useful instruments for the analysis of literary works inspired by Shakespeare's plays. It has been proved that the application of these instruments to the novels of the Hogarth series allows to distinguish similarities and differences among them that can be systematised into the three established patterns.

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